

Driving anxiety experienced by many older adults, new research reveals

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Driving anxiety is experienced by many older adults in New Zealand, especially among women and those aged over 70, recent collaborative research shows.

In a nationwide survey of 1170 drivers aged 65 and over, researchers from the University of Otago, Massey University and the University of Auckland found 62.3 per cent reported no driving [anxiety](#), 27 per cent reported mild driving anxiety and 10.7 endorsed more moderate to extreme levels.

Lead author, Dr. Joanne Taylor a Senior Lecturer in the School of Psychology at Massey University, says the number of older drivers reporting any degree of driving anxiety was higher than in previous research carried out in New Zealand among a younger group of older drivers aged between 55 and 72.

In the most recent study published in a leading geriatrics and gerontology journal *Maturitas*, there were higher proportions of women than men in the mild and moderate to extreme driving anxiety

groups and more drivers aged over 70 in the group with the highest level of driving anxiety.

Nearly half of the women (47.2 per cent) reported some level of driving anxiety, compared to only 28.4 per cent of the men. A little more than half of the study participants were men (53.2 per cent).

Those with moderate to severe driving anxiety tended to drive less often, for shorter distances and to use alternative modes of transport more often than those with mild or no driving anxiety.

Dr. Taylor explains driving anxiety can range from driving reluctance to driving phobia and other types of anxious distress that can impact on functioning.

"Further research is needed to better understand why older drivers experience driving anxiety and how it impacts health and wellbeing as well as driving self-regulation and cessation," Dr. Taylor says.

Principal investigator and a Senior Reserch Fellow at the University of Otago, Dr. Rebecca Brookland, says more research needs to be carried out in this area.

It is important to learn more about older peoples' driving habits as New Zealand has a growing ageing population with more people living in their own homes. Currently, most research about driving is related to young adults and very little is known about driving among older adults, Dr. Brookland says.

"This is particularly important as driving anxiety may contribute to premature driving cessation which, with its associated loss of independent mobility, can have serious consequences for older people including depression, social isolation, functional and health decline, institutionalisation and early death," she says.

This study was funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand. Understanding the role of driving anxiety will be explored further as part of a larger prospective cohort study, also funded by the council. Follow-up interviews with the participants of this study are planned for next year and 2021.

The University of Otago is hosting a symposium in Wellington on November 16 about [older drivers](#), where findings from this study will be discussed. Older [drivers](#), families and GPs: Navigating the path between mobility and safety is the topic of the symposium with a wide range of speakers.

More information: Joanne E. Taylor et al. Understanding driving anxiety in older adults, *Maturitas* (2018). DOI: [10.1016/j.maturitas.2018.10.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2018.10.008)

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