

Parental Monitoring, Parental Attitudes, and Children's Helmet Use

Erica Scheldt, Margaret Brinson, Lisa Thomson Ross, Ph.D., and Thomas P. Ross, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology

Abstract

A survey study was conducted regarding parental attitudes towards their children's helmet use. We hypothesized that the more a parent monitors their child or children, the more likely that the parent will enforce strict helmet wearing rules for their children. In addition, we hypothesized that high parental monitoring rates are predictive of more frequent helmet use in children. A 10 page helmet use survey was administered consisting of questions regarding education level, annual income, number of children, and attitudes toward their children's helmet use. Data analysis confirmed that a correlation between high monitoring scores and enforcing helmet rules approached significance. Limitations such as a small sample size and limited diversity of the sample should be noted when considering implications for future research.

Introduction

Bicycle Injury Stats

- Approximately 300,000 children treated in emergency rooms for bike injuries each year; 1/3 involved the head.
- Using a bike helmet reduces risk of head injury by between 60-90% (Berg & Westerling, 2007).
- In 1998, bicycle-related injuries accounted for approximately 275 deaths in the U.S. (Ortega et al., 2004).

Impact of Laws

- 29 states have no helmet laws; 21 states have laws for children only.
- Currently, no state has a universal bike helmet law (ihs.org)
- Many children support mandatory helmet laws. As one boy stated "there should be a law. Nobody would laugh."
- A 1992 comprehensive law in Broward County Florida requiring bike helmets for all bicyclists resulted in an 81% increase in helmet use (Delamater & Patino 2003).
- Thus, helmet laws effectively increase helmet usage.

Alternative to Laws: Parental Monitoring

- Parental Monitoring is concern for the regulation, supervision, and management of behavior, such that parents are aware of and regulate their children's whereabouts, companions, and activities. (Ross & Veal, 2009).
- Helmet rules and rule enforcement may illustrate a specific example of parental monitoring.
- *We investigated the possibility of higher parental monitoring being predictive of strictly enforced helmet wearing rules for children.*

Parental Expectations/Rules for Helmet Use

- Parental rules may govern children's attitudes toward helmet use.
- Parental involvement had an indirect effect on children by influencing attitudes and a direct effect on helmet usage (Berg & Westerling, 2007).
- *We investigated the possibility of stricter parental helmet usage rules being predictive of higher usage rates in children.*

Method

Participants

- A helmet use survey was completed by 21 female and four male (N=25) parents whose children were enrolled in a preschool located in the downtown district of a small southeastern city.
- Participants ranged from 30 to 48 years of age.
- Most participants (96%) were Caucasian, with the remainder (4%) Latino.

Procedure

- Surveys were distributed at the preschool.
- Once completed, surveys were placed in a covered box at the school indicating "completed helmet use surveys"
- All participants were treated in accordance with the American Psychological Association's ethical principles (1992).
- Participants were given contact information where they could obtain a copy of results upon completion of the research.

Results

Parental Monitoring

- We found high monitoring rates in all parents.
- Parents who reported more monitoring also reported a tendency to strictly enforce helmet wearing rules for the oldest child; see Table 1.
- High television monitoring also predicts stricter helmet wearing rules.

Parental Expectations/Rules for Helmet Use

- The second prediction that stricter parental helmet rules would correlate with actual helmet use in children was not supported.

Discussion

Role of Parental Monitoring

- Parental monitoring is a moderate predictor of strict helmet-wearing rules for children.

Role of Parental Expectations/Rules for Helmet Use

- The relationship between stricter rules and helmet use could not be statistically assessed due to the fact that nearly all parents reported their children always wear a helmet.

Limitations

- Due to a small sample size, this study should be considered preliminary.
- We had limited variance among parent's reports of their children's helmet use; almost all parents noted that their child wears a helmet 100% of the time while riding a bike
- The sample represented limited diversity, as nearly all parents were Caucasian, high SES, and college educated.

Further Research and Implications

- Future research should administer surveys at several schools in order to obtain a larger sample size and a more diverse population in order to fully test our hypotheses.
- Parental monitoring and helmet rules are critical for preventing bicycle-related head injuries and for establishing healthy habits as children become more proficient bicyclists.

	Overall Monitoring	Television Monitoring	Strict Helmet Rule Enforcement
Overall Monitoring	-		
Television Monitoring	.71 (p < .01)	-	
Strict Helmet Rule Enforcement	.41 (p = .06)	.46 (p < .05)	-

Table 1. Correlations Among Parenting Variables