Reviewer's report

Title: How do motorcyclists manage mental tensions of risky riding? A qualitative study

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Reviewer: Charles B.A. Musselwhite

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting article addressing an important issue. It takes a novel, yet appropriate direction in using cognitive dissonance to understand discordance with motorcyclists' attitudes and behaviour. However, the paper suffers from some major flaws, which require serious attention before publication can occur and I suggest the following major compulsory revisions:-

1. Grounding of the article in previous literature. There needs to be more discussion in the background drawing on research on attitudes to road user safety for motorcyclists. In particular, there needs to be far more justification for why cognitive dissonance of motorcyclists is an important issue to examine. What led the authors to believe that there is a discordance between motorcyclist attitudes and behaviour? I would suggest there needs to be greater drawing on previous literature in this section, perhaps see Musselwhite et al (2012) (Musselwhite, C.B.A., Avineri, E., Susilo, Y.O. and Bhattachary, D. (2012). Public attitudes towards motorcyclists' safety: A qualitative study from the United Kingdom. Accident Analysis and Prevention, 45, 105-113.) or Simon Christmas' work both which used qualitative data to examine how motorcyclists articulate their work (Christmas, S. 2009. Passion, Performance, Practicality: Motorcyclists' Motivations and Attitudes to Safety. Department for Transport Report. Christmas, S., Young, D., Cookson, R., Cuerden, R. 2009. Passion, Performance, Practicality: Motorcyclists’ Motivations and Attitudes to Safety. Transportation Research Laboratory Report (PPR442). TRL: Crowthorne, England.)

2. Justify the methods used. A qualitative technique seems appropriate for the study, but some discussion as to why it is appropriate is needed. What does it do that a quantitative survey couldn’t achieve? What are the limitations of the chosen approach and why should we live with them?

3. Internationalisation. The article needs to be set within an International context for the reader. Fine to use Iran as a case study, but how far might results be unique to this country and what, if anything, might be generalised for other countries and why.

4. Recruitment. How were the participants recruited – door-to-door? On the street? How did the participants self-define themselves as risky? Was it simply a question that was asked? How was risky defined? A risk to themselves? To others? Taking risks? Were examples given?

5. Details of the sample. Would be helpful to have details of age, gender and
amount of motorcycling done. Could place a table in the methods section.

6. Need to know who said what in the findings. Quotes in the findings section should contain attribution with details of who said them, age, gender, amount of riding.

7. Data does not support inferences made in the findings. No evidence is really presented that the participant’s ‘over rated’ their riding behaviour. Moreover, examples of confidence are presented, there is no evidence that these riders are not as good as they report? Following on from this, the discussion does not stem from the findings – e.g. “the motorcyclists perceived themselves to be superior to other riders in respect to riding talents, skills, and vigilance” – there is little data presented in the findings to support this claim, apart from two minor comments at the end of ‘over-rating one’s perceived superiority’ section. More careful attention to the sub-heading, perhaps eliminating ‘over-rating’ and concentrating more on confidence of riders, rather than just superiority.

8. The findings could be said to be categorising the riders. Are the findings actually categories of rider, rather than themes found amongst the data? If so, some discussion and description is needed to highlight this approach. Again see Simon Christmas’ work on categorizing motorcyclists by attitude and behaviour. Again, this could be evident in the 2nd category a whole category/theme presented. The importance of the motorcycle to fulfil utility needs is a separate issue to attribution of previous crashes to inattention, yet both are presented together. Hence, this seems to be a category of motorcyclists rather than a theme from the data and more discussion is needed about this. Also, if these categories of rider exist, discussion about how mutually exclusive membership of them is and whether there might be other categories present in other samples of the population.

9. Quantitative terms used. Authors need to limit the amount of quantitative terms (e.g. ‘some’ or ‘majority’) when presenting qualitative data with a small sample. Please revisit article and reduce unnecessary quantification.

10. The discussion is interesting and draws appropriately on previous literature, but some of this literature should have been introduced in the background section and there needs to be careful distinctions made between literature that looks at driver behaviour and literature that looks at rider behaviour.

11. Interventions. In the conclusion, it would be useful to discuss in more depth potential interventions aimed at improving motorcyclist behaviour in light of what has been found.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests