

The Experience of Power Mobility Aid use From an Environmental Aspect

The Perspective of Maltese Older Adults

Ms. Alicianne Fenech BSc (Hons) OT, MGer (Melit)

Dr Maria Aurora Fenech Dip Phys, MCSP, DipGer (Melit), MGer (Melit), PhD (Nott.)

Dr Vickie Gauci SROT, PhD



INTRODUCTION

Power Mobility Aid (PMA) use enables participation which increases opportunity for independence. As a result, it positively impacts various aspects of the older person's quality of life and over all well-being. These positive effects may however be hindered or completely disrupted by **ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES**.

AIM OF STUDY

With a special interest towards environmental factors and safety implications, study explored the experiences of community living Older Persons utilising a PMA.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

Built and Outdoor Environment

Challenges revolved around lack of infrastructural planning consideration of the size of PMAs and their safe manoeuvring, together with increased vehicle traffic, resulting in spatial and safety issues for PMA driving. Participants recalled accidents resulting from device/person instability as well as daily struggles which affected their level of confidence and participation.



Natural Environment

Rain and extreme temperatures, affected mostly the frequency of engagement in daily community activities rather than the choice of activities.

PMA Challenges—Device not matching expectations

PMAs considered as a limiting factor in relation to their size, weight, battery, uncomfortable seating and lack of available safety accessories. For instance, PMA being too heavy or not fitting in car luggage boot or in apartment lift - limiting outdoor access.

Participants expressed feeling overly cautious and insecure when outdoors, jeopardising their self-confidence and ability to participate. This highlighted the important role of Allied Health Practitioners in the process of PMA acquisition and use to encourage safe and successful PMA management within the community.



ATTITUDINAL CHALLENGES

Actions of neighbourhood residents, other drivers and pedestrians, decisions taken by local councils and policy makers generated challenges when managing PMAs outdoors.

For instance, obstacle on pavements, non-attentive pedestrians, reckless drivers and drivers parking on ramps.



QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

An experiential constructionist point of view allowed the researcher to understand the Older Persons' worlds, and how they saw, understood and experienced PMA use.

PARTICIPANTS

Findings were sourced from 7 Older Persons making use of PMAs for outdoor community purposes in Malta.

Participants' ages ranged between 69 and 85 years. Majority were males (5) and utilised a powered scooter (5), rest utilised a powered wheelchair.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSES

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with the Older Persons, it was then transcribed and analysed through thematic analysis.