

Young snowboarders, skiers on slippery slope to serious injury

Nigel Hawkes, Ottawa Citizen 12/04/2007

Foolhardy skiers and snowboarders face a growing risk of death and serious injury, according to research published today.

While the general injury rate among winter sports enthusiasts has declined since the 1970s, largely as a result of better equipment, the risks of serious injuries appears to be increasing, say a group of Canadian doctors led by Dr. Charles Tator of Toronto's Western Hospital.

The team looked at 24 studies from 10 countries and found that traumatic brain injuries and spinal cord injuries were increasing.

Men were more likely to be hurt than women, and the authors blame increased speeds and a growing tendency for people to jump and perform acrobatic manoeuvres.

Snowboarders appear to be at greater risk than skiers, they conclude in *Injury Prevention*. One Norwegian report showed that snowboarders were three to four times as likely to suffer injury, while a Canadian Study found that they were 50 per cent more likely to have head and neck injuries.

Overall, say the team, there is evidence "that the incidence of traumatic brain injury (TBI) and spinal cord injury (SCI) in these activities may be increasing."

They add: "These injuries can cause death or severe debilitation, both physically and emotionally, and also result in enormous financial burden to society."

"Indeed, TBI is the leading cause of death and catastrophic injury in the skiing and snowboarding population."

The authors set out to examine a range of evidence and included studies published between January 1990 and December 2004.

They looked especially at serious brain and spinal cord injuries, which make up a relatively small proportion of injuries suffered while skiing and snowboarding, but were the leading cause of death.

The authors said: "Skiers and snowboarders under the age of 35 were three times more likely to sustain a head injury than older participants, and male skiers and snowboarders were 2.2 times more likely than their female counterparts to sustain a head injury."

Other studies backed up the claim that men were more likely to be injured than women. The authors concluded: "TBI and SCI in skiing and snowboarding is increasing."

"The increases coincide with the development and acceptance of acrobatic and high-speed activities on the mountains."

"There is evidence that helmets reduce the risk of head injury by 22-60 per cent."

The authors called for more promotion on how to prevent injuries.

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