

Characteristics of older bicycle riders in Australia

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BACKGROUND

In Europe there is considerable interest in older rider safety, particularly in injuries to older riders resulting from single-bicycle crashes. Little is known about older riders in Australia. It is estimated that 17% of Australians aged 50+ rode a bicycle in the last year, compared to 35% of those aged 30-49 years. The number of riders admitted to Australian hospitals aged 65+ increased from 192 in 1999-2000 to 946 in 2015-16, demonstrating the growing need to better understand the characteristics of older Australian riders and their riding patterns.

METHOD

An online survey was sent to half of the members of Queensland's largest bicycle rider group in May 2015. Among 2057 valid responses, 12% were from riders aged 65+ (older riders). Rider age was categorised into 18-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64 and 65+ years. Type of bicycle provided a proxy measure for purpose of riding.

RESULTS

Compared to other riders, older riders were less likely to be female (65+:12% vs other age groups:21-24%), to live in major cities (78% vs 84-92%), and to be university-educated (56% vs 62-80%). Time spent riding in an average week in the last year did not differ significantly across age groups, with older riders spending an average 6.9 hours riding. The older riders rode 125 kms/week on average, similar to most other age groups but somewhat lower than riders aged 35-44 (141 kms/week). Older riders were more likely to have been riding for the last 10 years (68% vs 26-58%), but less likely to ride a road bike (73% vs 77-84%). All respondents aged 45+ were more likely to ride on 70-80 and 90-110 km/h roads than the younger riders. Further analyses will examine whether the age-based demographic differences are specific to cyclists, or shared by non-cyclist drivers who completed the same survey.

CONCLUSIONS

This survey of regular riders showed that older riders shared the main characteristics of Australian riders, being predominantly male, and riding road bikes, suggesting that riding was largely for recreation. There was no evidence of these older riders adopting protective strategies such as riding less often or less distance or avoiding higher-speed roads.