

Cycling Injuries Reduced as Cyclists on the Road Increase

Research is proving there actually is truth to the old adage “safety in numbers.” More than 50 years ago a researcher named Smeed made this connection when he noted the rate of fatal injuries went down as the number of motor vehicles increased on the road. The conclusion was reached that fatalities per vehicle exponentially decreased when the number of drivers on the road increased. Noting this pattern, researchers have been testing it against cycling and pedestrian fatalities to see if the hypothesis remains true.

Countries with the fewest number of cyclists have the poorest cycling safety records. This is attributed to drivers not being aware of the rights cyclists have on the road because they scarcely encounter them while driving. Between 1994 and 1998 London experienced a 91% increase in the number cyclists and found there was a 33% decrease in cycling casualties.

Apparently, this holds true not only for fatalities. Between 1982 in 1989 in Western Australia the cycling community doubled while the number of bicyclists admitted to the hospital for injuries dropped by 48%. Fatalities dropped 33%.

Research in Hong Kong in 2016 found that this same trend applies on a neighborhood level, as well. Drivers who became accustomed to seeing more cyclists in a particular part of town were more careful when driving in that area.

One of the conclusions of these studies is that motorists are less likely to injure a cyclist or pedestrian as their numbers increase and drivers encounter them more regularly. The research suggests as drivers encounter cyclists more and more frequently the more they are aware of their own driving, regardless of where they are.

This phenomena is very similar to the an old rule in marketing known as “The Rule of Seven” which suggests consumers need to hear a message seven times before they will take action. As drivers see more and more cyclists on the road they begin to be more aware of, and to consider, their own actions behind the wheel. People who travel to Holland and other countries where cycling is much more prevalent frequently remark that drivers are much more courteous.

Is there hope for us here? We are clearly nowhere near having drivers in the US be as accommodating as those in Holland or elsewhere. As an optimist, I am convinced this is in the process of changing. From 2006, the number of people enjoying cycling has increased by over 10 million and is still growing. When you combine a general increase in cycling with the boom in E-bike sales, it is easy to foresee significantly increasing numbers of bicycle riders on more and more roads. As our numbers increase, the rate of injury is sure to decline if this research holds true. Hope springs eternal!

Sources: www.Bicycling.com/culture/g19625113/bicycle-safety/

https://ecf.com/sites/ecf.com/files/ECF_FACTSHEET4_V3_cterr ee_SafetyNumb.pdf

<https://www.statista.com/topics/1686/cycling/>

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