

Children in Seatbelts . . .
Who Buckles Up,
and Who Doesn't?

A Summary of
Research Results

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**CHILDREN IN SEATBELTS . . .
WHO BUCKLES UP, AND WHO DOESN'T?**

N-2574-NICHD, *Children's Seatbelt Usage: Evidence from the National Health Interview Survey*, by John Haaga, December 1986, 3 pp., \$4.00.

Over 600 children under age five die each year in motor vehicle accidents in the United States.

Despite evidence that seatbelts and child restraints save children's lives when used properly, use of such devices is far from universal. Fully 40 percent of parents never buckle their children up, 27 percent do so "sometimes or once in a while," and 33 percent "all or most of the time." The highest rate for seatbelt or child restraint usage is 65 percent for children under one year of age.

These findings are from an analysis of the 1981 National Health Interview survey that pinpoints characteristics of families who habitually use seatbelts or child restraints for children under seven years old. The study, by John Haaga, was published in the December 1986 *American Journal of Public Health* (reprinted as RAND N-2574-NICHD, *Children's Seatbelt Usage: Evidence from the National Health Interview Survey*).

About 42,000 households, totaling approximately 111,000 persons, participated in the study, answering this question about seatbelt usage: "When riding in a car, does (NAME OF CHILD) wear a seatbelt or restraint all or most of the time, some of the time, once in a while, or never?"

**Who Buckles Up . . .
And Who Doesn't?**

Children in their first year of life were more commonly placed in restraints than older children: 65 percent vs. less than 14 percent of five- and six-year-olds. Teenaged mothers were actually more likely than older mothers to report regular seatbelt use for their children, but this was only because the younger mothers tended to have younger children at the time of the interview. Girls were more likely

than boys to wear seatbelts regularly, but only by a very small margin.

According to the study, children's seatbelt usage varies somewhat across regions: 28 percent of children in the southern United States are routinely put into seatbelts, compared with 36 percent of children in other regions. Children in metropolitan areas are more likely to wear seatbelts than those outside metropolitan areas (35 percent vs. 29 percent).

Seatbelt usage varies more strongly across groups defined by family and parental characteristics. The largest differences are among racial and ethnic groups, and these differences persist even after educational and income differences are statistically controlled. Only 16 percent of black children and 20 percent of Hispanic White children routinely wear seatbelts.

Seatbelt Use Associated with Other Health-Promoting Behaviors

One key finding is that parents who buckle their children in are parents who also promote their children's health in other ways—for example, by breastfeeding their children as infants or abstaining from smoking during pregnancy. Children who were breastfed have odds of seatbelt use half again as high as those for children in otherwise similar families who were not breastfed.

This association among different health-promoting behaviors (seatbelt use, breastfeeding, and abstinence from smoking during pregnancy) suggests that unmeasured family-specific factors are at work. Health professionals, therefore, should be alert when parents are not practicing one behavior that would promote child health. It signals the likelihood that they are not practicing others as well.

N-2574 may be obtained directly from the Publications Department, The RAND Corporation, 1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, California 90406-2138, or by telephoning (213) 393-0411, Extension 6686.

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Peter A. Morrison, "Changing Family Structure: Who Cares for America's Dependents?" RAND N-2518-NICHD, 1986.

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