

2003 SURVEY RESULTS

**CHAPTER 3: ATTITUDES CONCERNING THE UTILITY OF
SAFETY BELTS, RISK PERCEPTIONS, AND FATALISM**

Background On Attitude Section

In 1998, the Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey introduced a section on attitudes and perceptions related to safety belt use. For the 2003 survey, the section consisted of a series of nine statements that interviewers read to the respondents (one item from the 2000 version was replaced in the 2003 version of the survey). After reading each statement, the interviewers asked the respondents if they strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, somewhat disagreed, or strongly disagreed.

The section served several purposes: to assess current messaging strategies, to corroborate and quantify with a large sample earlier focus group findings concerning impediments to safety belt use, and to provide other strategic information for addressing reasons for non-use. Thus the content for this section was derived from previous research as well as current program activity.

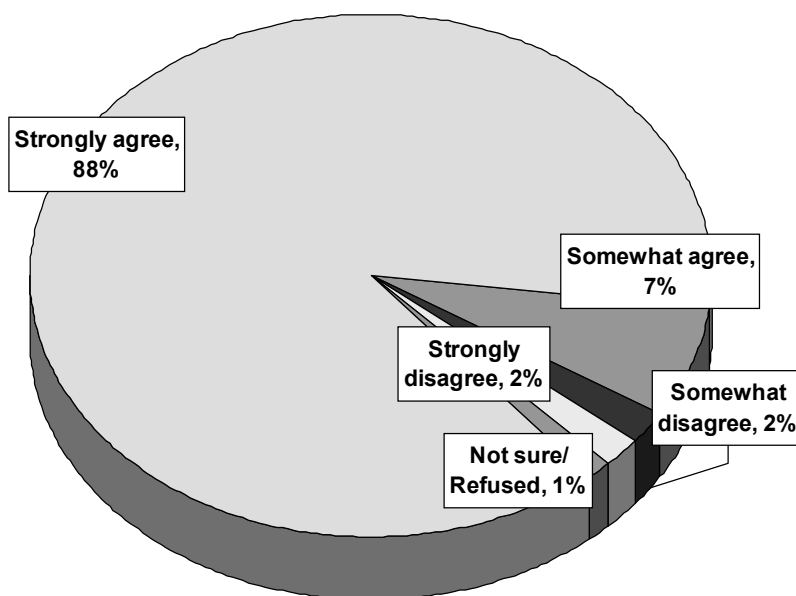
This chapter summarizes results from those items that explored the perceived utility of safety belts, and perceptions of risk related to safety belt use. Attitude items that involved perceptions of enforcement of safety belt laws are addressed in the next chapter (Chapter 4).

Since its inception in 1994, this survey has asked a question about fatalism.... the belief that all events are determined by fate and are therefore inevitable. Summarized responses to that question are included in this chapter because of similarities to other themes presented herein.

Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception And The Utility Of Safety Belts

The most basic question concerning the perceived usefulness of safety belts is whether the public believes they improve the chances of avoiding death or injury in a crash. The survey asked respondents their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement “If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.” Nearly nine-in-ten persons (88%) strongly agreed with the statement. Another 7% somewhat agreed, bringing the total level of agreement to 95%.

Figure 40
Would Want Safety Belt On In An Accident



Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.

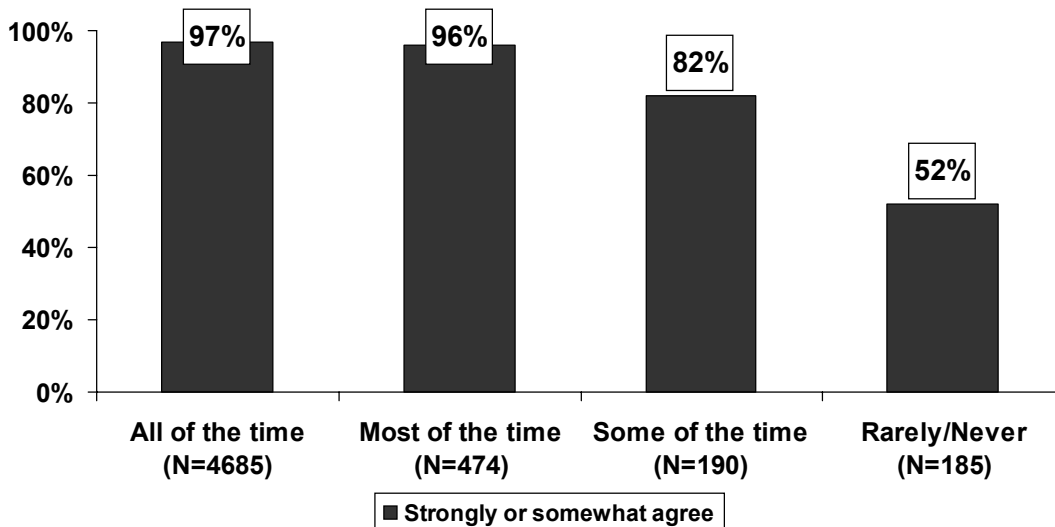
Base: Total population age 16+.

Unweighted N=6180

2003 MOTOR VEHICLE OCCUPANT SAFETY SURVEY: Safety Belt Report

Drivers who regularly wore their safety belts were most likely to strongly or somewhat agree with the statement that they would want to have their safety belt on if they were in an accident. Yet even among drivers who said they never or only rarely wore their safety belts, more than half (52%) either somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement.

Figure 41
Would Want Safety Belt On In An Accident
By Frequency Of Driver Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

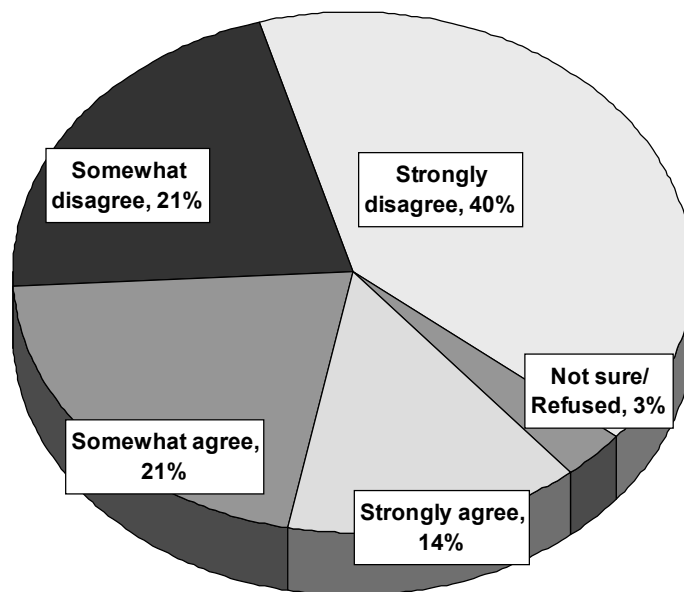
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

NHTSA has conducted a number of focus groups with target populations characterized by low safety belt use. One of the more common sentiments expressed in these groups was that “seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.” According to the national data obtained in this survey, more than one-third (35%) of the general public agreed with this statement, with 14% strongly agreeing.

Figure 42
Safety Belts Are Just As Likely To Harm You As Help You



Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.

Base: Total population age 16+.

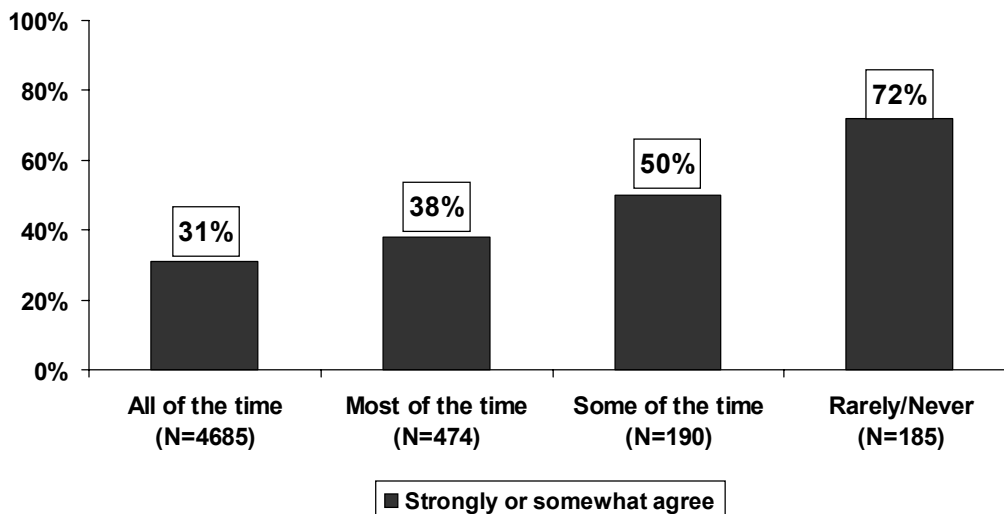
Unweighted N=6180

**The percentages in the pie do not sum to 100% because of rounding.*

2003 MOTOR VEHICLE OCCUPANT SAFETY SURVEY: Safety Belt Report

Even among drivers who reported wearing their safety belt “all of the time” while driving, almost one-third (31%) either somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement that “seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.” For infrequent safety belt users, more than half held this opinion. Readers are reminded that one of the specific reasons given by non-users for not wearing safety belts was concern about their safety (page 66).

Figure 43
Safety Belts Are Just As Likely To Harm You As Help
By Frequency Of Driver Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

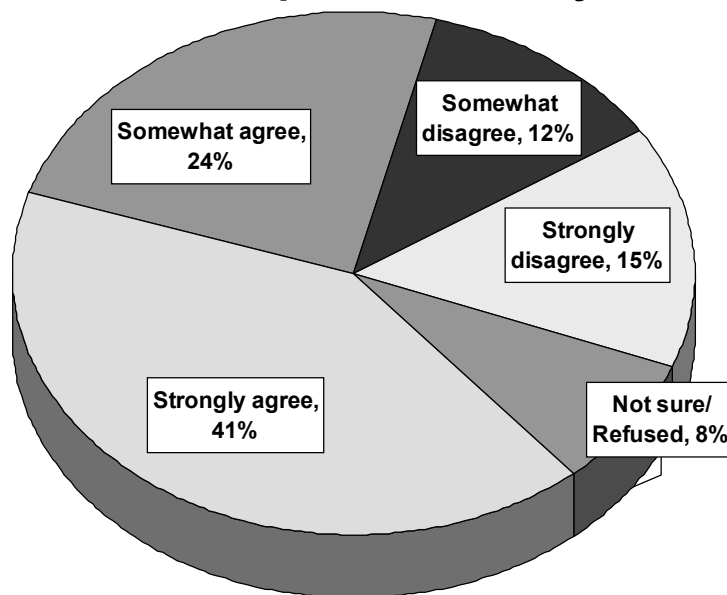
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

One of the messages that safety professionals have been communicating to the public is that non-use of safety belts translates into increased costs for everyone, as the greater number of fatalities and injuries resulting from non-use extracts more resources from society. This survey sought to determine if the public made the connection that non-use of safety belts results in more fatalities and injuries, and that some of the costs for those increased fatalities and injuries are passed on to them. The survey found that about two-thirds (65%) of the public either strongly or somewhat agreed that medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore their safety belts.

Figure 44
Medical Insurance Costs Would Be Lower
If More People Wore Safety Belts



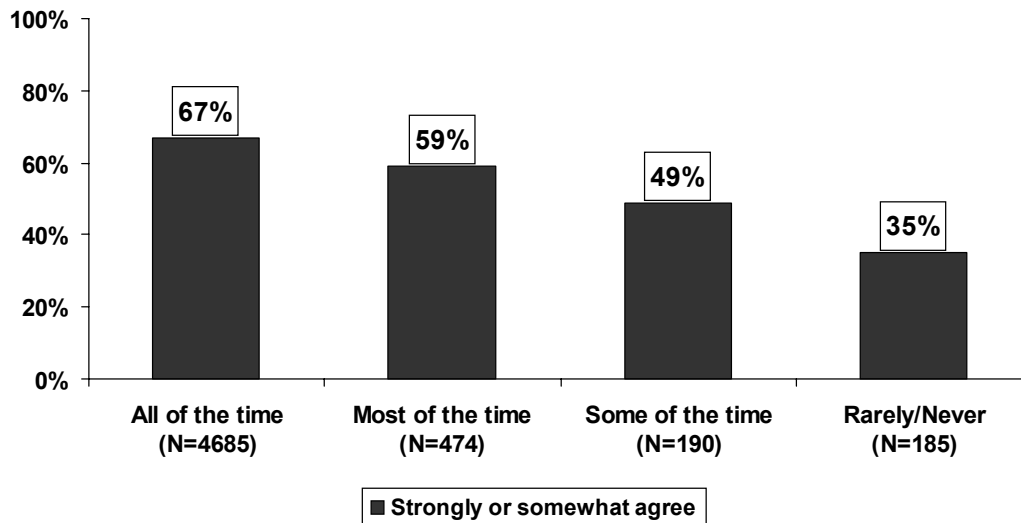
Qx: *Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts.*

Base: *Total population age 16+.*

Unweighted N=6180

Two-thirds (67%) of drivers who reported wearing safety belts “all of the time” agreed that medical insurance costs would be lower with increased safety belt use. About three-fifths of “most of the time” users concurred.

Figure 45
Medical Insurance Costs Would Be Lower
By Frequency Of Driver Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

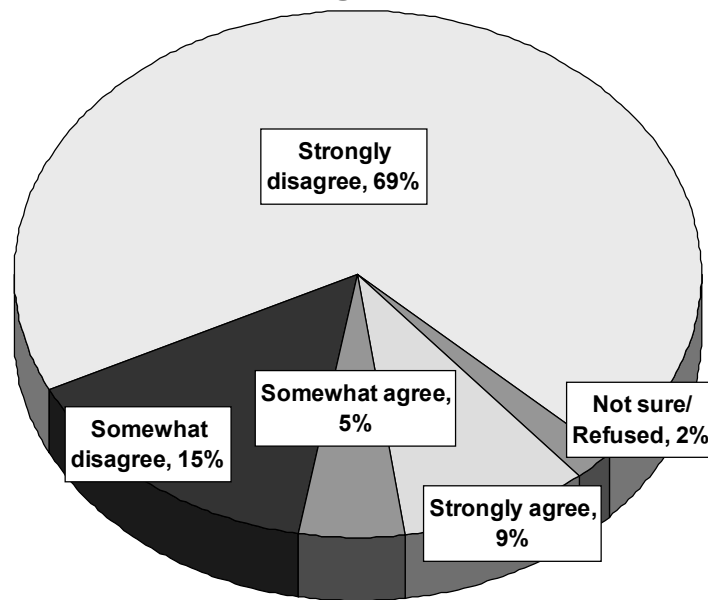
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts.

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Whereas public anxiety over potentially unsafe or unhealthy outcomes may lead to adoption of prescribed safety behaviors, there sometimes is a danger that the intervention itself becomes an anxiety-producing cue that people seek to avoid because of its connection to the negative outcome. This survey explored that issue by getting reactions to the statement “Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident.” Most persons refuted the notion; over two-thirds (69%) strongly disagreed. However, 15%⁶ of the population indicated some level of agreement with the statement.

Figure 46
Putting On A Safety Belt Makes Me Worry More About Being In An Accident



Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident.

Base: Total population age 16+.

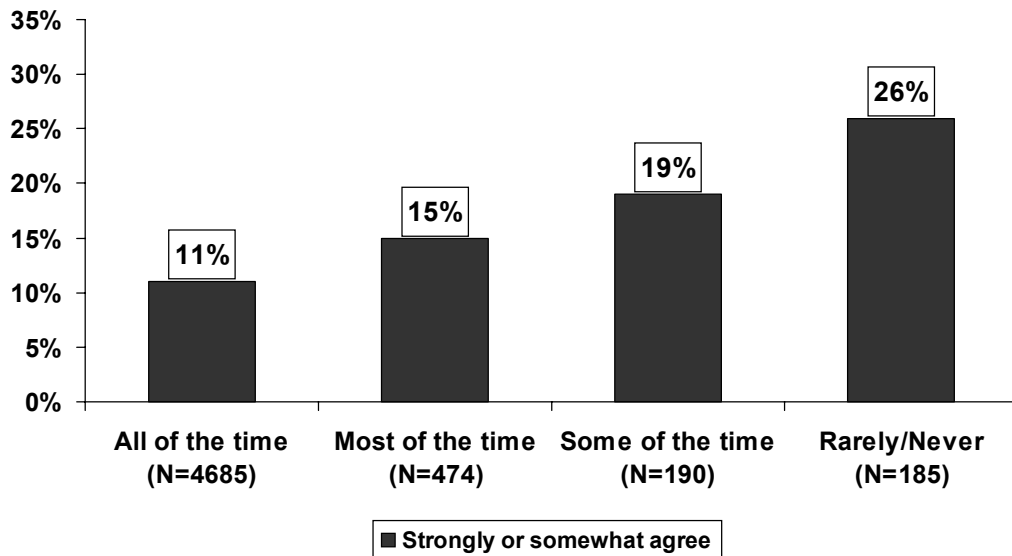
Unweighted N=6180

⁶ The number does not equal the sum of the components in the Figure due to rounding.

2003 MOTOR VEHICLE OCCUPANT SAFETY SURVEY: Safety Belt Report

Reported anxiety from safety belts increased as reported usage decreased, with about one-fourth of infrequent users agreeing that they worried more about getting in an accident when they wore their safety belt.

Figure 47
Putting On A Safety Belt Makes Me Worry More
By Frequency Of Driver Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

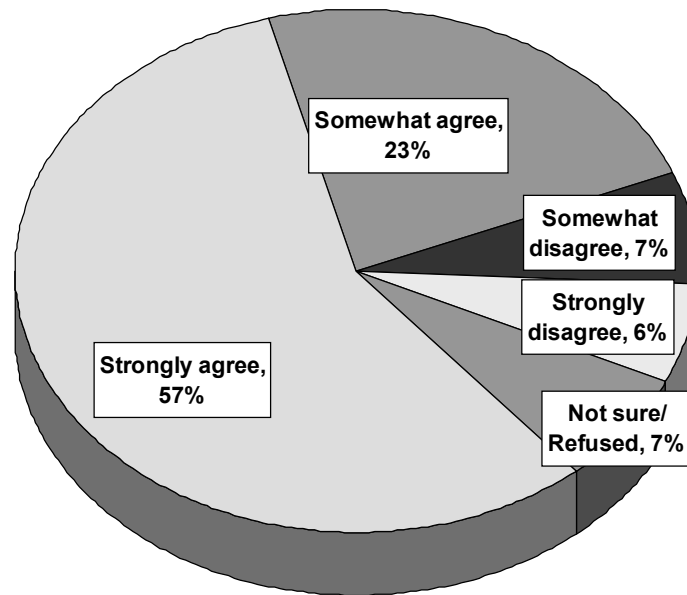
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident.

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Part-time safety belt users often said they did not use their safety belt because they were “driving just a short distance” (see page 59). The 2003 Survey added a question to see if driving close to home was considered a greater or lesser risk for being involved in a crash. The vast majority (80%) agreed with the statement “Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.”

Figure 48
Most Motor Vehicle Accidents Happen Within Five Miles Of Home



Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.

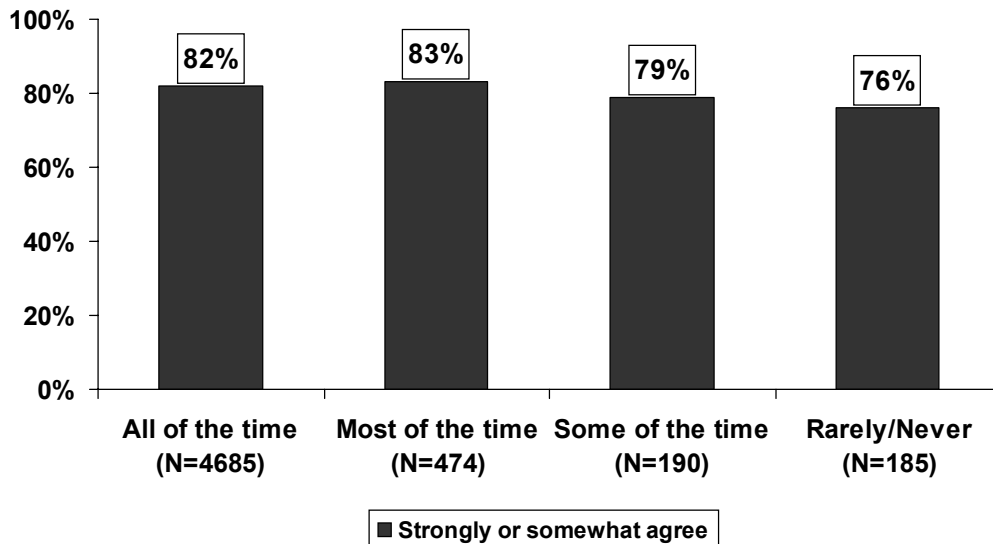
Base: Total population age 16+.

Unweighted N=6180

2003 MOTOR VEHICLE OCCUPANT SAFETY SURVEY: Safety Belt Report

There was little difference across levels of reported safety belt use in the proportion who agreed with the statement “Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.”

Figure 49
Most Motor Vehicle Accidents Happen Within Five Miles Of Home By Driver Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

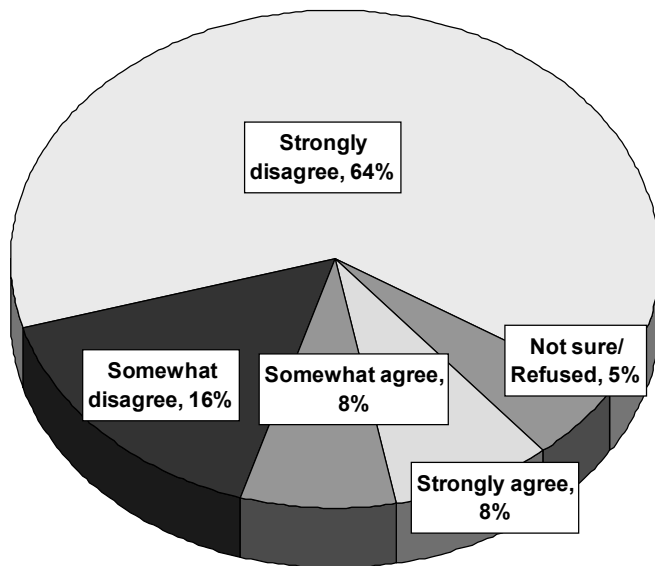
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Some focus group participants have commented that they thought crashes close to home would tend to involve “less energy” than those farther away. The survey explored whether this meant that the public was prone to discount the seriousness of potential crashes near where they live. The answer was generally “no” as only one-in-six persons (16%) either somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement that “An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away.”

Figure 50
An Accident Close To Home Is Usually Not As Serious As An Accident Farther Away



Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away.

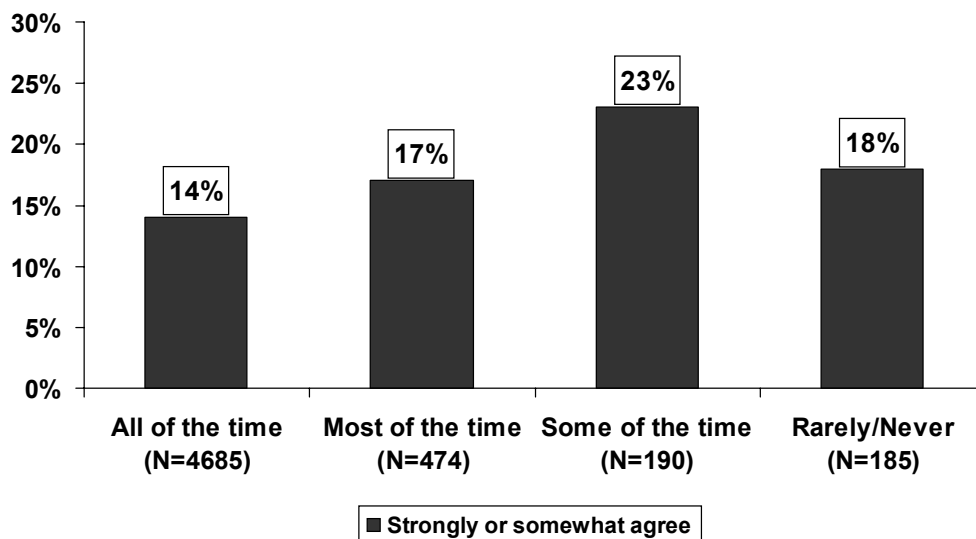
Base: Total population age 16+.

Unweighted N=6180

*The percentages in the pie do not sum to 100% because of rounding.

No clear relationship emerged between agreement with the statement and reported belt use.

Figure 51
Accidents Close To Home Are Less Serious
By Frequency Of Driver Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

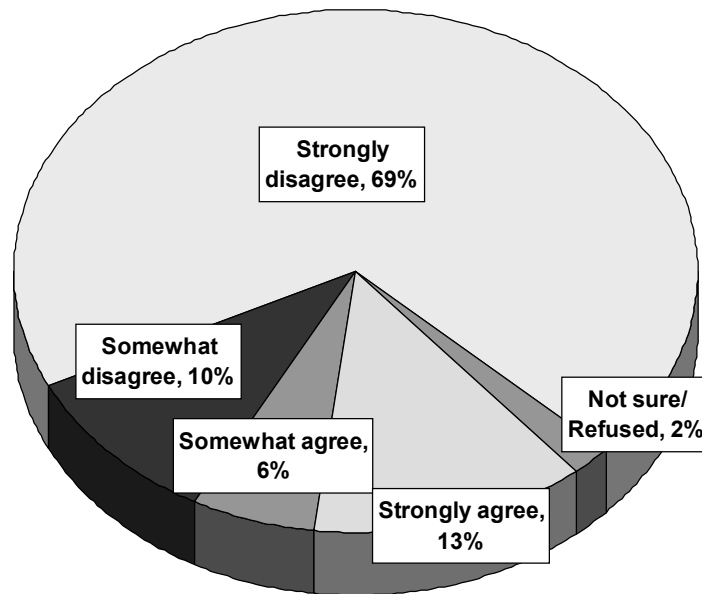
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away.

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

To this point, the discussion on perception of risk has revolved around perceived risk of injury. But there may be social risks involved in safety belt use if usage runs counter to the group norm. The survey included an attitude statement addressing this type of situational pressure. About one-in-five persons (19%) either strongly or somewhat agreed that they would feel self-conscious around their friends if they wore a safety belt and their friends did not.

Figure 52
**Would Feel Self-Conscious Around Friends
If Wore A Safety Belt And Friends Did Not**



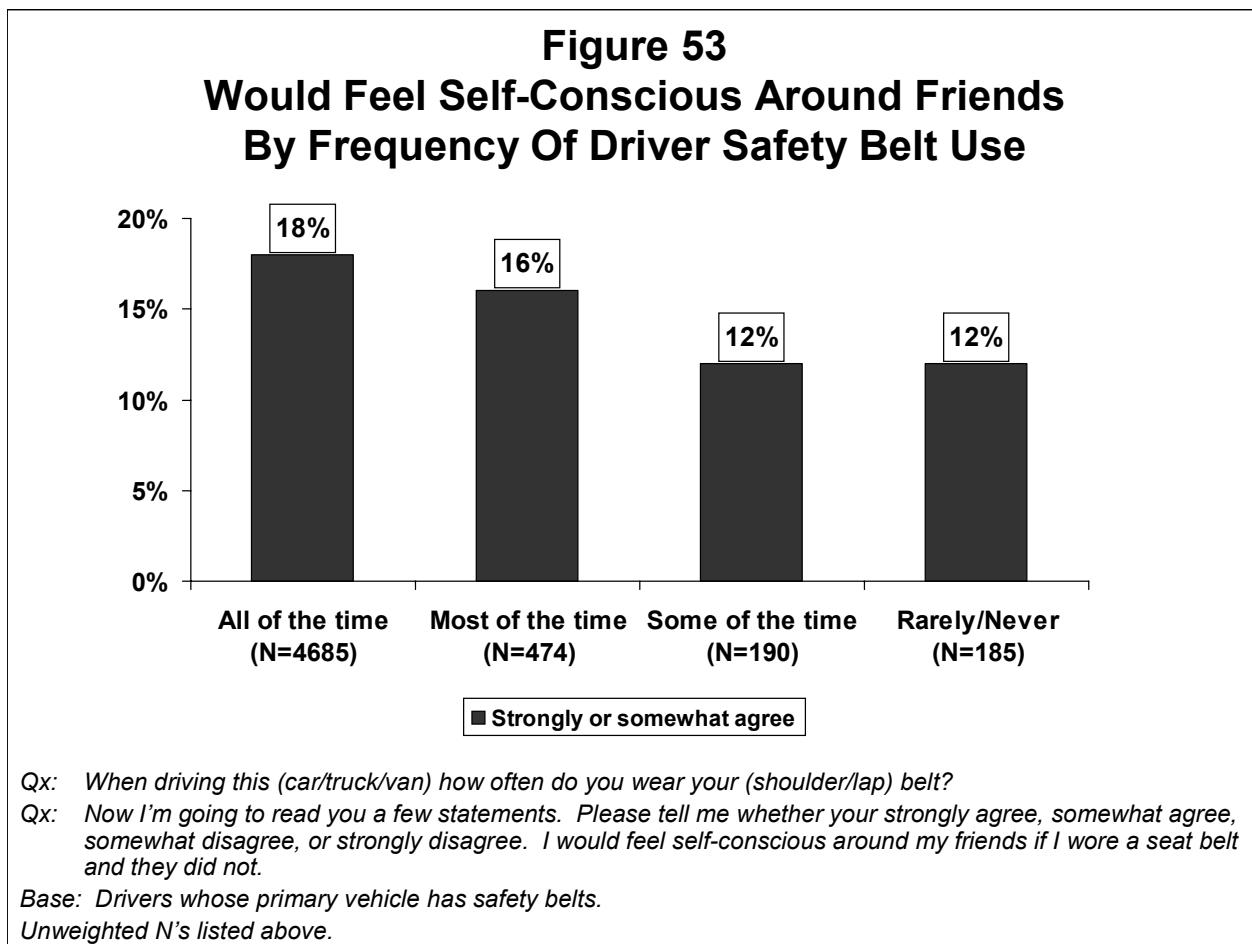
Qx: *Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. I would feel self-conscious around my friends if I wore a seat belt and they did not.*

Base: *Total population age 16+.*

Unweighted N=6180

2003 MOTOR VEHICLE OCCUPANT SAFETY SURVEY: Safety Belt Report

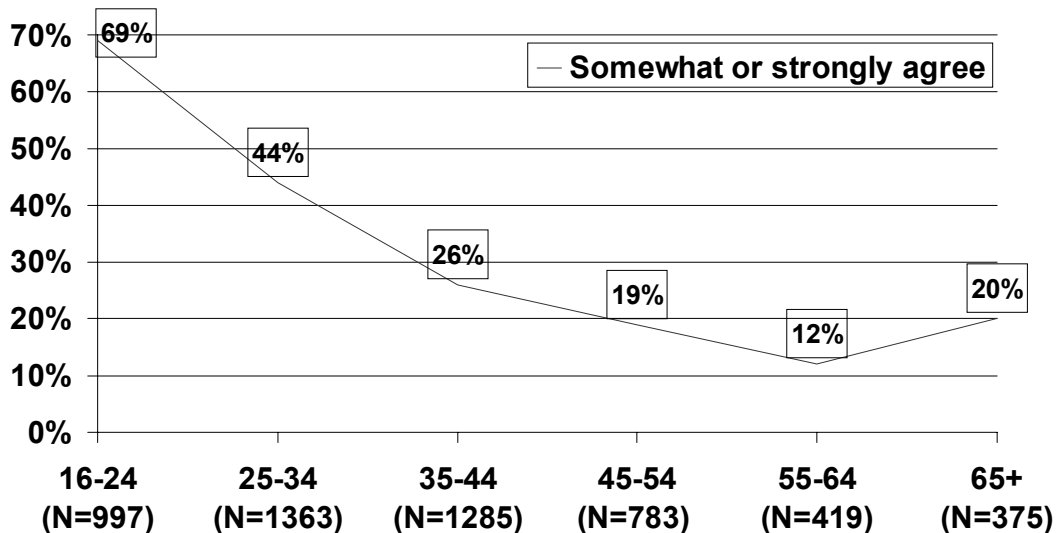
The percentage of respondents who acknowledged they would feel self-conscious if they wore their safety belts and their friends did not was highest among “all of the time” users (18%) and “most of the time” users (16%).



2003 MOTOR VEHICLE OCCUPANT SAFETY SURVEY: Safety Belt Report

The survey explored the parental influence issue by asking respondents their level of agreement with the statement “I have a habit of wearing a seat belt because my parents insisted I wear them when I was a child.” Among persons 16 to 24, 51% strongly agreed and 18% somewhat agreed (69% when combined). The level of agreement dropped sharply for older age groups, reflecting the lower belt use rates during their childhood years. It is unclear what the oldest age groups were responding to, as safety belts were not in the vehicle fleet during their childhood years.

Figure 54
Have A Habit Of Wearing A Safety Belt Because Parents Insisted I Wear Them When I Was A Child By Age Group



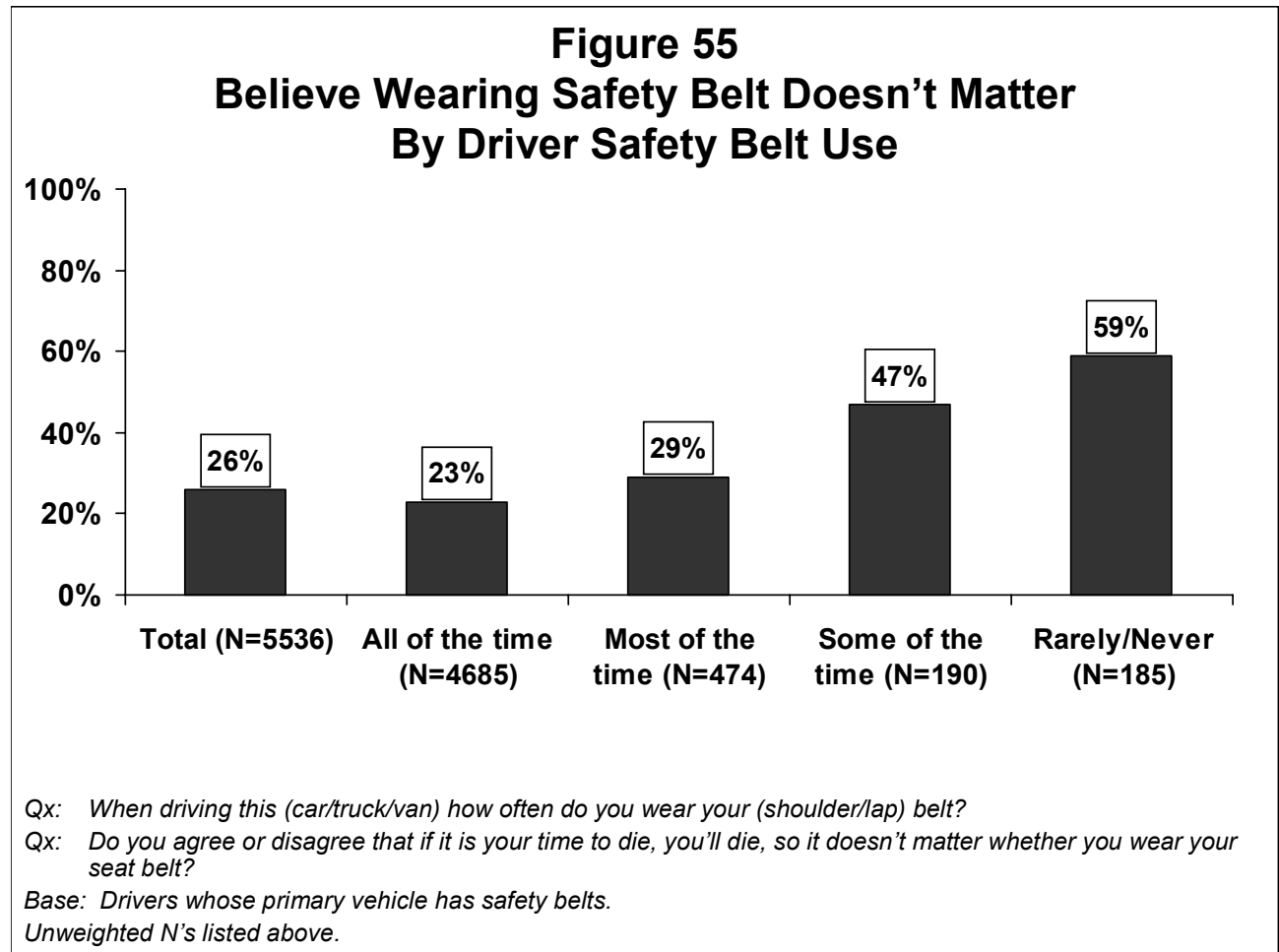
Qx: Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. I have a habit of wearing a seat belt because my parents insisted I wear them when I was a child.

Base: Population 16+ who answered the question (890 people were excluded from the base because they said when they were children there were no safety belts in parent's vehicle).

Unweighted N's listed above.

Attitudes Toward Fatalism

The survey also explored the role of fatalism in safety belt non-use. Since the primary reason for safety belt use is to avoid injury, there is a question as to whether those who do not wear belts on a regular basis do not recognize the danger, or simply don't believe they can avoid it. Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement "If it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt." About one-quarter of the total population age 16 and older agreed. Among drivers, the data showed an inverse relationship between agreement with the fatalistic statement and reported belt use.



Gender And Age Differences In Attitudes

Few differences emerged between the genders in their levels of agreement with the attitude statements described in the previous sections of this Chapter. The data suggested that females are more likely than males to agree that safety belts are as likely to harm you as help you (39% to 31%).

Table 35
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And The Usefulness Of Safety Belts By Gender And Age

Qx: *Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.*

Qx: *Do you agree or disagree that if it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt?*

Base: *Total population age 16+.*

	Gender		Age		
	Female	Male	16-20	21-64	65+
	(N=3244)	(N=2936)	(N=531)	(N=4805)	(N=764)
Strongly or somewhat agree:					
If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.	95%	94%	96%	94%	94%
Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.	39%	31%	47%	34%	31%
Medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts.	65%	65%	73%	64%	67%
Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident.	15%	15%	27%	14%	13%
An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away.	14%	17%	30%	13%	19%

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More substantial differences on the attitude statements appeared with age. Almost one-half (47%) of 16-to-20 year-olds agreed that safety belts were as likely to harm as to help, compared to 34% of those 21-to-64 and 31% of those 65 and older. The youngest age group also was more likely to agree that an accident close to home was usually not as serious (30%), that putting on a safety belt makes them worry about being in an accident (27%), and that they would feel self-conscious if they were going against the group norm in wearing safety belts (30%). Moreover, the youngest age group was more likely to agree that insurance costs would be lower if more people wore safety belts (73%).

Table 35 (Continued)
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And
The Usefulness Of Safety Belts By Gender And Age

	Gender		Age		
	Female	Male	16-20	21-64	65+
	(N=3244)	(N=2936)	(N=531)	(N=4805)	(N=764)
Strongly or somewhat agree:					
I would feel self-conscious around my friends if I wore my seat belt and they did not.	18%	21%	30%	18%	19%
Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.	80%	80%	72%	83%	72%
Agree:					
If it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt.	26%	27%	25%	28%	21%

Racial And Ethnic Differences In Attitudes

Blacks and Hispanics differed markedly from Whites and non-Hispanics on perceived risk and the utility of safety belts. Whereas about one-third of Whites (31%) and non-Hispanics (33%) agreed that safety belts were just as likely to harm you as help you, about half of Blacks (48%) and Hispanics (52%) agreed with the statement. Blacks and Hispanics also were more likely than Whites and non-Hispanics to agree that putting on a safety belt made them worry more about being in a crash, or that a crash close to home would not be as serious as one farther away.

Table 36
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And
The Usefulness Of Safety Belts By Race And Ethnicity

Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.

Qx: Do you agree or disagree that if it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt?

Base: Total population age 16+.

	Race		Ethnicity	
	Black	White	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
	(N=537)	(N=4591)	(N=757)	(N=5386)
Strongly or somewhat agree:				
If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.	95%	95%	96%	94%
Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.	48%	31%	52%	33%
Medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts.	66%	64%	71%	64%
Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident.	24%	10%	39%	11%

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Blacks (26%) and Hispanics (36%) were about twice as likely as Whites (15%) and non-Hispanics (16%) to say they would feel self-conscious about using safety belts if their friends were not wearing them. Blacks (39%) and Hispanics (37%) were also more likely to agree with the fatalistic statement that wearing a safety belt did not matter because if it was your time to die, you'll die.

**Table 36(Continued)
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And
The Usefulness Of Safety Belts By Race And Ethnicity**

	Race		Ethnicity	
	Black	White	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
	(N=537)	(N=4591)	(N=757)	(N=5386)
Strongly or somewhat agree:				
An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away.	20%	12%	34%	13%
I would feel self-conscious around my friends if I wore a seat belt and they did not.	26%	15%	36%	16%
Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.	71%	84%	65%	82%
Agree:				
If it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt.	39%	23%	37%	25%

Differences In Attitudes By Educational Level

Education level also showed a relationship to the various attitudes. Generally, people with more years of formal schooling tended to be less fatalistic, less ambivalent about the injury reduction benefits of safety belts, and less self-conscious about going against group norms of non-use.

Table 37
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And
The Usefulness Of Safety Belts By Education

Qx: *Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.*

Qx: *Do you agree or disagree that if it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt?*

Base: *Total population age 16+.*

	Education			
	Grade 11 or less	High school grad	Some college	College grad
	(N=806)	(N=1791)	(N=1474)	(N=2072)
Strongly or somewhat agree:				
If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.	94%	92%	95%	97%
Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.	52%	44%	32%	21%
Medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts.	71%	61%	62%	68%
Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident.	34%	16%	11%	7%
An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away.	33%	16%	12%	10%

Table 37 (Continued)
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And
The Usefulness Of Safety Belts By Education

	Education			
	Grade 11 or less	High school grad	Some college	College grad
	(N=806)	(N=1791)	(N=1474)	(N=2072)
Strongly or somewhat agree:				
I would feel self-conscious around my friends if I wore a seat belt and they did not.	33%	21%	16%	13%
Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.	67%	80%	83%	85%
Agree:				
If it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt.	39%	33%	26%	15%

Differences In Attitudes By Type Of Primary Vehicle Driven

Since pickup truck drivers were less likely to report safety belt use compared to other drivers (see page 17), analyses were conducted to assess whether vehicle type corresponded with any differences in attitudes toward belt utility or fatalism. The results showed pickup truck drivers less likely than other motorists to agree there is a connection between medical insurance costs and belt use, and a slightly greater tendency among SUV drivers to report attitudes supportive of safety belt use.

Table 38
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And
The Usefulness Of Safety Belts
By Type Of Primary Vehicle Driven

Qx: *Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.*
 Qx: *Do you agree or disagree that if it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt?*
 Base: *Total population age 16+.*

	Primary vehicle			
	Car	Van/Minivan	Pickup truck	SUV
	(N=3276)	(N=558)	(N=860)	(N=745)
Strongly or somewhat agree:				
If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.	96%	95%	91%	96%
Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.	33%	34%	36%	30%
Medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts.	67%	65%	57%	66%
Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident.	13%	13%	11%	10%

Table 38 (Continued)
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And
The Usefulness Of Safety Belts
By Primary Vehicle Driven

	Primary vehicle			
	Car	Van/Minivan	Pickup truck	SUV
	(N=3276)	(N=558)	(N=860)	(N=745)
Strongly or Somewhat Agree:				
An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away.	14%	17%	14%	12%
I would feel self-conscious around my friends if I wore a seat belt and they did not.	18%	21%	17%	14%
Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.	81%	80%	84%	87%
Agree:				
If it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt.	24%	28%	29%	24%