

TITLE: Bicycle- and Bicycle helmet use by cyclists in Athens

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ABSTRACT

AIM: The present study was carried out within the frame of COST TU1101 WG1 action, “better cycling” having the aim to examine the factors influencing bicycle- and bicycle helmet use in the city of Athens, a city with very limited urban facilities for bicyclists although such need is growing.

METHODS: This pilot survey was conducted upon a convenient sample of 80 adult cyclists (60% male and 40% female) aged 18-55 years, in Athens/ April 2012. This convenient sample was gathered in two of the cyclists’ favorite meeting points (hang outs) in Ag.Asomati and Thision squares of central Athens. Our sample completed a questionnaire rating the motives for using or not using a bicycle and a bicycle helmet.

The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions including bicyclists’ socio-demographic characteristics, type of bicycle, years of riding experience, frequency of bicycling, reasons for bicycle use, possible crash involvement and motives for wearing or not a helmet.

RESULTS: A 37,5% uses their bicycle for mere recreation. Furthermore a 45% has been involved in a crash at least once, while 51,4% of them were not wearing a safety helmet at the moment of the incident.

The most frequently mentioned problems were the deficient bicycle lane network (33%) and the inadequate, low road quality (30%).

After correlation of safety helmet use and socio-demographic sample characteristics, bicycle type, years of riding experience, riding frequency and crash involvement, it was concluded that the higher the crash involvement in the past, the more frequent the helmet use in the present ($p=0,001$) ($B=0,43$).

CONCLUSIONS: Our study has shown that some groups of bicyclists’ were more prone to use a safety helmet compared to other groups. It was also remarkable that the vast majority of the respondents complained about the lack of infrastructures (poor bicycle lane network and poor road quality).

Finally it should also be taken into consideration that the present study was realized in the middle of a major financial crisis when more and more Greeks understand the benefits of bicycle use (low cost, health, environment), compared to car driving (costly maintenance, high oil price, increasing tolls and road taxes, sedentary lifestyle, more pollution).

Keywords: Road safety, urban health, bicycle use, helmet.