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D I G E S T

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## Women's attitudes towards cycling



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**A study of 2,417 regular cyclists in six European countries found cycle use can influence gender differences in perceptions and attitudes towards cycling. It highlights the need to promote cycling behaviours and for the specific needs of women to be included in the design of cycling infrastructure.**

Research has shown that women cycle less compared with men and have unfavourable attitudes towards cycling. The gap between female and male bicycle use is because of several factors. For example, men report fewer barriers or constraints to cycling and have more positive attitudes to cycling compared to that of women.

Women have different attitudes towards cycling infrastructure and environment (e.g. preference for streets with slower traffic speed and segregation from motor traffic) and report a high-risk perception of cycling. There are specific factors such as cycling culture and gender inequality that contribute to these gender differences.

According to self-perception theory, cycling behaviour may influence attitudes to cycling as people develop attitudes from observations and own behaviour. For example, men may be less likely to report negative attitudes towards cycling because they cycle more frequently than women.

A study examined gender differences in positive attitudes towards cycling in a population of 2,417 regular cyclists (i.e. cyclists who cycle at least once a month) irrespective of their membership of a community organisation. It investigated gender differences in bicycle use and cycling injuries.

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## TRIMIS

The Transport and Research and Innovation Monitoring and Information System (TRIMIS) supports the implementation and monitoring of the Strategic Transport Research and Innovation Agenda (STRIA) and its seven roadmaps.

TRIMIS is an open-access information system to map and analyse technology trends, research and innovation capacities, as well as monitor progress in all transport sectors.

TRIMIS is developed and managed by the Joint Research Centre on behalf of the European Commission.

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## Women's attitudes towards cycling

A web-based questionnaire survey was undertaken involving 2,417 participants in six European countries (Hungary, Italy, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom). The survey included questions on cycling frequency, attitudes towards cycling, perceived safety when cycling, cycling infrastructure and cycling environment.

The study found gender differences in attitudes towards cycling were small (albeit significant) or non-existent in the sample of regular cyclists. No significant gender differences were found in the perception of cycling mobility benefits. However, there were gender differences in personal benefits of cycling – women perceived more than men that cycling is a practical and convenient mode of transport. In contrast, previous studies have suggested that male cyclists perceive fewer barriers or constraints to cycling and have more positive attitudes to cycling compared to those of women.

Results did not show gender differences in the evaluation of cycling infrastructure, but women cyclists perceive higher levels of discomfort than men on roads without bicycle lanes. Women cyclists showed a higher risk perception than men.

Regarding bicycle use, Dutch female cyclists were more likely to use bicycles for shopping, entertainment, personal business and taking children to or from school, and less likely to cycle for recreation or sport.

Gender differences in perceptions and attitudes towards cycling were similar across the six European countries. However, there were differences in perception and attitudes towards cycling between countries. For example, mobility and personal benefits of cycling were lower among Dutch cyclists. This may be because cycling is part of the Dutch national identity, so the Dutch may have other reasons for cycling rather than for environmental or personal benefits. Compared to Dutch cyclists, Italian and Spanish cyclists recognised the personal and mobility benefits of cycling. In contrast, Hungarian cyclists perceived high discomfort for cycling on a road with and without cycling lanes, and had a lower perception of risk related to cycling.

The findings of the study suggest that gender differences in attitudes towards cycling disappear when considering regular cyclists. It is not only that women are less likely to use bicycles than men because of different attitudes towards cycling, but also that women exhibit different attitudes towards cycling because they are less likely to use bicycles. This is in line with the assumptions of the self-perception theory. People use their own behaviour as a source of evidence for their beliefs and attitudes.

The study provides insights for intervention aimed at promoting cycling and increasing cycling behaviours among women. In addition to promoting positive attitudes to cycling and increasing cycle behaviours, female input and consultations should be considered in the design of transport infrastructure to ensure gender balance in bicycle use.