ASSESSING THE COMMUNITY MOBILITY NEEDS OF ELDERLY INDIVIDUALS IN RURAL AND URBAN MAINE

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Clinical Questions

RQ1: How does community mobility impact the quality of life for elderly individuals in rural and urban areas of Maine?

RQ2: What are the primary barriers affecting the ability of elderly individuals to access transportation and engage in community activities?

RQ3: How do urban and rural environments differ in their impact on elderly community mobility?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how community mobility impacts the quality of life of older adults living in rural and urban areas of Maine. It aims to identify transportation barriers, compare experiences across environments, and highlight areas where services or supports may improve access and independence for elderly individuals.





Background

Community mobility refers to the ability to move through public spaces and access essential services such as grocery stores, healthcare, and social settings using transportation like walking, driving, wheelchairs, or public transit (Justiss, 2013). Limited mobility—due to transportation or socioeconomic barriers—can negatively impact health, leading to missed appointments, delayed care, and worsened chronic conditions (Syed et al., 2013). Social isolation and loneliness, often linked to limited mobility, are associated with increased ER visits and medical costs among older adults (Barnes et al., 2021). Additionally, adults with chronic conditions and mobility limitations report poorer health and higher healthcare use (Ufere et al., 2024). This study explores barriers to community mobility for older adults in Maine, focusing on how these barriers affect quality of life. Survey topics include transportation concerns, assistance with ADLs, and trip frequency.

Survey

Population & Sample

This study targeted adults aged 60+ in Maine's rural and urban areas who fit any of the following categories:

- Use mobility aids (walkers, canes, wheelchairs).
- Need help with daily activities.
- Have had 3+ falls in the past six months.

Participants were recruited through community centers, senior facilities, and healthcare networks using convenience sampling.

Survey contents:

- Demographics
- Mobility assessments
- Transportation challenges

Ethical Considerations

- Informed Consent: Participants will provide consent before participation.
- Confidentiality: Data will be anonymized and securely stored.
- Risk & Benefit: Minimal risk

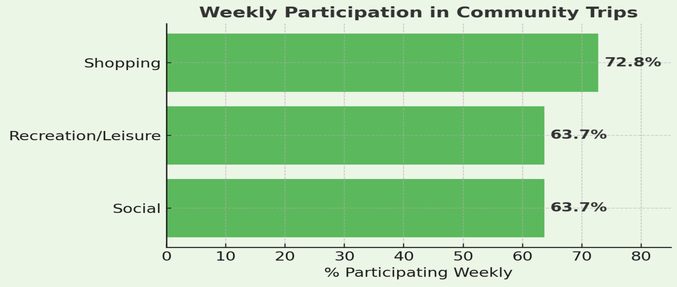
Results of Study

Demographics & Function Status

The survey included 11 older adults from rural and urban Maine (average age: 80). Seven were female and four male. Most (9) lived in rented apartments, and 64% lived alone. Health ratings were 45% fair, 36% good, and 18% challenging. Most (82%) reported fair balance. Six used assistive devices like canes or walkers; five used none. While most had no recent falls, a few reported 2–5 falls, showing varied mobility needs.

Types of Trips and Delays

The survey results indicate that the primary trips taken into the community revolve around medical (72.7% monthly, 27.3% every other week), social (63.7% once or more a week), recreation/leisure (63.7% once or more a week) and shopping (72.8% once or more a week). For assistance needed to make the trip, 90% needed assistance to get to medical appointments, 60% for social trips, 50% for recreation/leisure, and 27.3% for shopping. 18.2% of participants experience delays attending medical appointments, 9.1% with social trips, 22.2% with recreation/leisure, and 20% with shopping.



Public Transportation

Participants noted some concern with becoming a victim of crime (28.6%- very concerned, 14.3%-concerned) as well as potential difficulties in navigating the transit system, particularly in locating bus stops (50%- concerned) and having to cross the street (28.6%- very concerned). Concerns about automobile use were slightly more pronounced. Safety emerged as a key issue, with some respondents indicating that they were "very concerned" (50%- very concerned, 25%- concerned) about potential risks while driving. Parking availability was also a notable concern, with the majority of respondents expressing difficulty in finding suitable parking spaces (75%-concerned).

Analysis

Based on the results of the data, older adults primarily engage in their community through medical, social, recreation/leisure, and shopping outings. A significant amount of older adults require assistance to make trips into the community. Without assistance (i.e family, friends, public transportation, medical-brokered transportation, i.e Penquis Lynx), most older adults surveyed would be unable to make trips necessary to maintain independent living. For example, 90% of those surveyed required assistance getting to medical appointments. With 81.9% of participants citing their health as either fair or challenging, and 89.1% citing their balance as either fair or challenging, it is critical that older adults have the resources they require to maintain their health (i.e transportation to medical appointments).

Further, 60% of participants required assistance for social trips and 50% for recreation/leisure. As an aging adult, maintaining social connections is crucial to one's mental and physical health. Without transportation to access these opportunities, older adults remain isolated in their home, contributing to an increase in mental illnesses like depression and anxiety. With 72.7% requiring assistance to get to grocery stores, many older adults are faced with lack of healthful foods and resort to processed or sometimes no food at all. With more and more adults in Maine opting to age in place, it is integral to continue to not only promote, but continue to build accessible means for older adults to engage in community mobility.

Safety and accessibility are major factors influencing transportation choices, with participants expressing concerns about both public transit and automobile use. These challenges highlight significant barriers to community mobility.

Recommendations

- Improve Access to Groceries: Support accessible transportation to grocery stores and promote healthy food delivery services for older adults.
- Enhance Medical Access: Encourage education for healthcare providers on mobility challenges, expand house call services, and increase telehealth options.
- Safer Sidewalks: Advocate for the addition of sidewalks in underserved areas and ensure existing walkways are regularly maintained and cleared.
- Social Engagement Support: Coordinate transportation resources to support social and leisure outings, reducing isolation and enhancing quality of life.

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Survey Results

Resources