

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Title: Safety issues for older drivers

Objective: To understand the older driver, attitudes to safety and risk on the road, and giving up driving.

Date: April 2010

Methodology: Desk research and semiotics; 9 depth interviews and 6 friendship groups with older drivers aged over 65 years with varying risk behaviours and attitudes.

Key findings:

- This research revealed that giving up driving is associated with a loss of identity and self-worth. Driving cessation is mostly met with anxiety and sadness; a mirror-image of the celebrated rite of passage of passing one's driving test and getting a car for the first time.
- The risks associated with continuing to drive as one gets older are widely accepted amongst older drivers and include issues with vision, attention, reaction times, mobility and signs/rules of the road.
- Barriers to stopping driving include functional elements (reliance on car for essential journeys), emotional elements (enjoyment of driving) and self-reflection elements (feelings of self worth and confidence in driving ability).
- Older drivers tend to become aware of potential issues with driving when an event (e.g. accident or potential accident) forces them to rethink their driving habits. Even so, changes in driving behaviour tend to be gradual, such as only driving short journeys or not driving at night, rather than a sudden significant change.
- Older drivers do not find existing rules and guidelines either clear or very helpful and many would welcome additional guidance and support.
- The tone and method of any communications to older people about the risks of driving as one gets older needs to be carefully considered to make them aware of the risks and solutions while avoiding patronising them. Many found the previous promotional literature around driving cessation patronising.
- Communications should take into account the varying levels of risk and acceptance of personal responsibility amongst aging drivers.
- Those who are accepting of the risks and their responsibility would welcome additional support and advice about how to continue driving safely.
- Those in denial about their fitness to drive are best approached not directly, but via their spouses and relatives.

Job number: 09076
