

Title: WHY DO OLDER PERSONS GIVE UP OR REDUCE CYCLING?

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Abstract:

Cycling is a cheap and practical means of travel but older persons often reduce or give up cycling. Furthermore, moderate physical activity improves health. The aim of this study was to describe antecedents and consequences of reducing or giving up cycling in older persons. Whereas antecedents and consequences of reducing or giving up driving are well known, they have not yet been assessed for cycling. This study is to provide a first insight into this topic.

In in-depth-interviews with 32 persons from 65 to 89 years of age we assessed their reasons for reducing or giving up cycling. On average these persons have been cycling very much and regularly: Two thirds have owned and used a bike all their life.

On average the persons interviewed cycle less, less often and shorter distances than before. They avoid busy times and dense traffic, cycling in the dark and in bad weather. Many persons named multiple reasons for reducing or giving up cycling: Only a quarter of the participants named only a single reason which was in most cases health-related. About two thirds of the participants mentioned health reasons among the main reasons, about one third was afraid of falls or accidents, about one quarter said that they felt in an age where persons need no longer cycle, one third said that their needs had changed, one third said that the traffic conditions had contributed, six persons mentioned their bike, four persons significant others. For about one third of the participants reducing or giving up cycling had not changed their life markedly. About one third felt restricted in their recreational activities. Some persons who also had troubles when walking felt markedly constrained in their daily life as they had to walk to public transport stops.

Health reasons are the most important problem making persons reduce or giving up cycling. Possible solutions are discussed, among them advice by well informed doctors, training under professional supervision to overcome physical difficulties or better cope with them, bike parking in garages or bicycle sheds and bike parts or a bike which fit the needs of older cyclists better than usual bikes.