

PERCEIVED ROAD SAFETY CHALLENGES AMONG OLDER PEOPLE AND PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES IN COLOMBO DISTRICT, SRI LANKA

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The ability to move about in the community is a key contributor to health, quality of life and meaningful participation in society. With increased motorization and hazards in the built environment, older people and people living with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to real and perceived risks of road traffic injuries. Inequitable transport options and road safety risks lead these road user groups to social exclusion and threats to their well-being. The objective of this study was to describe individual and environmental challenges for safe transportation among older and disabled people in three Secretary Divisions of Colombo district in Sri Lanka. This was a qualitative health research study. Participants were vulnerable road users i.e. older (60 years and above) and disabled people (physical, sensory, learning or mobility impairment; 12 years and above). Eight focus group discussions (6-10 in each) were conducted among participants to explore the local and regional destinations that were most important to access, perceived risks related to road safety and their needs/suggestions for safe transportation. A photographic documentation was undertaken by participants (10) to illustrate the environmental barriers and facilitators for road safety. Photographic details are increasingly used as a valuable adjunct in qualitative research - a voice better heard and visualised. Important places visited by older people were identified as the hospital, temple, meeting hall and market. For disabled people this varied by age including special-needs-school, vocational training school and hospital. The travel modes commonly used were public bus, three-wheeler or walking. Thematic analysis of data showed poor road conditions, lack of disability-friendly transportation options, harassment and negative attitudes of public as transportation barriers. Disabled people found accessibility to public transport and embarrassment as major barriers. These perspectives were supported by photographs. Suggestions for improvement included improved road infrastructure, user-friendly transportation modes, awareness programs for service providers and public and effective law enforcement. In conclusion, the findings show the need for improving road conditions and modes of transportation, rigorous legislative implementations alongside fostering favourable societal attitudes towards older and disabled people to allow them equitable opportunities for social participation and positive wellbeing.

Keywords: ageing, disabled-persons, transportation, challenges, injury