

## COMMENTARY

### ECONOMIC BURDEN OF MOTORCYCLE ACCIDENTS IN NORTHERN GHANA

Motorcycles are a convenient way of travelling in the Northern part of Ghana. This means of transport is associated with a high accident rate. These accidents often result in injury, incapacitation and sometimes death. In this issue of the journal M. Kudebong *et al*<sup>1</sup> describe the economic burden of motorcycle accidents in the Bolgatanga Municipality in Northern Ghana. The study also discusses motorcycle insurance, the licence status of motorcycle riders, the role of the police and other law enforcement agencies, low use of helmets, and the need for continuous mass education campaigns to improve motorcycle safety. The authors estimate the economic burden of motorcycle accidents in the municipality to be about US\$1.2 million.

The authors identify difficulties in obtaining data on motorcycle accidents as being related to low patient traceability resulting from poor residential addresses, low insurance rates, licencing rates and low law enforcement rates. Despite the difficulties in identifying accident victims the study is based on the assumption that motorcycle accidents accounted for 80% of all road traffic accidents in the municipality from 2004 to 2008.

A majority of the motorcycle accident victims were riders and of male gender. There seems to be agreement among the participants in focus group discussions that “lack of formal motorcycle riding training, abuse of alcohol, unrestrained animals and donkey carts” were among the major causes of the accidents. No mention is made of other risk factors such as road conditions, weather, and traffic congestion (e.g. on market days). About a third (29%) of motorcycle riders wore a helmet at the time of the accident. Thus the majority of riders did not wear helmets, an act that infringes on the law.

Many of the victims sustained multiple injuries, with head injuries and fractures forming about 60% of the cases. Males predominated in the injuries table (73.7% males versus 26.3% females). Even though 78% of the accident victims were within the productive age group of 20–39 years, no data is presented to support the contention that “the majority of fatalities occur in male riders within the productive age group”.

This study provides an important preliminary view of the economic burden of motorcycle accidents in North-

ern Ghana. The study suffers from the challenges of data availability and uncertainty in the estimates of numbers and rates of fatalities among motorcyclists compared to other road users; on the other hand it may be better to produce uncertain results rather than ignore a health problem if available data sources are poor.<sup>2</sup> Despite the weaknesses enumerated above, this study appears to demonstrate a significant economic burden on the Bolgatanga Municipality from motorcycle accidents. The study also draws attention to important safety issues surrounding motorcycle use in the Bolgatanga Municipality. In addition the study highlights the need to strengthen data collection by health care providers and other stakeholders within this community. Further studies may more accurately delineate the size of the problem and will be required to help shape policy on the safety of motorcycle riders in Ghana and other developing countries.

#### REFERENCES

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**Conflict of interest:** None declared