

Quarterly Boda Survey

January 2023

Executive Summary

For the third Quarterly Boda Survey, we expanded our assessment to observe helmet types, passenger helmet usage, and more. The goal is to see whether upcoming legislative changes and concerted efforts by civil society can result in higher helmet usage, better helmets, and lower fatalities on the roads. Over 6,000 boda bodas were observed over a week's time, and 281 were interviewed. A few quick takeaways from the third edition of the Quarterly Boda Survey and the first in collaboration with Safe Way Right Way are:

- There was a slight rise in helmet usage, from 70% to 75%. It could be a bump from Christmas season, it remains unclear.
- Helmet usage is the highest in Central Division, around 87%, and lowest in Wakiso, at around 60%.
- Helmet usage also rises around police stations and especially around visible police officers.
- Half face helmets remain the favorite, accounting for two-thirds of all helmets.
- Passenger helmet usage distressingly low, at less than 1%.

Methodology

The survey was conducted from January 2nd – 8th, 2023. For each observation, surveyors spent fifteen minutes at a roadside location counting boda bodas passing one direction, then the other for the same duration. This was done twice a day, at two different locations, with at least 4 hours apart for individual locations. Observations were made of five characteristics of each passing boda boda: whether the rider was wearing a helmet, the type of helmet they were wearing, whether they were carrying a passenger or load, whether the passenger was wearing a helmet, and the type of helmet worn by the passenger. In the case of a driver or passenger not wearing a helmet but a first and/or second helmet were seen being carried on the motorcycle, the type of helmet was still recorded, while it was noted that it was not worn.

In addition, surveyors interviewed five drivers at each location, for a total of 280 surveys over the course of the week. Riders were asked if they owned a helmet, the type of helmet they owned, how old it was, any defects, and how often the helmet was worn. In case riders said they didn't wear it all the time, they were asked why they didn't wear it all the time. In addition, they were asked about finances, and motorcycle ownership.

In total, 28 locations were surveyed across the five divisions of KCCA and three suburb subcounties of Nansana, Kira, and Makindye-Ssabagabo. The same locations had been surveyed in October 2022, allowing for a reasonable comparison of changes. Over the course of the week, surveyors observed 6,266 boda bodas.

Findings

Overview

This survey found that 75% of riders are wearing helmets across Greater Kampala, five percent more than were observed in both October and July of 2022. As found in previous surveys, there remains a huge difference in helmet wearing from Central Division, at 88%, to the suburbs, where only 60% were observed wearing helmets.

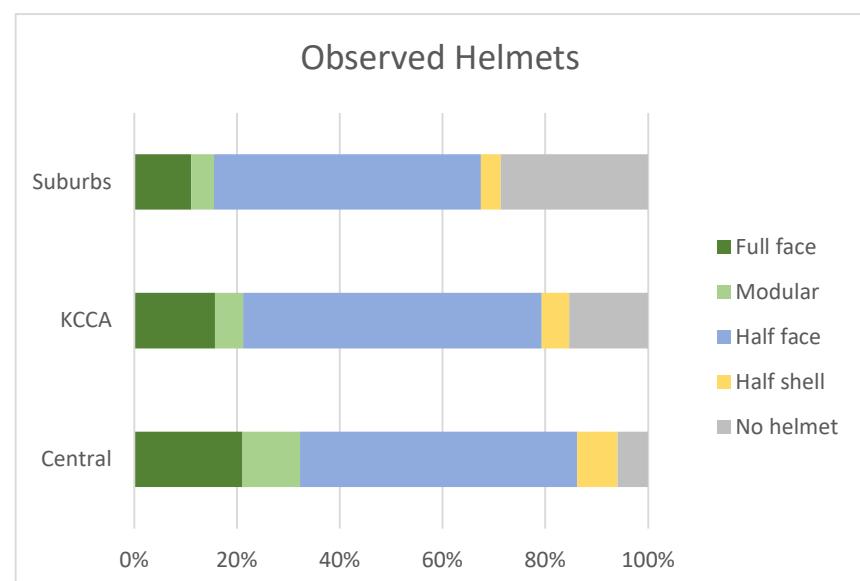
Passenger Helmet wearing

Utilization – defined as trips with passengers or visible loads – was around 59%, within 1% of observed utilization in October 2022. Low utilization signals a saturated boda boda market, where there are more riders than passengers – while this can drive down costs for passengers, it encourages competition for passengers and potentially unsafe behavior.

Helmet Type, Age & Defects

Type

Similar to previous findings, half face helmets are by far the most common, making up two-thirds of all helmets on the road in Kampala. However, full face and modular helmets – which cover the chin, and thus offer full face protection – are known to be safest and provide the best protection for riders and passengers in a fall. Similar to helmet wearing overall, the highest usage of these safer helmets was observed in Central Division, where fully 34% of riders with helmets were wearing full face or modular helmets, compared to 25% and 22% in KCCA and Wakiso respectively.



Helmet age

Helmets are recommended to be replaced upon either reaching five years of age or upon becoming defect. Less than 4% of helmets surveyed had reached five years of age. Additionally, riders in Central had the oldest helmets, at an average age of 23 months, compared to relatively young 14-month-old helmets in Wakiso.

Defects

Helmet defects were least common for riders with stages in Central Division – yet around a third of their helmets still had defects. In KCCA and Wakiso, the defect rate ranged from 26%-56%.

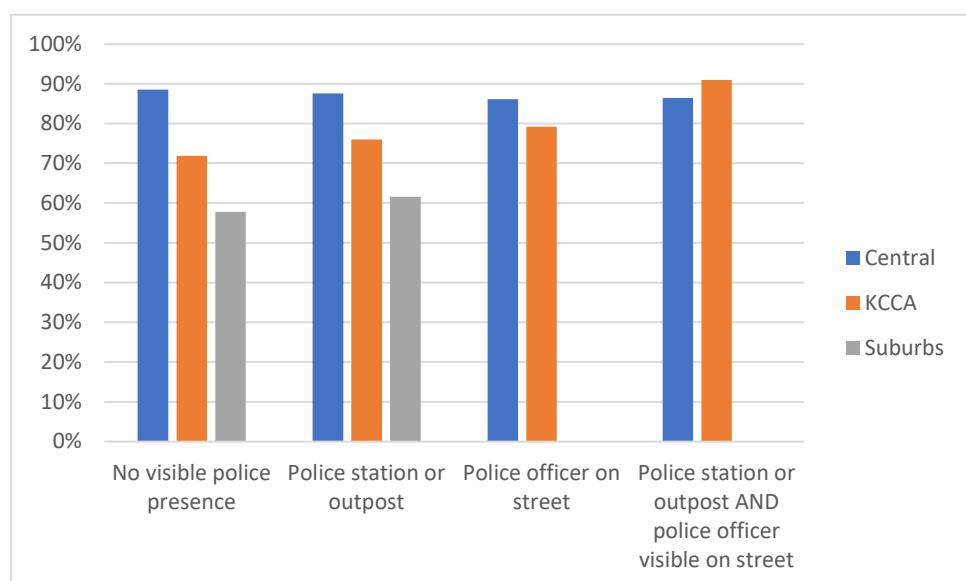
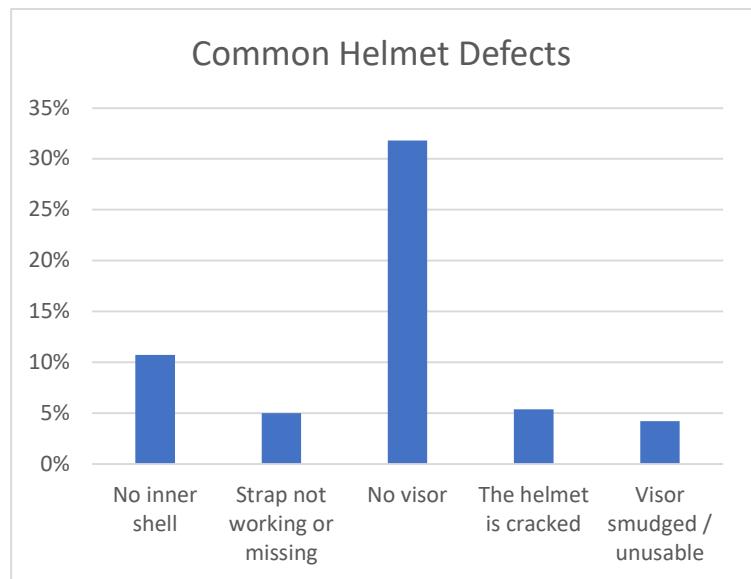
By far the most common defect was a missing visor – 32% of all helmet owners reported missing a visor. After this, missing inner shells were the second most common defect, affecting around 11% of surveyed riders. Inner shells provide protection for the head upon impact, and missing the inner shell is a major defect that can make the helmet nearly useless.

Whether to Protect the Head

Similar to findings in October 2022, helmet wearing seems to depend on a handful of observed factors, most especially a) whether the rider is carrying a passenger, b) location, and c) police presence. Carrying a passenger seems to encourage riders to wear helmets – 78% of riders carrying passengers were observed wearing helmets, compared to 71% of riders not carrying passengers or loads.

Much bigger impact, however, was location. Riders in Central were 47% more likely to be wearing helmets than those in the suburbs.

Helmet wearing was also dependent on police presence. Locations with both a station or outpost and a visible police officer saw 87% helmet wearing, compared to 69% helmet wearing at locations without any police presence.



Passenger Helmet Wearing

Unfortunately, passenger helmet usage remains distressingly low. Of the more than 3,000 passengers observed across Kampala, only 20 were observed to be wearing a helmet: less than 1% of passengers. Once again, the safest behaviors were noted in Central, where 1.7% of passengers wore helmets, compared to 0.2% of passengers in Wakiso. Passenger helmet types were largely the same as rider helmets: two-thirds were half face helmets.

The survey was carried out by Geofrey Ndhogezzi and Kalungi James. The survey was designed by Tom Courtright with input from Dr. Paul Mukwaya and the surveyors. Data entry was also conducted by Judith Mbabazi, of the Urban Action Lab at Makerere University.