Prolonging Safe Driving through Technology

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Introduction
The number and percentage of older people in the UK population is increasing (ONS, 2004b), and it is this group of older people who report most difficulty in accessing local amenities such as shops, banks and hospitals (ONS, 2004a). It is therefore important that the travel needs of older people are investigated to ensure that this sector is able to achieve maximum mobility. Owning and using a motor vehicle fulfils this function and in turn is reported to increase feelings of self-confidence, self-esteem, autonomy, and prestige (Ellaway et al, 2003). However, many older individuals become anxious about the driving task and give up (Monterde i Bort, 2004). Their concern may be justified; when mileage is taken into account they are more likely to be involved in accidents than the middle-aged (DfT, 2001). Reasons for this include physiological barriers, increased cognitive error and mental workload (DfT, 2001; Lee et al 2003). Recent technological advances in Advanced Control and Safety Systems, could help overcome such barriers, but to date research into such technologies has largely ignored the older driver (Musselwhite, 2004; Rumar 1986).

The Investigation
Aim
To critically examine the extent to which new technological advances in Advanced Control and Safety Systems have the capacity to aid driver safety and prolong driving for older drivers in the UK.

Potential Benefits
For older people
Technological advances resulting from this project could enable older people to continue driving safely for longer, whilst retaining confidence in their ability. In addition, the methodology provides an opportunity for older people to become involved in research in a participatory manner and maximise the benefits of the research outcomes for their age group.

For society
The project will increase the depth of knowledge about older drivers’ needs regarding driving and technology, which would be a useful anchor to underpin future studies that may develop and prototype such technologies. It could also serve as an important platform for future research addressing social and attitudinal issues that may mediate or enhance the effect of technology in overcoming barriers to continued safe driving.

Key References

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