

A Survey on Occupational Therapy Driver Assessors' Experience of Critical Incidents in Victoria, Australia

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The experience of critical incidents among occupational therapy driver assessors has been recognized in past research. A preceding qualitative study conducted in 2004 in Victoria, Australia, interviewed six occupational therapy driver assessors on their experiences of critical incidents, including a near collision, a collision, a death threat, and an aggressive client. These experiences remain largely unstudied and its extent is unknown. The purpose of this study was to develop our understanding of Victorian occupational therapy driver assessors' experience of critical incidents. The aims of this study included ascertaining the prevalence of critical incidents, identifying the type and frequency of critical incidents experienced, determining the emotional impact of a critical incident on driver assessors, establishing the strategies used to cope with critical incidents, determining the impact of critical incidents on clinicians and their practice, and establishing if differences exist between driver assessors according to years of experience, location and type of employment.

A mail survey of Victorian occupational therapy driver assessors was conducted. The researchers developed a questionnaire and 70 participants were recruited through purposive sampling, using a list of Victorian driver assessors compiled by the School of Occupational Therapy, La Trobe University, Australia. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis.

Almost 60% of driver assessors who participated in this study were found to have experienced one or more critical incidents, where the most frequently occurring types of critical incidents were near collisions and aggressive/threatening clients. Emotional responses associated with critical incidents included anxiety, fear and shock. Support was most often obtained from the driving instructor involved in the incident, and family and friends. Novice driver assessors were more likely to perceive incidents as critical and older people with a cognitive impairment were the client group most commonly involved in critical incidents.

The results indicate a need for greater acknowledgement and awareness of critical incidents. The findings of this study may be utilized to inform occupational therapists practicing in the area of driver assessment, to assist in the prevention and management of critical incidents.