

Motorcycling adolescents as child neglect: A health emergency in Iran

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Dear Editor

Road accidents are one of the main causes of death in the world. Accident fatalities account for more than 1.2 million deaths and 50 million injured people globally each year (1). Road accidents in Iran claim the lives of 43 people daily (1, 2). Motorcycles are the most dangerous vehicles, and the risk of injury with motorcycles is 3 to 16 times per mile greater than with cars (3). The exposure of motorcycle riders to risk of accident is 10 times more than car drivers for different reasons (3). Motorcycle riders are one of the most vulnerable groups in road accidents. Some European countries have adopted the project "Vision Zero" for child deaths in road accidents. For example, Norway achieved their Vision Zero goal with no child deaths resulting from road accidents involving pedestrians or cyclists in 2019.

Children and teenagers have a significant share in the number of motorcycle crash fatalities. The number of motorcycles in Iran has increased significantly for different reasons (4). Statistically, the rate of motorcycle registration increased from 50,599 in 1986 to 11,640,000 in 2019 (4), indicating a significant increase in the use of this type of vehicle, which is produced mainly inside the country (5). For example, in Yazd province, 100 accidents happen every day, 29% of which are related to motorcycle crashes (5). More than 50% of motorcycle crash fatalities involve people aged 10-40 years (6), and more than 12% of fatalities involve children aged 11-17 years, even though it is illegal in Iran for children under the age of 18 to drive cars or motorcycles (6).

Child neglect and motorcycling adolescents

One of the most common forms of child abuse is neglect. Child neglect is a deficit in meeting a child's basic needs as well as their physical, emotional, social, educational, and safety needs (7). Different types of child neglect have been defined by researchers, including inadequate protection from environmental hazards (8). Protection from environmental hazards is a basic need of children inside and outside the home (9). A single incident is not considered neglect, but a pattern of inadequate protection and supervision generally counts as neglect (8).

The number of Iranian children involved in motorcycle crash fatalities and injuries shows a pattern of inadequate protection and supervision of children (5, 6), or in other words, child neglect. Based on studies in Iran, riding motorcycles is a hobby for teenagers, especially in the hot season in provinces that have a hot and dry climate (4). Because of temperature, lack of knowledge, price, etc., riders do not use helmets (4). The distribution of motorcycle crashes shows a greater frequency on weekends and in the evening and at night, between 6 pm and 10 pm (4). Many parents allow children to use motorcycles; police are not serious in stopping children motorcyclists; there are no penalties for motorcycle riding without a helmet; the media and civil society remain silent in the face of this phenomenon (4, 5). It can be concluded that parents, communities, governmental organizations, motorcycle factories, and politicians are neglecting children in this emergency. Even

nongovernmental organizations and civil society do not talk about children victims of motorcycle crashes, and now it has become a regular issue in Iran.

What should be done?

Child injuries are a major public health issue that directly affects child survival. Child fatalities and injuries in motorcycle crashes can be prevented with legislation, law enforcement, product modification, environmental modification, the promotion of safety devices, and education. Research on child injuries in motorcycle crashes is too limited, and there are too few practitioners in child injury prevention, including motorcycle crashes. Some recommendations based on the evidence can be given to governments, non-governmental organizations, media, and parents:

Government: Make child fatalities and injuries in motorcycle crashes a priority; establish sustainable data collection processes in all provinces; build a coalition for action on child injury prevention in motorcycle crashes; allocate sufficient funds and human resources for efforts on prevention; protect children against child neglect.

Nongovernmental organizations: Identify local problems; promote advocacy and campaign for prevention; identify high risk neighborhoods; conduct awareness programs.

Research centers: Invest in research on children victims of motorcycle crashes; conduct studies on the different aspects of children and motorcycle crashes (psychosocial, physical, mental, economic, etc.).

Media: Raise awareness and create sensitivity to motorcycle crashes in society; support campaigns about children and motorcycle crashes.

Parents: Forbid motorcycles for children; supervise high risk and hazardous activities; talk to children to raise awareness.

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Authors' Contribution

HS and IS contributed to the conception of the work. HS drafted the letter. HB, IS, and HSJ provided critical comments on the draft. All authors approved the final version and ensuring the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work.

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