The principle of 'optimal defaults' (coined by Kelly Brownell from Yale University) I think is the cornerstone for behaviour change for older adults and the rest of the population. When a choice has to be made, the right choice has to be the easy choice. When an older adult needs services or resources, the right choice must be the easy choice and must be accessible. When an older adult is no longer able to drive, the right choice must be the easy choice.

There are many organizations developing strategies to positively influence the lives of older adults, and the Older Driver Blueprint is another example of the work that can be accomplished when groups and individuals work together for the betterment of Canadians.

References


Editor’s Note:
Patricia Clark was a member of the Advisory Council for the National Blueprint for Injury Prevention in Older Drivers and an invited speaker for the launch of the Older Driver Blueprint February 26, 2009 in Ottawa.

Visit www.caot.ca/driving to attain a free download of the National Blueprint for Injury Prevention in Older Drivers.

CRITICALLY APPRAISED PAPERS

The experience of driver’s license cancellation for Australian older adults evoked overwhelming feelings of shock and loss

Katie-Ann Berry


Research purpose: To develop an understanding of the experience of driver license cancellation for older adults and to describe the essential structure of the participants’ experience.

Design: A qualitative, phenomenological study that included individual interviews with five older adults who had their driver’s licenses cancelled.

Setting: Interviews were conducted in the participants’ homes in an unspecified community in Australia.

Participants: A convenience sample of five adults between the ages of 68 and 87 participated in this study. The participants had their driver’s licenses cancelled within the past 18 months because they had failed an occupational therapy driver assessment or had failed to meet the medical guidelines for fitness to drive. The participants had no cognitive impairments, understood the study, and were willing to provide a detailed description of their experience.

Methods: Participants were asked to describe the experience of having their driver’s license cancelled in a one hour, semi-structured individual interview. Interview transcripts were analyzed using Colaizzi’s (1978) Method of Phenomenological Analysis. Using this seven-step analysis procedure, nine themes emerged which were reduced into an essence statement that described the fundamental structure of the participants’ experience.

Main findings: The experience of driver’s license cancellation for these adults involved nine themes which emerged from the interview data: Having their driver’s license cancelled was a severe shock for the participants, as they had always seen themselves as good drivers.
The participants experienced a period of wanting to drive and wishing to be re-assessed as the loss of the license was felt deeply. The participants reflected on life with and without driving and felt a loss of independence. The act of handing in the license evoked a sense of finality and drew the participants' attention to the multiple losses in their life. Over time, the participants began making sense of the situation. They began to accept the situation and decided to soldier on.

Authors’ conclusions and clinical significance:
The findings highlight the intense and overwhelming experience of driver’s license cancellation for older adults. The researchers describe this as a very significant and challenging event in the lives of the participants. The researchers suggest that health care professionals should be aware of the emotional and functional impact driver's license cancellation has on their clients so that they can enable their clients to maintain a sense of independence, autonomy, and a positive identity.

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Having one’s driver’s license cancelled is a significant event in the life of an older adult. Whitehead and colleagues completed a study with the purpose of understanding the experience of driver license cancellation for a group of Australian older adults. While researchers have explored the impact of driving on the identity of older adults (Eisenhandler, 1990), the experience of losing the ability to drive (Gillins, 1990), older women’s experience of their decision to stop driving (Bonnel, 1999), and the experience of driving cessation for older adults (Yassuda, Wilson, & von Mering, 1997), only one study has explored the experience of having one’s driver’s license cancelled (Lister, 1999). Whitehead and colleagues, therefore, have made an important contribution to an area of research that has received little attention thus far.

Overall, Whitehead and colleagues have conducted a study where the methods of data collection and analyses are consistent with the phenomenological tradition and are used appropriately to address the purpose of the research. The results section includes an essence statement that summarizes the themes that emerged from the data analyses. Although the study is generally well-designed, certain methodological issues affect the trustworthiness of the study.

First, the researchers did not report keeping a reflective journal, nor did they report engaging in any bracketing activities. The authors have clarified that these activities were undertaken but space limitations prevented inclusion of these details in the manuscript. The reader, however, is not made aware of the researchers’ assumptions and biases and cannot determine how these may have affected the researchers’ portrayal of the phenomenon.

Second, the transferability of the study is adequate but could be improved. The description of the participants was clearly presented in a table and included a description of each participant’s marital status, age, medical history, time since the cancellation of the driver’s license, and reason for cancellation of license. However, the authors did not describe how it was determined that the participants did not have cognitive impairments.

Third, while the findings of the study appear to be consistent with the interview data, this is not immediately evident because the essence statement does not include direct quotes from participants, and only one example is provided of how a statement from a participant was transformed into a meaning statement. This affects the dependability of the study. Interview data are included in the discussion section. The findings are presented this way because the essence statement is meant to be representative of the essential features of participants’ experiences and presenting excerpts from individual interviews would interfere with the presentation of these essential features. However, presenting the findings without interview data removes the participants’ voices from the findings and gives the
impression that the participants’ data are used to support the literature addressed in the discussion section rather than the findings of this particular study.

An important strength of the study is that the researchers provide a good description of the process of data analyses and illustrate it with examples using the interview data. This strengthens the dependability of the study. These examples are helpful to the reader, as the process of data analyses is often abstract and difficult to understand.

The researchers conclude that the findings of the study “highlight the intense and often overwhelming feelings evoked when an older person’s driver licence is cancelled” (p. 179). The researchers’ conclusions reflect the findings of the study, based on a group of Australian older adults. While the researchers’ conclusions reflect the findings of the study, more research will be needed to ensure that the findings are similar in other countries; however the similarities between Australia and Canada would suggest that this is likely. These findings may be clinically significant as they illustrate the impact of a therapist’s recommendations regarding a client’s ability to drive. The researchers suggest that health care professionals should be aware of the impact of license cancellation on their clients so that they may work with the clients to maintain a sense of independence and a positive identity. The findings of this study may also be used to encourage therapists to prepare their clients for the possibility of dealing with the cancellation of their license before they go through a driving assessment.

Whitehead and her colleagues have described the essential features of the experience of driver license cancellation for five Australian adults. This study may prompt other researchers to explore this experience for other groups of adults in different contexts. It also provides a starting point for researchers who wish to investigate methods of enabling clients to cope with this significant event.

References

This issue’s Critically Appraised Paper (CAP) column was written by Katie-Ann Berry, a student occupational therapist at Dalhousie University. The paper was initially written as an assignment for an evidence-based practice course at Dalhousie. Dr. Joan Versnel, who organizes the course and also sits on the advisory group for the CAP column, recommended Katie-Ann’s paper for publication, it was very well written and is on a very relevant topic in occupational therapy practice. The column has gone through the same blind peer-review process and consultation with the original authors as all other CAP columns.

If you have a suggestion for an article that you would like to see reviewed in an upcoming CAP column, or want to participate in writing a CAP column, please contact the column editor, Lori Letts at lettsl@mcmaster.ca or the OT Now managing editor Brenda McGibbon Lammi at blammi@caot.ca.