

OLDER DRIVERS' DECISIONS ABOUT GIVING UP DRIVING AND ACCEPTABILITY OF ALTERNATE TRANSPORTATION: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Lisa Keay, Soufiane Boufous, Marilyn Lyford, Rebecca Ivers

Injury Division, The George Institute for Global Health, University of Sydney



THE GEORGE INSTITUTE
for Global Health

Background

Concerns over safety of older drivers have been raised due to increased crash involvement and vulnerability to crash injury. One in five crash fatalities are older Australians,¹ and for every fatality there are many more serious injuries. However, concerns over safety need to be tempered by the fact that driving is an important means to maintain independence and community participation for older Australians. There is agreement, that managing the safety of older drivers should focus on helping older drivers to drive as safely as possible for as long as possible.²

There has been considerable epidemiologic research evaluating the risk factors for crash involvement for older drivers and longitudinal studies which have examined driving cessation. However, there is a shortage of stakeholder perspective data from older drivers themselves.³

Aim

Our aim was to gather perspectives on safety and aged-based licensing, fitness to drive and barriers and facilitating factors during the transition to not driving.

Methods

Volunteers were sought to participate in discussions on aging, driving and alternate transportation. Recruitment was facilitated by a public lecture at a seniors' community group in north-west Sydney on issues surrounding aging and driving and through advertisement in the local newspaper.

The setting of this research is a highly motorized shire, where only 9.8% of private dwellings of persons 70+ years have no car, compared to 19.8% for Metropolitan Sydney.⁴

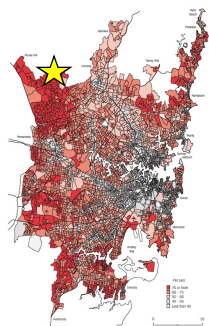


Figure 1

Map of the Sydney region showing the reliance of private cars. Outer regions have higher proportions of people who drive to work (Source: ABS 2001 Census⁵).

★ = location of community consultation

Focus Groups

- 1 male and 2 female focus groups,
- 5-7 members in each,
- Held in November 2009.

Table 1: Semi Structured format for focus group sessions of 1-2 hours duration

Topic	Guided content of discussion
Age based licensing in NSW	Awareness of regulations and perceptions of equity. Safety issues for older drivers
Giving up driving	The process for the transition to not driving and the circumstances around stopping driving
Barriers to stopping driving	Discussion of factors which discourage you from stopping driving (barriers) and those that facilitate the transition (facilitators)
Alternative transport	Awareness of transport, preferred schemes and acceptability of these options.

A summary of the focus group discussions was reviewed with the participants after each session to confirm our interpretation. Each focus group was audio recorded, transcribed and thematic analysis conducted using NVivo 8 (QSR International Pty Ltd).

All participants were members of a community-based seniors club in north-west Sydney. Each signed a record of informed consent and the project was approved by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee.

Results and Discussion

Licensing in NSW:

Participants were aware of licensing guidelines in NSW as relevant to them ie. Medical certification of fitness to drive at 75 years and driving test from 85 years or restricted license.

Stress associated with practical driving test at age 85 years: *'it is closest I have been to having a nervous breakdown, it was time to take the test.'*

Confusion about extent of restricted license (range 10-100km). Participants were unanimous that standard restricted licenses would not be feasible to reach essential services in their area.



Fitness to drive:

Failures in current system – discussions of difficulty for General Practitioners assessing fitness to drive: *'He wouldn't have really known how bad Dad's driving was..'*

Strong conviction that they would know when they should not drive anymore – more pronounced in male group.

Table 2: Themes emerging from discussions of transition to not driving grouped into barriers and facilitating factors

Barriers*	Facilitating Factors
Need for independent mobility <i>'isolation if you can't get in your car'</i>	Community transport services <i>'that solves the problem of the car and it gets around the lack of public transport.'</i>
Poor judgement about own abilities <i>'everybody in the country is confident of one thing - that is that they are better than the average driver'</i>	Advice from family <i>'..your family is saying to you, look you are not coping'</i>
Could not continue to live in area <i>'..I would have to sell up... I would have no choice</i> <small>*as others have reported,⁶ few had planned for the possibility of not driving</small>	Availability of alternate driver <i>'.. she (daughter) would come and pick me up and take me anywhere'</i>

Alternate transportation:

Taxis: expensive (*it just goes against the grain. They think its extravagant'*), long delays in waiting for taxis in this area

Public transport: currently low utilisation, would need investment in parking spaces at trains stations and bus stops, difficulty accessing information

Community transport: little knowledge about what is available, concerns about utilisation of community buses (economic viability), community transport was favoured over taxis and public transport

Conclusions

This consultation highlighted the importance of independent mobility and the need for objective data to inform policy in this area. Considerations of preferences, acceptability, accessibility and cost to older drivers are critical when adapting research evidence into strategies for safe mobility. The findings of this research can inform development of programs designed to promote safe mobility in older people.

References

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