

## **Malaysians are good drivers with bad habits**

### **QUESTION**

**29/05/2010**

### **THE STAR**

ON my way to work recently, I saw a woman who was carrying a baby in the rear seat of a taxi. The baby was merely sitting on her lap. I have also seen children riding pillion motorcycles without crash helmets. And there are children who stand on the rear seats of cars, completely unrestrained. A recent newspaper report stated that there were 6,500 road deaths in 2009 in Malaysia. Another article reported a road accident in which five out of seven people (including three children) were killed. Newspaper articles and editorials slam bad Malaysian drivers and motorcyclists as the root cause for the high casualty rate. I am not convinced that it is quite so cut and dry. Worse, some articles imply that fatal accidents do not happen to law-abiding citizens.

The Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research website reveals that MIROS clearly does not have a project at the national-level or a research to look into the use of infant and child car seats. There are even no statement by any official over the issue.

¿Rear-facing infant seats reduce the risk of fatal injury in a crash by more than 70%, forward-facing toddler seats by more than 50% and safety belts by 45%. In the US, only 10% of children under the age of five travel unrestrained ¿ but they account for more than half of child deaths in cars¿. That¿s a quote from a Britain¿s Automobile Association leaflet.

¿And seat belts save lives ¿ in countries with the lowest child fatality rates, 90% of passengers wear them¿. This one is from an OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) website. As an example, in the UK, a baby isn¿t allowed to leave hospital in a car unless the parents have a rear facing infant seat. There are no compromises.

The MIROS website stated that in 2007 there were 22.8 road fatalities per 100,000 population in Malaysia. That¿s over four times that in the UK. Malaysia has about 17 million vehicles on its roads compared to circa 33 million on UK roads ¿ twice the number of vehicles and four times less fatalities on UK roads.

Malaysians aren¿t necessarily bad drivers, but are riddled with bad habits. They are definitely family loving people, yet there is a problem here: Malaysians persist in carrying children unrestrained in their cars, or as pillions on motorcycles without helmets or babies in the arms of wives and maids while being driven.

However good a driver you are, if you are distracted by your child acting up in the back seat, and immediately ahead of you a car unexpectedly pulls out, or a tyre blows out on a poorly maintained vehicle, or a motorcyclist does an odd move; think what happens when the driver does a sudden stop at 50 km/hr.

The cost of a car seat might be RM800 and lasts for at least 10 years or more. The cost of a crash helmet is less than RM100.

Think about it when you next buy a washing machine or fridge or TV set or anything luxurious.

*Laurentia*

### **FEEDBACK**

**02/06/2010**

### **THE STAR**

***On behalf of the Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research (MIROS), I would like to thank the Star for publishing the letter written by Laurentia on 29 May 2010 entitled 'Malaysians Are***

**Good Drivers with Bad Habits'. I also wish to record the Institute's appreciation to the writer for her keen observations and deep concern for the safety of child road users.**

**Indeed, road accident statistics reveal a significantly high number of fatalities and injuries involving children. In 2008 for instance, road accidents involving children between the ages of 1 and 15 accounted for 410 fatalities while another 2,797 were reported to have suffered slight to serious injuries. The highest number of fatalities involved children between the ages of 11 and 15 with a total of 213 fatalities nationwide. Meanwhile, 43 % of these accidents occurred on motorcycles where the children were either directly responsible for riding or were pillion riders. Another 24 % involved car collisions while 18 % of accidents were made up of pedestrians.**

**What is equally alarming is the fact that residential areas are also becoming increasingly dangerous. In the same year (2008), 75 children were killed, 192 seriously injured and another 424 sustaining slight injuries from road accidents that occurred within housing areas. Another 311 fatalities and 728 serious injuries were recorded throughout numerous locations. Road accidents that occurred at schools meanwhile, claimed the lives of 22 children and seriously injuring another 78 while 15 children lost their lives in road accidents that occurred at shopping centres.**

**One of the primary areas that are currently being comprehensively looked into by MIROS is the need for children to be safely restrained in vehicles, more precisely the use of baby seats, child seats, and child booster seats. As you are aware, while the law states that all occupants of a vehicle must fasten their seatbelts there are currently no provisions making it mandatory for adults ferrying small children in the car to use proper child restraint systems.**

**MIROS is now undertaking a research of child restraint systems in Malaysia and we hope that this will not only present the relevant authorities with important findings, but also provide parents and car owners adequate and precise information in terms of selecting a suitable and available child safety restraint system in Malaysia.**

**In an outdoor crash test conducted by MIROS in February this year, we were able to analyze the safety levels involving a child seated in a child safety seat. Simulating a 30km/h crash, the test proved that there were no visible signs of injury to a child properly secured in a child seat.**

**In contrast, a three-month-old baby in the hands of an adult passenger in the rear seat was thrown forward hitting the back of the driver seat. This kind of impact can cause serious injury or even fatality. Although the adult passenger holding the baby was buckled up and remained intact and unhurt during the crash, the momentum of the vehicle and the force of the collision overwhelmed the strength of the adult to hold the baby in place. Analysis of the crash clearly points to the fact that an adult does not have the strength to hold a baby or a child from being thrown forward in the event of a crash at any speed.**

**Unrestrained, children can be easily flung out of the vehicle, thrown forward against the front windscreen or dashboard, or hit against the solid back of the front vehicle seats which can result in serious injury or even fatality. A child in the front seat and on the lap of a parent not wearing his/her seat belt, can also be crushed between the parent and the vehicle dashboard during collision, or bear the full brunt of an airbag deploying.**

**While the use of child seats and infant seats have not yet become compulsory in Malaysia, parents and adult passengers in a vehicle must always ensure that children of all ages are properly secured when traveling, either in a dedicated child seat, infant seats or buckling up their seat belt. Research findings have also suggested that the safest place for a child in a car**

*is in the rear seat.*

*In countries like the United Kingdom for example, laws are already in place making it compulsory for children under the age of 12 or 135 cm in height to be restrained in child seats or booster seats. In Canada, children and infants must be restrained in certified child safety seats while babies under the age of nine months must be in rear-facing seats or carriers. Children under the age of 10, meanwhile, are not permitted to travel in the front seat of a vehicle in France. Child seat laws are also enforced in the United States, Australia, Germany, Italy, and Spain.*

*In relation to children on motorcycles, the law clearly stipulates that all riders and pillion riders, including children, must securely fasten a helmet. While the relevant authorities continue with efforts in enforcement and in trying to create a higher degree of road safety awareness amongst motorcyclists, initiatives involving policies are also being addressed in the interest of greater safety. This has since led to the introduction of a regulation which today only permits SIRIM-approved helmets to be used on the road.*

*A motorcycle helmet is a life saving device, and in selecting an appropriate child helmet, adults/parents must also ensure that the product is first certified for safety, and that the chin strap can be securely fastened to make sure that the helmet will not come off should the motorcycle suddenly accelerate or stop. Equally important, adults must set a good example for children to emulate therefore individuals must never be on a motorcycle without first wearing a helmet irrespective of the distance traveled. This will encourage children to embrace good road safety etiquette and awareness from a very young age*

*Whether a child is traveling in a car or on a motorcycle, parents and adults must be made to realize that children are our most precious cargo.*

*Professor Dr Ahmad Farhan Mohd Sadullah  
Director-General  
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