

Greek study on helmet use

- summary in English -

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Abstract

During 2014-2015 the Hellenic Motorcycle Institute 'Motothesis' studied perceptions on helmet usage and unorthodox practices regarding helmet use in Greece. It addressed adolescents and young people (riders or not) and motorcyclists.

The aim of the study was to develop a proposal with best practices on the promotion of a qualitative and broad/wide use of helmet.

The survey identified that a distorted or a metaphysical perception on helmet efficiency has established, as it is believed that helmet can be effective even it is used in unorthodox ways or if it is not used at all. This perception can be derived from a limited understanding of helmet usage, from an underestimation or ignorance of the helmets' contribution to qualitative motorcycling. Moreover, the study identified that the consolidation of non-use or unorthodox use of helmet is reinforced by the factor of the prestige demonstration via this behavior. However, at the same time, this factor can be used in order for bad practice to be reversed. It is recognized that the development of motorcyclist literature is the basis for the overall improvement (quantitative and qualitative) of motorcyclist practice. However, the Institution proposes, as part of a gradual development of self-education and qualitative motorcycling, immediate promoting and educative actions based on the following principles: a) release helmet from fear factor and b) debunking of bad practices.

Introduction

The Hellenic Motorcycle Institute 'Motothesis' was founded by MOT.O.E. (Hellenic Motorcyclists Federation - www.motoe.gr), which is a non-profit, non-governmental motorcyclists' organization. MOT.O.E. is an 'umbrella' organization for motorcycle clubs, situated all over Greece. The main actions of Motothesis are to create information about motorcycling, to promote motorcycling and to organize training in motorcycling. Motothesis is a member of the European Road Safety Charter, led by the European Commission (www.erscharter.eu), the largest civil society platform on road safety. In terms of development of good practice under the umbrella of the European Road Safety Charter, Motothesis designed and conducted a descriptive survey of helmet use.

The helmet is the only protection accessory for riders. In Greece use of a helmet by motorcyclists has been mandatory since 1992. However, in reality there is lack of quantitative and qualitative use of helmets in Greece. Anyone can see every day that there is occasional usage or no usage of helmets, usage of improper helmets, usage of helmets that do not fit correctly, and inadequate protection or maintenance of the helmet itself.

The need for original research on beliefs in helmet use is grounded not only in the fact that it was not a subject of research before, but also in the fact that especially in countries in southern Europe, a large percentage of the population use powered two wheelers (due to weather and economic conditions).

In Greece there were about two million motorcyclesⁱ, when the population aged 15-64 years reached 7.5 million (census of 2011). Practically, this means that a quarter of the population rides motorcycle and hypothetically half of the Greek population makes at least occasional use of a powered two wheels, if we add the passengers.

About the study

The aim of the research was to develop a body of proposals for the development of good practice, which could support the wide and systematic proper usage of helmets.

The research objectives were defined as follows:

- Review the range of public perspectives on the reasons for helmet use.
- Investigate reasons that riders themselves identify for not using a helmet or using it inappropriately.
- Review the range of riders' perspectives on what could be the best practice for increasing the qualitative and broad/wide use of helmets.
- Compose a proposal for best practice, taking into account the results of the above studies.
- Promote best practices for the dissemination of a qualitative and wide use of helmets.

The study was designed as quantitative/descriptive research. The descriptive survey was carried out during the period 2014-2015. Two questionnaires were distributed to teenagers and young people and to the boards of motorcyclist clubs (members of MOT.O.E.). The study addressed on the one hand the new generation (for whom the use of helmets was always mandatory), and on the other hand experienced motorcyclists. Therefore, a questionnaire aimed at young people (15-25 years old) was distributed online.

The one part of the 'accidental sample' was composed from pupils of Greek high schools and students from the Greek academic community. The initial design aimed to approach all pupils contacting with all school units, but the responsible office of the Greek Ministry of Education gave permission for only the 5% percent of school units, which were selected via a random sampling technic. The second part of the accidental sample was composed from young students from 18-25 years old derived from the Greek academic community, who were called to participate in the online survey via the distribution of this calling by the administration offices of their schools and departments.

The response in total was 40.7% out of a target of 1,000 people (90% of them were pupils and 10% students; 70% of them were men and 46% used a motorcycle). Regarding the questionnaire to the motorcyclists, Motothesis addressed the motorcyclist clubs of the Hellenic Motorcyclists Federation (MOT.O.E.), asking them to fill out the online survey (only one response per club); the clubs were asked to discuss this subject with their members and to fill out the questionnaire as a result of this discussion. In total 36% of the clubs responded; most of them were located in the Northern part of Greece.

Motorcycling literature and practice

Motorcycling literature is correlated with the qualitative motorcycling as result of advance riding, bike liability and use of complete and proper equipment. The protection equipment, which a helmet is, under good practice can reduce destruction factors, offering enjoyable and safe riding. Motorcycling literature (or motorcyclist culture) can be developed through the fields of knowledge, technical skills and traffic handling. Knowledge about the vehicle is required related with its handling and its maintenance. Development of technical skills is also required in order to handle the bike under any condition. Traffic handling or better road behavior is identical with the achievement of advance riding; the ability to control the position and speed of the bike safely, systematically and smoothly, to utilize the road and weather conditions, in order to move freely, skillfully and with responsibility. This capability requires a positive, noble behavior a high level of driving ability, which is based on the concentration, the effective observation, the prediction and root design. Additionally, this ability must be combined with the manipulation of the bike: the bike should be in the proper position on the road at the right time, moving at the right speed, have the proper gear and be able to stop safely, always on its own side of the road and into the distance - what you see in front - free from obstacles.

The study examines beliefs related with the use of helmet. In particular, responders were asked to express their opinion if a helmet is *certainly usable* or *possibly usable* or *not usable* for the following purposes:

Qualitative riding, when a rider can enjoy motorcycling without destructions, which could reduce safe riding:

- Protection against noise
- Protection against weather conditions (e.g., heat, rain, cold, etc.)
- Protection against floating objects (e.g., dust, insects, etc.)
- Protection against wind

Protection of a road accident:

- Improvement of rider's visibility by third partiesⁱⁱ
- Protection during a rider's fall (cased or not by other road users or other reasons)

Rider's legal compatibility:

- Avoidance of penalty for not wearing helmet

The results showed that both young people and motorcyclists identified protection during a road accident as the most important reason to wear a helmet. Secondly they mentioned the avoidance of a penalty for not wearing a helmet. The aspects of a quality ride related to the use of a helmet were not identified by young people. However, experienced and better informed representatives of the motorcycle clubs identified the usefulness of a helmet for some of the qualitative aspects, such as protection against weather conditions, against flying objects and wind.

In addition, the study investigated thoughts about the reasons for bad practice related to the usefulness of helmet use. In particular, respondents were asked to identify reasons for the following expressions of bad practice:

- It appears that some riders (and pillion) do not use the helmet occasionally or systematically.
- It appears that some riders (and pillion) do not fasten the strap of their helmet.
- It appears that the helmet size is not correct (it is too small/large) for some riders (and pillion).
- It appears that some riders (and pillion) wear inappropriate helmets (unapproved, dubious quality, very old, beaten, etc.).
- It appears that some riders (and pillion) neglect the protection and maintenance of the helmet before and after its use (e.g. prolonged exposure to weather conditions, mounted on the motorcycle, careless behavior of the helmet causing falls and blows on it, non-purification gelatin, etc.).
- It appears that some riders (and pillion) tie the strap too tight or too loose or wear it in an unorthodox way (as if it were a hat or sideways like a 'helmet raised', etc.).

The results showed the majority of respondents did not identify the certain negative impact of those practices. An ignorance of qualitative riding can be identified as result of lack of the motorcyclist culture.

However, another two aspects/factors related with that lack of motorcycling literature, were identified:

- a) the expression of superiority (guts) / the demonstration of prestige via bad practice (e.g. not use of helmet, unorthodox ways of wearing it, use of inappropriate helmets, etc.)
- b) a belief that nothing bad with physical or legal consequences will happen if a rider will not wear helmet or will not wear a right helmet of with right way (metaphysical approach)

Good Practice: suggestions

Bad practices in helmet usage can be based on the lack of qualitative motorcycling. People underestimate the vital role of helmets and the rest of motorcyclist protection equipment and accessories. At the same time, there is a strong influence in Greek culture by a metaphysic perspective on life. In addition, there is a high negative expression against the legal framework

for the helmet use. The development of motorcycling literature/culture is a long and complicated procedure, so the Institution suggests, as part of a gradual development, the immediate and systematic diffusion/promotion of messages, in the terms of education programs, information, advertising, etc., which are derived from the following principles:

- release helmet from fear factor
- debunking of bad practice

Therefore, it is proposed the content of messages on the helmet use to be developed according to:

- release or demotion of the negative message, where the helmet is associated with the accident or enforce by law
- mockery of bad practices
- promotion/advertising of the technical characteristics of the helmet, upgrading the public opinion for the helmet as product/object

A helmet is part of the system 'rider-bike'; it does not operate only after an accident, but it contributes to a pleasant and safe ride. A helmet is not like the safety-belt in a car; The helmet and the rest rider's equipment as a complete system could be compared with the car, which protects rider from noise, wind, objects on air, weather conditions during riding. In that point, promotion of the technical advantages of helmets for a pleasant and safe ride could increase the respect and appeal for it as object and product and not only as protective equipment, but as essential motorcyclist accessory, which can operate when it is in good condition, in the right size and fits correctly. Definitely, a reduction of the cost and honest information about quality would be supportive.

Fear and negative thinking reduces the duration of memory and provokes refuse, as human brain minimizes/fading away negative memories and thoughtⁱⁱⁱ. How is it possible to expect positive results in qualitative and quantitative improvement in the use of the helmet, when promoting ONLY and ALL the false and negative connection of the helmet to the accident or the traffic police control? Systematic and proper use of helmet must be connected to the personal responsibility for wheel (happiness) and health. The Institution believes that no law can/should impose someone to be or not to be healthy and happy in the end! Police could only encourage to this direction. Motothesis does not adopt proposals for increase of police surveillance and penalties, even if some researches proposed that^{iv}. Penalties are not a positive approach to increase helmet use, without any guaranties for any permanent efficiency^v.

Riding motorcycle is deeply connected to the feeling of freedom, superiority, joy, power, ... Based on this psychological basis, it is proposed mockery of bad practices 'ramming' the 'good image', which a rider builds for him/herself having adopted bad practices. In other words, the factor of rider's 'prestige' can be used to reduce bad practices gradually as far as those will be disconnected with the willing image of a 'cool rider'. The information/education can help if gradually all these superiority stereotypes through bad practice are demystified.

Motothesis suggests a concept of messages. However, it is essential that each organization adjusts the message to an appropriate style for their audience, in order to achieve the best efficiency. Potential organizations to spread the message could be state offices (e.g. in education, transportation and civil protection), private law institutions (e.g. insurance companies, driving schools, etc.) and motorcyclist clubs and associations.

ⁱ ACEM – The Motorcycle Industry in Europe στο Delhay, A. & Marot, L. (2015) Ridescan project: European Scanning Tour for Motorcycle Safety, Brussels: Federation of European Motorcyclists' Association.

ⁱⁱ The following article discusses visibility issues and bike's safety [Law, T. H., M. Ghanbari, H. Hamid, A. Abdul-Halin and C. P. Ng (2015). "Examining the effect of visual treatments on truck drivers' time-to-arrival judgments of motorcycles at T-intersections." Transportation Research Part F: Traffic Psychology and Behaviour **33**: 66-74.]

ⁱⁱⁱ See, related article: Walker, W. R., Skowronski, J. J and Thompson, Ch. P. (2003), "*Life is pleasant and memory helps to keep it that way!*" Review of General Psychology **7**(2): 203—210.

^{iv} See, examples: Ranney, M. L., M. J. Mello, J. B. Baird, P. R. Chai and M. A. Clark (2010). "Correlates of motorcycle helmet use among recent graduates of a motorcycle training course." Accident Analysis and Prevention **42**(6): 2057-2062.] ακόμη και με ελληνικό ερευνητικό πεδίο [ενδεικτικά: Papadakaki, M., G. Tzamalouka, C. Orsi, A. Kritikos, A. Morandi, C. Gnardellis and J. Chliaoutakis (2013). "Barriers and facilitators of helmet use in a Greek sample of motorcycle riders: Which evidence?" Transportation Research Part F: Traffic Psychology and Behaviour **18**: 189-198.

^v See related study: Houston, D. J. (2007). "Are helmet laws protecting young motorcyclists?" Journal of Safety Research **38**(3): 329-336.