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Technical Report

Fatal Motor Vehicle Crashes on Indian Reservations 1975 - 2002



National Center for Statistics and Analysis

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was written to examine the characteristics of fatal motor vehicle crashes on Indian reservations as reported to the National Center for Statistics and Analysis (NCSA), Fatality Analysis Reporting Systems (FARS). It makes available to the public for the first time, motor vehicle crash statistics related to Indian reservations as collected by the FARS. Data from 1975 – 2002 were used to analyze crash characteristics such as the number of vehicles involved in the crash, time of day that the crash occurred, fatalities in the crash by sex and age, restraint use by occupants of passenger cars and light trucks involved in the crashes and the involvement of speed in these crashes. Alcohol involvement in fatal motor vehicle crashes on reservations that occurred between 1982 – 2002 was also examined. These are the only years for which alcohol data were collected in the FARS. In addition, from 1999 – 2002, the race of fatally injured drivers has been collected in the FARS. This race data for this four year period was analyzed for motor vehicle crashes on reservations as well.

From 1975 to 2002, an average of 213 fatal motor vehicle crashes a year occurred on roads within areas designated as Indian reservations. During this time-period, the 5,962 fatal crashes have resulted in the loss of 7,093 lives. The number of fatal crashes has shown an increase over the years. The average number of fatal crashes for the first five years of this study (1975 - 1979) was just under 187 crashes per year, while the average number of crashes for the most recent five year period (1998 – 2002) increased 29.5 percent to 239 crashes per year. The number of fatalities in these crashes followed a similar pattern, for the first five years of the study, the average number of crash related fatalities was 231 fatalities per year, but for the last five years the average number of fatalities increased 23 percent to over 284 lives lost per year.

In comparing Indian Reservation crash fatality data with national crash data, Indian reservations show significantly higher levels of involvement in many areas. On reservations, the number of fatal motor vehicle crashes per year increased 52.5 percent, (from 181 fatal crashes in 1975 to 276 fatal crashes in 2002), while the number of fatal crashes in the nation declined 2.2 percent, (from 39,161 fatal crashes to 38,309 fatal crashes).

Other findings are as follows:

- The percentage of fatal crashes on reservations that involved a single vehicle was almost twenty-six percent higher than the percentage in the nation (73% to 58%).
- Sixty-three percent of the fatalities in crashes on reservations were under 35 years old compared to fifty-seven percent of the nation's crash fatalities.
- Seventy-six percent of passenger vehicle occupant fatalities on reservations were unrestrained at the time of the fatal crash compared to sixty-eight percent of passenger vehicle occupant fatalities in the nation being unrestrained.
- Forty-three percent of the fatalities on reservations were in speed related crashes while thirty-five percent of the nation's fatalities were a result of a speed related crash.

- Since 1982, sixty-five percent of fatal crashes that occurred on reservations were alcohol related compared to forty-seven percent alcohol involvement in the nation.
- Forty-eight percent of the drivers involved in fatal crashes on reservations since 1982, had a BAC of 0.01 or more compared to just thirty percent of drivers involved in motor vehicle crashes across the nation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Specific safety, education, and enforcement programs need to be established primarily for high risk Native Americans (under 35 years old), who make up 63 percent of the fatalities in motor vehicle crashes on Indian reservations. In addition, improvements in data and record keeping at the Federal and state level could result in better data for the FARS system.