Reviewer's report

Title: Motorcyclists' Reactions to Safety Helmet Law: A Qualitative Study

Version: 1 Date: 15 May 2009

Reviewer: Parissa Safai

Reviewer's report:

The article “Motorcyclists' Reactions to Safety Helmet Law: A Qualitative Study” by Zamani-Alavijeh et al. explores the ways in which motorcyclists and police officers in Iran have come to understand and negotiate mandatory safety helmet laws as part of their daily lives. The topic is timely and relevant to the readership of BMC Public Health. The focus of the paper is well defined and the methods employed are appropriate. However, there are a number of substantive and stylistic problems with the paper that warrant Major Compulsory Revisions. Specifically, the following concerns need to be addressed:

- Stylistically, there are a number of spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors in the manuscript that warrant a thorough re-editing. For example, the fifth theme explored by the authors is identified as “using a cheep and convenience helmet” and this should read: “using a cheap and convenient helmet.” The errors occur throughout the paper and, as such, I have not identified each and every instance. The manuscript (including the abstract) needs be extensively edited to clear up the style issues.

- In the first few pages of the manuscript, the authors identify Iran as a developing country and it is unclear how they have determined this status or categorization. Furthermore, it is unclear as to why such a categorization is necessary. If the authors wish to make the point that the topic of safety helmet use is under-studied in Iran, the identification of Iran as a developing country is unnecessary. If the authors wish to ground this study within broader population-level data on road traffic injuries and head trauma rates in Asian countries, there is again no need to suggest that Iran is a developing country. If the authors wish to discuss differential rates or relationships between road traffic injuries in developing nations as compared to developed nations (should this be the case), then this needs to be clearly identified as a key theme and this needs to be critically elaborated upon.

- In addition to the above point, greater contextualization is needed around traffic patterns and laws in Iran generally, and the safety helmet law specifically. When was this law legislated? Under what circumstances was it introduced – for example, was it introduced in response to public outcries over road traffic accidents or in response to the coordinated efforts of concerned citizens or politicians? What data is available on the rates of accidents/injuries pre- and post- the introduction of helmet laws in Iran? How are motorcyclists educated about the law? This context will add greater weight to the empirical data drawn
later in the paper as it provides a more complete picture of the situation in Iran.

- The methods are appropriate; however, the authors need to elaborate further on how participants (both motorcyclists and police officers) were recruited, as well as why only men were eligible to participate. With regard to the latter, given that only men participated in the study, the authors need to explore the gendered nature of risk-taking as it pertains to road traffic accidents/injuries. The authors do discuss risk-taking in the discussion section of the manuscript but, again, there is no connection made to the social construction of masculinity and how (hegemonic) masculinity promotes the tolerance of risk-taking in many areas of social life. Furthermore, the authors group the participants into categories of risk-taking (first paragraph of Discussion section) but it is unclear as to how they developed the categories and how they grouped the participants into these categories (i.e., what criteria was used to differentiate participants in the different categories).

- The authors may wish to reconsider having separate results and discussion sections. Given that it is a qualitative study, the analysis would be stronger if the quotes from participants was integrated with analysis in one results and discussion section. Should the authors choose to keep the results and discussion sections separate, the transitions between themes need development in order to keep the flow of the paper smooth. The data are sound although I encourage the authors to incorporate more raw data into their manuscript to add to the paper.

- Under the first thematic heading of “Circumventing or Dodging Police Officers,” it is unclear whether the passage “Therefore, we avoid those spots... upcoming traffic)” is a quote from participants or not.

- In wrapping up the paper, the authors do acknowledge that educational programs need to be socio-culturally sensitive but there is no indication as to what is meant by that in relation to this study and in relation to the safety of motorcyclists in Iran. The authors should also articulate the limitations of their work and point to future lines of research. I encourage the authors to take this as an opportunity to discuss the need to better contextualize road traffic injuries and the adoption of (or lack of compliance to) road safety laws in Iran specifically or in Asian countries, generally.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**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.