

Survey of Canadian Seniors' Safe Driving Practices and Readiness for Vehicle Technology: Implications for Occupational Therapy Practice

Janice Polgar¹, Paul Hagler², Lynn Shaw¹

¹*The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada,* ²*University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada*

Introduction: Driving is important to most older adults, affording them independence and a sense of autonomy. Their confidence contributes to their safety when they face challenging driving situations and use vehicle technologies designed to assist with driving tasks. This paper presents the results of a survey exploring seniors' driving confidence, which has clinical implications for occupational therapists providing rehabilitation to clients with age-related changes that affect their driving skill.

Objectives: The purpose of the project was to describe safe transportation practices of Canadian seniors, including driver confidence and use of vehicle technology and examine the relationships between these practices and age (65-74 years vs. >75 years), gender and perceived health/activity levels.

Methods: A telephone survey was conducted with seniors living in western, central and eastern Canada. The Survey of Safe Transportation for Seniors was used. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were completed previously to ensure validity. Participants were asked about driving exposure, perceptions of overall health and physical activity, use of various vehicular and non-vehicular technologies, safe driving behaviours and driving confidence under various conditions. Composite variables for confidence, health and technology readiness were derived from the confirmatory factor analysis.

Results: Three hundred and fifty eight participants completed the survey (41.4% response rate). No significant difference was found between age groups in terms of driving confidence. Men reported significantly more confidence and a significantly greater readiness to use technology than women. Readiness to use technology was negatively correlated with age, perceived health and activity level. Significant differences were found between age groups and between gender groups for perception and use of vehicle technology and safe driving behaviours.

Conclusion: Older adults and women reported lower confidence and less readiness to use technology when driving, which may affect their willingness to drive and their safety while driving.

Contribution to Practice: These findings provide direction for occupational therapy intervention with older drivers, including driver re-training in general and education for female drivers on selection and use of technology in particular. Driver re-training may boost confidence, while education on selection and use of vehicular technology can foster its correct and confident implementation.