

## Giving up driving not all bad: study

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Older people who give up driving report positive life impacts and say it's not all doom and gloom, according to new research by PhD student Sarah Walker from The Australian National University.

The study looked at the lived experiences of nearly 40 volunteers above retirement age who had ceased driving. Ms Walker said previous research had only associated the change with negative effects.

“Other studies have shown that giving up driving can lead to poorer physical health, increased risk of mortality, depressive symptoms and emotional distress,” she said.

“But little is known about people’s actual experiences, the cognitive coping strategies used to deal with these detrimental and often distressing consequences, or the positive impacts of quitting driving.

“My study looked at filling these gaps and it produced some interesting results. In some cases, individuals felt relief at no longer having to drive, personal growth through adversity and learning acceptance, and monetary savings.

“Most individuals made lifestyle changes to adapt to life without a car, for example, using other ways of getting around, shopping closer to home or on a bus route, and finding new activities.”

Ms Walker said driving was important for many people to feel freedom and independence.

“Abruptly stopping driving can mean there has been no choice in the matter, however, this is not necessarily a barrier to adapting to the changes or accepting life without a car,” she said.

“A number of factors like having relatives or friends who drive, accessible shops and services, a planned or staged decline in driving, or having a say in the decision to quit can mean fewer negative impacts. A study in this area is underway.”

Almost 1.5 million of Australia’s 21 million people are between the ages of 65 and 74 years, the ages at which the majority of drivers are known to quit driving.

“The difference between how long people are thought to live and how long they are expected to keep [driving](#) means that on average, 70 to 74 year-olds can expect to live for about 7 to 10 years without being able to drive a car,” Ms Walker said.

“Further research in this area is vital in dealing with the health of Australia’s aging population.”

**More information:** ANU will be highlighting psychology research stories from Monday 14 to Friday 18 November, as part of National Psychology Week 2011.

Provided by Australian National University

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