

## Dangers of the road revealed in new WHO survey



### **New global figures on road safety show the stark variation in safety standards between nations.**

Only 57% of countries have laws that require all car occupants to wear seat-belts. In low-income countries this figure is only 38%. Half of all countries do not have laws requiring the use of child restraints like child seats and booster seats. There are laws governing child restraints in 90% of high-income countries but only 20% of low-income countries.

And while helmet laws exist in more than 90% of countries, only 40% have a law that covers both riders and passengers while also requiring that helmets meet a specified standard.

These findings come in the first global assessment of road safety, conducted by the World Health Organization. The global status report, released in New York in June, provides the first worldwide analysis of how well countries are implementing effective road safety measures. These include limiting speed, reducing drink-driving, and increasing the use of seatbelts, child restraints and motorcycle helmets.

WCPT is backing the World Health Organization's efforts to draw attention to the devastating toll of road traffic accidents, and the need to implement comprehensive road safety measures. "Physical therapists know better than anyone else the devastating consequences of road accidents — not just in terms of bereavement, but long-term disability," says WCPT President Marilyn Moffat. "I hope that WCPT's member organisations will become involved in encouraging new integrated approaches to road safety at national level."

"Physical therapists in many countries know the enormous impact that

compulsory helmet use has in preventing head injury and consequent disability, and should be advocating for their universal use."

The WHO assessment finds that almost half of the estimated 1.27 million people who die in road traffic crashes each year are pedestrians, motorcyclists and cyclists. While progress has been made towards protecting people in cars, the needs of these vulnerable groups of road users are not being met.

The report presents information from 178 countries and finds that traffic injuries remain a global public health problem, especially in low-income and middle-income countries. Few countries have well-enforced road safety laws or reliable data on road traffic injuries.

Where laws on risk factors are in place they are often inadequately enforced, particularly in low-income countries. For example, only 9% of countries rate their enforcement of speed limits as over 7 on a scale of 0 to 10, while the corresponding figure for enforcement of seat-belt laws is 19%.

More than 90% of the world's road deaths occur in low-income and middle-income countries, while these countries only have 48% of the world's vehicles.

The global status report on road safety aims to help countries assess their road safety progress and encourages increased investment in road traffic injury prevention.

# WCPT NEWS

July 2009

