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Commission

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TRANSPORT RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
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D I G E S T

Issue 12

January 2020

Transport and Older People

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Source: Gormley, M. and O'Neill, D. (2019) Driving as a travel option for older adults: findings from the Irish longitudinal study on aging. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10:1329. Available [here](#)

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Older people and driving



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Transport plays a role in the health and wellbeing of older people. This study examines patterns of changed mobility and driving cessation in older adults. It takes into consideration factors such as gender and marital status, and the reasons given for ceasing to drive in later life. It highlights the advantages to society of older drivers continuing to drive.

There has been a shift in transport thinking from a previous misplaced emphasis on the reduced ability of older drivers to a realisation that a lack of transport access is likely to pose a significant threat to wellbeing and health in later life. Older drivers are not only a safe group of drivers, but also their crash rates and fatalities continue to decline despite the levels of fragility that increase the risk of fatality compared to younger people.

The impact of driving cessation can cause depression, and premature admission to nursing homes and even death. Not being able to drive a car, for whatever reason, is associated with restricted transport mobility for older people. Using a personal car as a driver is a key element in ensuring mobility and wellbeing in later life. It is the primary mode of personal vehicle transport, even in countries with well-developed public transport.

This study investigated the travel choices of older Irish adults. It addressed which transport modes were used, and whether location and age affected these choices. It aimed to determine the extent to which driving oneself is the dominant travel choice and how age and gender influence car dependence. It examined the reasons cited for giving up driving and the impact that gender might have on these. Finally, it assessed the impact of being able to drive on quality of life and feelings of loneliness.

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The Transport and Research and Innovation Monitoring and Information System (TRIMIS) supports the implementation and monitoring of the Strategic Transport Research and Innovation Agenda (STRIA) and its seven roadmaps.

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TRIMIS is developed and managed by the Joint Research Centre on behalf of the European Commission.

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The study surveyed 8,163 people with an average age of 63 years. The sample was stratified by socio-economic status and geographical location.

The car was the most often used mode of transport, with driving oneself the most popular travel option in the 65 to 79 age group. While enjoying the benefits of being able to drive should not be compromised (e.g. by introducing unwarranted medical screening for older drivers), access to alternative transport modes should be facilitated. Among the 80+ cohort, being a car passenger was the most common way of travelling. With an increased level of automation in cars, driving may become easier and safer making it even more attractive for older adults. Given the advantages of maintaining driver status for older people, it is important manufacturers of new cars do not exclude this cohort from advances in technology.



The study confirmed that men drive more than women do. It showed the gender impacts of a decline in driving with age. For women, driving remains static up to 69 years of age and a decline is often seen after 79. More men than women were drivers, but the proportion of women who had never driven was greater than that for men. Irrespective of gender, married participants were more likely to drive.

Regarding reasons for stopping driving, physical incapacity was only the third most cited reason. This shows that driving cessation is not necessarily related to health and physical status. Problems with eyesight were a reason given by men while women stated non-health-related reasons (e.g. expense and told by family to stop).

The study found that driving impacted positively on quality of life and loneliness. It concludes by highlighting the need for further research to understand better the diverse transport profiles associated with older adults such as active car users, car passenger, multimodal users and public transport users.