

REFRESHER COURSES FOR OLDER DRIVERS – A LITERATURE STUDY

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Purpose of the study

A literature survey on further education and training for older drivers was conducted in a project commissioned by the Norwegian Road Administration. The aim was to determine if there is scientific evidence that driver education and training is an effective intervention for older drivers in terms of sustained safe mobility. Furthermore, the aim was to provide recommendation for how to further improve the current practice in Norway.

Method

Three different bibliographical databases were used to identify relevant articles: TRIS, ITRD and TRAX. Over 80 articles published after 2000 were found and approximately 40 of these were considered relevant for the study.

Results

Research on education and training for older drivers shows that older drivers can develop new abilities as well as learn new strategies to drive safer. Thus, such an intervention may also promote sustained mobility for older drivers. However, a difficulty often identified is how to reach the drivers who are most in need of training, e.g. recent widows with past spouse who was the dominant driver. Research also shows that there are methods to adapt the education to suit individuals or tailor education to target certain groups of older people. It seems like the old saying “one should not teach an old dog new tricks” does not apply not even when concerned with cognitive aspects of driving. There are some promising results indicating that cognitive training programs for older drivers have a positive effect on driving performance. However, older drivers are a heterogeneous group and different groups of older drivers may need different education and training. For example, it may be more effective to design different courses for men and women due to gender differences in attitudes to cars and driving. Finally, we live longer not just because we are healthier but also due to medication. Our knowledge is limited concerning what impact medication has on the ability to drive safely and the possible need for adaptive behaviour. This might also demand changes in driver training programs.

Conclusion

It was recommended that the current practice – offering refresher courses to older drivers (in past from 65 now from 70) – should be continued. Further efforts should be made to reach those with greatest need, more individualised and practical training. Alternative pedagogical methods like problem based learning and new technology (computer or simulator based

training) could be utilized to improve the current practices. The potential of cognitive training programs should be further explored.

Topic code: J (more specific – education for older drivers)