

Extended abstract

Perceptions on female bicycle use and infertility among some Ghanaian communities

Introduction

Most Sub Saharan Africans are faced with severe mobility constraints in their quest to access education, healthcare and other important places of wellbeing. In some societies females are additionally burdened with responsibilities both at home and on the farm. Although bicycles offer possible solution as a relatively low cost Non Motorised Transport, this is undermined due to perceptions of bicycle use in some cultures. Indeed, the utilitarian use of bicycle by females has considerable reduce mobility constraints and lessen the burden of work on women and girls in some cultures. This notwithstanding utilitarian use of bicycles by females is undermined in some cultures by the perception that riding a bicycle will render women infertile.

Methods

The current study involved 1005 children aged between the ages of 8 and 18 drawn from eight communities within two ecological zones in Ghana. The children were either classified as in-school or out- -of-school. The eight communities used were representative of urban, peri-urban rural and remote-rural communities. Some of the study settlements were nucleated, some partly nucleated, some partly or fully dispersed and some linear. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection was employed within the context of the mixed-method study design. Questionnaires, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted in all the study communities. A total of 1005 questionnaires were administered while 323 in-depth interviews (IDIs) and 31 focus group discussions (FGDs) were held to supplement the quantitative data collected. The IDIs conducted included interviews with 12 key informants (mainly settlement leaders, teachers, drivers and health personnel.), 12 out-of

–school children, 12 in-school children, 12 parents and 6 life histories of study participants in each of the 8 study sites. FGDs with in-school and out-of-school study participants were held separately with each group and consisted of up to 10 children. Individuals and households formed the unit of analysis for statistical analysis as appropriate. The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS.

Result

The study indicated that 44.8 % of girls have never used bicycles as compared with their male counterparts who returned a non use rate of only 15.9%. Further, the study found out that even though daily bicycle use among children in Ghana is generally lower, boys use it about 5 times more (10%) than recorded among their female counterparts (1.9%). Among the child study participants in the urban settlements, 33% indicated it was not right for girls to ride, 16% for peri- urban and 31% for rural settlements. Varied reasons were cited for these disparities in bicycle use among boys and girls. Notable among them is the perception of fertility loss in girls who use bicycles. The children also gave responses to suggest that their ridding behaviour is influenced by the attitudes and perceptions of their parents. Girls were mostly warned by parents and guardians not to ride because they will not give birth in future. Similarly, apart from perceptions and attitudes of parents, beliefs shared by children themselves and their peers may also explain the low usage of bicycle among females. This to a large extent has informed the type of bicycles used by girls. Most of the girls said they preferred bicycles without crossbars because it is easier to get on the seat or get off it.

Conclusions

The phenomenon of low use of bicycles among girls in is not exclusive to Ghana. However the reasons ascribed to this phenomenon may vary among different African nations. Contrary to widely held perception in the western world that excessive bicycle use could cause male

infertility, Ghanaians are rather concerned about cycling and infertility in women. This perception could have implication for the utilitarian use of bicycle Ghanaian women.