



# Cambodia promotes motorcycle helmets to halt rise of traffic deaths

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In Cambodia, motorcycle sales have surged in recent decades, but so have fatalities from motorcycle accidents. In collaboration with the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, special correspondent Steve Sapienza and Hari Sreenivasan report on how government and traffic safety advocates are working to make helmets accessible and enforce compliance for all riders.

## TRANSCRIPT

**GWEN IFILL:** In Cambodia, motorcycles outnumber cars 10-1. There were 43,000 motorcycles on the road in 1990. Now it's up to more than two million. But there's a downside. Motorcycle crashes represent 67 percent of all road deaths.

Our report is part of a collaboration with the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.

It comes from video journalist Steve Sapienza and is narrated by Hari Sreenivasan.

**HARI SREENIVASAN:** In Phnom Penh, 19-year-old Chhieng Sreylea is shopping for a motorcycle with her dad and older brother.

**CHHIENG SREYLEA (through interpreter):** Today, I'm buying this motorcycle and I will drive it to school.

**HARI SREENIVASAN:** They're a family of five and this will be their third motorcycle. They don't own a car, but, like many Cambodians, thanks in part to more available small loans, cheap motorcycles and rising incomes, they can afford the equivalent of \$1,100 that this motorcycle costs.

It's the case across all of Asia, where most of the world's two-wheelers are sold.

**MAN (through interpreter):** Today, we have sold more than ten.

**HARI SREENIVASAN:** And that's before noon; 85 percent of all the vehicles on Cambodia's roads are motorcycles, and according to the government, they cause the majority of all accidents.

Nearly 200 people die on these roads every month, up almost 20 percent from the year before.

**PEOU MALY, National Road Safety Committee (through interpreter):** We also notice that most of them are young adults aging from 16 to 29.

**HARI SREENIVASAN:** Motorcyclists are also more likely to die of a head injury, because while motorcycle sales are booming, helmet sales are not.

All countries in Southeast Asia have mandatory helmet laws, but the laws are lightly enforced and largely ignored.

**PAGNA KIM, Asia Injury Prevention Foundation:** In 2004, just around 8 percent of motorcycle riders that they wear helmets. But now it increased up to 65 percent for the driver and 9 percent for the passenger.

**HARI SREENIVASAN:** In Cambodia, historically, helmet compliance has been very low. One survey on a treacherous stretch of road north of Phnom Penh showed that only 24 percent of drivers wore helmets during the daytime, with that figure dipping to 5 percent after dark.

That sort of weak compliance means YouTube videos like this, featuring Cambodian youth performing daredevil stunts, all without helmets.

Advocates of better helmet laws say targeted education is need.

**PAGNA KIM:** People may know well about the benefit from helmet wearing. However, there were some misperceptions about them, that helmet wearing wasn't needed for short distance travel or maybe when they travel in low speed.

**HARI SREENIVASAN:** The growing numbers of child passengers prompted the Asia Injury Foundation to find ways to get affordable helmets onto small heads.

**PAGNA KIM:** Since we start our helmets for kids program in 2006, we have donated around 20,000 helmets to Cambodian students, teachers, and also road user in Cambodia.

We were able to build the first ever nonprofit helmet factory in Vietnam. It's a factory that produces helmet at lower costs. And all the profit from helmet selling will be returned to invest in road safety. We are hoping that we will be about to build a nonprofit helmet factory in Cambodia as well in the near future.

**HARI SREENIVASAN:** The government plans to roll out new helmet laws later this year, requiring both passengers and children to wear helmets, while riders like our new 19-year-old owner, lunge headlong into traffic without one.

**HENG SOKHA, Motorcycle salesman (through interpreter):** Sometimes, when they buy a motorcycle, they have a helmet, and sometimes they don't. It depends on the client.

**HARI SREENIVASAN:** For the PBS NewsHour, I'm Hari Sreenivasan.

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