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Content Analysis Of Injury Prevention Behavior In Adolescent Television Programs

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Purpose: Unintentional injury is one of the leading causes of death for youth aged 1 to 19 in the United States, and adolescents are known to be heavy users of television. This study assessed injury behavior in television programs popular with adolescents to see what messages were provided. Methods: The sample included three randomly selected episodes from the top 15 television programs watched by adolescents during the 2004-2005 television season. Three coders conducted a content analysis of the programs to look for behaviors related to unintentional injury, such as wearing a seat belt while driving, wearing a helmet on a bike or motorcycle, and driving while talking on a cell phone. Results: Over half of programs (58%) showed people riding in cars. However, for the 69 incidents of car riding, only 18% of drivers were clearly shown wearing a seat belt. High school and college age drivers were more likely to be shown wearing a seat belt than adult drivers ($p=.005$), and Whites were more likely to be shown wearing a seat belt than Blacks ($p=.016$). Coders noted four incidents of bike riding which appeared in 3 episodes (7% of all shows). Three of four bikers were shown wearing a helmet. Motorcycle riding appeared in 4 shows (9%). Of the five incidents of motorcycle riding, three riders were shown wearing a helmet (60%). Twenty-eight of the 45 shows (62%) involved walking/crossing a street with a total of 128 incidents. Boating was seen in 3 shows (7%). None of the 3 boating incidents depicted people on the boat wearing a life jacket. For all incident types, only 3% (6/219) resulted in some sort of injury. Conclusions: Mixed messages are shown on television programs watched by adolescents regarding injury prevention behavior.