Community Mobility: Barriers and Access

Taylor Beaulieu OTS, Katelyn Munro OTS, Andrea Richardson OTS, Hannah Salter OTS, Cavenaugh Kelly PhD, MS, OTR/L
Husson University School of Occupational Therapy, Bangor, Maine

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to identify the barriers that impact community mobility and explore possible solutions to address these challenges. Community mobility is the ability to navigate the world safely and independently, which allows individuals to participate in daily life, stay connected, and access needed services.

Populations Affected

Populations impacted by community mobility barriers include older adults, individuals with disabilities, people with chronic health conditions, and those living in rural or socioeconomically disadvantaged areas. Community mobility is limited for older adults by financial constraints, difficulty accessing locations, transportation challenges, and age-related health issues. These limitations can result in social isolation, limited access to resources and decreased meaningful activities.

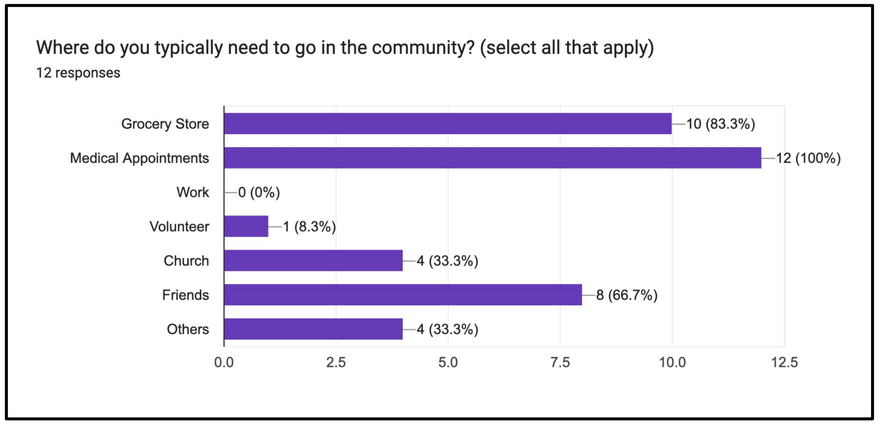
Implications & Barriers

Barriers to community mobility significantly impact older adults independence, participation, and overall well-being. Common challenges include limited transportation access, financial constraints, environmental inaccessibility, and age-related physical decline. These barriers may lead to social isolation, reduced healthcare access, and decreased quality of life.

Methods

This study used a quantitative, descriptive design to explore barriers to community mobility in older adults. Data was collected based on the Occupational Therapy Checklist of Community Mobility Skills (CCMS), developed by AOTA. The checklist allowed participants to rate their abilities related to safety, transportation, and navigating the community through a mix of multiple choice, rating scale, and open-ended questions.

Participants in this study ranged from 62 and older residing independently at Miller Square senior housing. A convenience sample was used, with recruitment taking place voluntarily during an on-site community health event. All participants provided informed consent. All responses were anonymous.



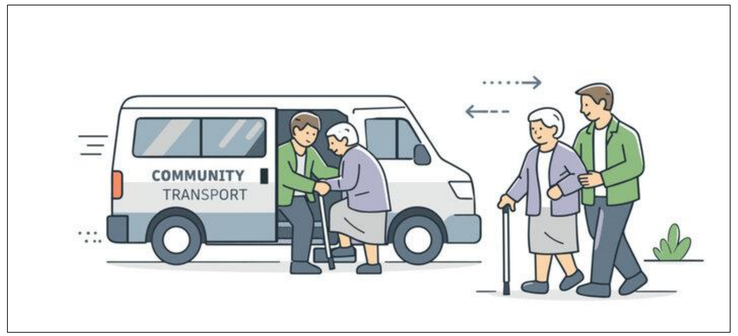
Results

Themes found in terms of community mobility barriers include:

Technology: Participants stated accessing technology was challenging for cell phone use, card payment methods, online resources
Health concerns: Such as impaired vision, reduced endurance, poor balance
Fear of falling: Challenges with sidewalks, inclement weather, public walkways
Navigating community mobility: Find available times, problem solving, finding available drivers.

Solutions & Discussion

Future efforts should prioritize the development of accessible, client-centered interventions that address the complex barriers to community mobility. Practical solutions include creating a low-tech, user-friendly app with visual icons, simplified navigation, low-vision accessibility features, as well as clear information on transportation options, schedules, and how to access services. Additional ideas include, occupational therapy led education on technology use, fall prevention strategies, and safety tools. Combined with student-supported community outings, these solutions can improve mobility skills, reduce fear of falling, and ultimately enhance meaningful participation in the community.



Survey

References

We thank the residents at Miller Square for their participation and for helping identify key barriers and solutions to improve community mobility.