

Predictors of Social Isolation in Community-Dwelling Seniors: The Importance of Asking about Transportation Mobility

Bonnie Dobbs, PhD; Emily Hussey, BSc; Jean Triscott, MD; Tara Pidborochynski, MSc
Medically At-Risk Driver (MARD) Centre, Department of Family Medicine, University of Alberta
Corresponding Author: Bonnie Dobbs, PhD (bdobbs@ualberta.ca)

BACKGROUND

- Social isolation is a common problem in community-dwelling seniors with prevalence estimated to range from 10% to 43%¹.
- Social isolation is associated with a range of adverse health conditions (depression, cognitive decline/dementia, increased risk of falls, re-hospitalization/institutionalization), as well as reductions in quality of life and well-being in the older adult population².
- Identified risk factors include older age, living alone, and health problems^{3,4}. Yet, few studies have examined the relationship between transportation mobility and social isolation in seniors.

PURPOSE

- To examine the predictors of social isolation in community-dwelling seniors in rural and urban Alberta.

METHODS

- Telephone interviews with seniors in rural and urban Alberta.
- Random digit dialing used to generate the sampling frame with interviews conducted by Banister Research under contract to MARD.
- Ethics approval from the University of Alberta.

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHICS/MEASURES

Demographics	Senior Driver	Senior Non-Driver	p value
Sample Size (n)	1043	347	
Age (Years)	73.7 (SD=6.2)	79.1 (SD=7.6)	< .001
Gender (Female)	60.9%	79.8%	< .001
Married/Common-law	61.9%	35.5%	< .001
Living Arrangement (Living Alone)	35.5%	52.2%	< .001
Physical Health (Poor/Fair)	22.6%	50.1%	< .001
Quality of Life (Poor/Fair)	10.4%	28.8%	< .001
Well-being (Poor/Fair)	9.6%	24.8%	< .001
Lack of Companionship (Sometimes/All of the Time)	25.0%	41.2%	< .001
Feeling Left Out (Sometimes/All of the Time)	17.3%	36.0%	< .001
Isolated from Others (Sometimes/All of the Time)	14.7%	34.9%	< .001
Social Isolation (Composite Measure) (Sometimes/All of the Time)	3.6 (SD=1.1)	4.3 (SD=1.5)	< .001

TABLE 2: REGRESSION ANALYSES

Factor	B	SEB	B	t	p
Age	-.009	.005	-.048	-1.82	.069
Gender	.132	.066	.050	1.99	.047
Living Arrangements	.349	.065	.135	5.33	< .001
Rural vs. Urban	.041	.063	.016	0.65	.517
Quality of Life	-.281	.063	-.168	-4.46	< .001
Well-being	-.390	.066	-.222	-5.98	< .001
Driving Status	.334	.079	.115	4.23	< .001

This study received funding from the Ministry of Seniors and Housing. The investigators retained full independence in the conduct of this research.

RESULTS

- 1390 seniors interviewed.
- Gender (female), living arrangements (living alone), quality of life (lower), well-being (lower), and driving status (non-driver) all were predictive of social isolation, accounting for more than 20% of the variance (see Table 2).
- Of interest, place of residence (rural/urban) was not a significant predictor of social isolation.

CONCLUSIONS

- Health care professionals play an important role in identifying social isolation in seniors.
- Incorporating questions on driving status and overall transportation mobility during the clinical visit has the potential to lessen the risk of social isolation in this growing segment of the population.
- MARD's *Provincial Online Listing of Alternate Transportation Services for Seniors* and *Mobility Guides* are valuable and free resources to enable the mobility and independence of seniors.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Nicholson, N. (2012). A review of social isolation. *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 33(2), 137-152. doi: 10.1007/s10935-012-0271-2
- ² Landeiro F., et al. (2016). Reducing social isolation and loneliness in older people: A systematic review protocol. *BMJ Open*, e013778. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2016-013778
- ³ Hawton, A., et al. (2011). The impact of social isolation on the health status and health-related quality of life of older people. *Quality of Life Research*, 20, 57-67. doi: 10.1007/s11136-010-9717-2
- ⁴ Courtin, E. & Knapp, M. (2017). Social isolation, loneliness and health in old age: a scoping review. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 25, 799-812. doi:10.1111/hsc.12311

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- mard@ualberta.ca or visit our website at www.mard.ualberta.ca