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Distraction in older drivers — A face-to-face interview study

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Abstract

The prevalence of older drivers' engagement in distracting activities while driving is largely unexplored. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the city of Braunschweig, Germany, comparing a sample of older drivers ($n = 205$) to a group of middle-aged drivers ($n = 209$). The drivers were interviewed on their engagement in distracting activities during the last half an hour of their driving trip, including the frequency and duration of these activities, their perception of the risk associated with these distracting activities and the role of these activities in at-fault crashes. Middle-aged drivers were significantly more likely to engage in certain distracting activities than older drivers. With regard to the duration of interactions with the passengers older drivers were significantly more talkative than middle-aged drivers. Middle-aged drivers rated most of the distracting activities as significantly less dangerous than older drivers. Distraction-related crashes are not a special problem of older drivers but seem to be very comparable to the middle-aged drivers. It is concluded that older drivers' reluctance to engage in distracting tasks while driving is either a process of self-regulation or their age-related prudence. The study is the first to gather knowledge about distraction in German older drivers. Although older drivers are not currently overrepresented in distraction-related crashes, it is important to note that future cohorts of older drivers might differ in the way they engage with vehicles and technologies, which in turn may influence their driving patterns and willingness to engage in potentially distracting activities.

Highlights

► German drivers were interviewed about their engagement in distracting activities. ► The most frequent distracting activities were *interaction with passengers* and *using in-car devices*. ► Middle-aged drivers were more likely to engage in distracting activities than older drivers.

Keywords

Driver distraction; Older drivers; Face-to-face interview; Distracting activities; Secondary tasks

Figures and tables from this article:

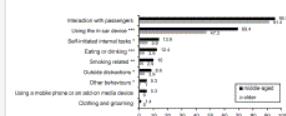


Fig. 1. Percentage of drivers engaging in the distracting activity in the last half an hour of the driving trip. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Note: The proportion of drivers engaged in interacting with a passenger refers to the proportion of drivers with a passenger (i.e., the percentage does not refer to the entire sample).

[Figure options](#)

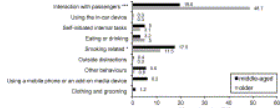


Fig. 2. Mean duration of the undertaken distracting activity. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. *Note:* None of older drivers reported engaging in clothing and grooming or using a mobile phone or an add-on media device.

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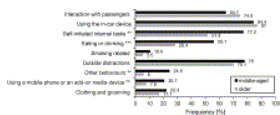


Fig. 3. Percentage of drivers who undertake certain distracting activities occasionally. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

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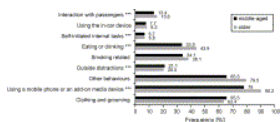


Fig. 4. Percentage of drivers who rated the distracting activities as "very dangerous" and "extremely dangerous". * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. *Note:* The answers "4" = "very dangerous", "5" = "extremely dangerous" are combined.

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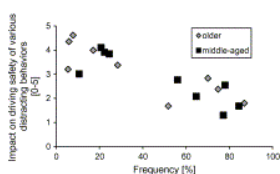


Fig. 5. Scatterplot between the frequency of occasional engaging in distracting activities and general impact on driving safety of these distracting activities. The points give the means of the frequency for the two groups.

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Table 1. Types of potentially distracting activities.



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