CYCLING IN LATER LIFE: TO CYCLE OR NOT TO CYCLE

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Extended abstract

The importance of introducing measures to increase the modal share of cycling has come to the fore in both policy and research in recent years. The benefits of increased cycling are wide-ranging; with cycling often considered to contribute to more attractive public spaces, increased safety, and more sustainable urban life.

Different parts of the world are seeing an increase in the modal share of cycling. However, these increases are largely attributed to commuter traffic, with older persons somewhat underrepresented. There is, however, some evidence to suggest that developing strategies for cycling promotion across the lifespan, and particularly into later life, would allow people to continue travelling by bicycle as they age. While much is known about the car and the importance of the car in facilitating mobility in later life, much less is known about cycling and its role in the mobility of older persons.

Employing a mixed method approach, this study aims to gain a greater insight into cycling as a mode of transport among those in later life. The study explores (1) the key differences between older cyclists and older non-cyclists; (2) the perceptions of older cyclists in relation to cycling as a mode of transport; and (3) the factors which are associated with cycling cessation in later life.

Malmö, a city in the south of Sweden with a strong emphasis on bicycle planning, is the study area. The city of Malmö is an interesting case as Malmö Municipality has put a strong emphasis on its aim for cycling to be a part of its inhabitants' everyday lives.

A survey aimed to capture the trends at play when it comes to cycling among those aged 65-85 living in Malmö city (N = 456). Two focus groups

were carried out in order to gain a deeper insight into older persons' perspectives and perceptions with respect to cycling. The focus group discussion guide comprised two main themes: 'Reasons for cycling/not cycling'; and 'The cycling experience in Malmö'.

The key differences between older cyclists and older non-cyclists were focused around the factors of gender; health and activity; mobility opportunities; and life course and intentions.

Cycling cessation was associated with those who do not participate in all desired activities, those who do not have access to a car in the household and those who do not associate cycling with health. The only variable associated with a higher odds of having ceased cycling was age, meaning that, by and large, the older the respondent the more likely he/she is to have ceased cycling.

The study's findings illustrated the very positive and important role cycling can play in the mobility of older persons in the city of Malmö. It is not only possible but also mostly enjoyable for many older people to cycle. Cycling is a facilitator of activities and is largely associated with convenience and ease.

There are clear differences between cyclists and non-cyclists, with the former generally having a wider range of mobility opportunities available to them. Cycling cessation is anticipated as a very distressing, yet inevitable, life event by those who still cycle.

The results of this study suggest that campaigns aimed at increasing the awareness and consideration of other road users towards older cyclists, as well as the introduction of clearer and more visible signage could support older cyclists in prolonging their cycling, as well as improving the experience they have as they do cycle. Increasing awareness of the health benefits of cycling could be another means of encouraging people to continue cycling as they age.

Keywords: older persons, cycling, cycling cessation, urban transport, health