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Reader Response to IMJ Article: 'Impact of a National Lockdown on Cycling Injuries' by Foley et al (Ir Med J; Vol 114; No. 7; P412)

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Sir,

Doctors Foley et al are to be commended for their data collection concerning cycling injuries during the 2020 lockdown. It is sobering to consider that one of the lesser highlighted but more alarming figures to be derived from their data were the 273 cycling-related attendances to the Emergency Department in St. Vincent's from January 1st to June 7th, 2020. This exposes the glaring inaccuracy of official Road Safety Authority figures regarding the yearly incidence of cycling injuries. In the most recent year (2018) for which the RSA provides figures, the RSA maintain that there were 1,056 cyclists injured in collisions nationwide[1]. RSA figures are derived from data provided by An Garda Síochána. The true burden of cycling injuries in this state is far higher than deeply flawed official figures suggest and would be more accurately estimated by measuring emergency department attendances. Unfortunately, flawed figures are currently being used to inform transport policy.

I also noted with interest that while lockdown did not result in increased cycling attendances to the ED, surprisingly there was a trend towards an increase in cyclist admissions ($p=0.05$) and significantly more operative procedures performed on cyclists during this time. The current boom in popularity of electric bicycles may plausibly account for this[2,3]. Electric bicycles – or eBikes – can be powered by battery as well as propelled by pedals. They are being widely adopted as an effective and affordable alternative to driving, especially when commuting on short or moderate length journeys. However, data suggests that the increased speed of eBikes is leading to more severe injuries[4]. A small increase in a cyclist's speed significantly increases the kinetic energy and risk for injury upon impact.

When considering future research in this area, identification of whether the bicycle involved was electrically assisted may help to give a fuller picture of the causation of cycling injuries.

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