

# Home handy but not so stable—steep rise in ladder-related falls

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Researchers at QUT have warned about the rising popularity of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) culture after a steep rise in the number of people falling from ladders.

The new study into ladder-related falls over a decade has shown a 47 percent increase in the number of people being admitted to hospital.

The research published today in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* examined the trends in ladder-related injuries showing a rise from 3,374 hospitalisations in 2002/03 to 4,945 in 2011/12.

Researchers at CARRS-Q, the Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety – Queensland, based at QUT, found men aged over 60 were the most at-risk group.

Associate Professor Kirsten Vallmuur said injuries suffered by veteran television presenter Molly Meldrum, who fell while putting up Christmas decorations almost five years ago, shone a spotlight on the demographic and the severity of ladder injuries.

"Men aged over 60 represented 43 per cent of the hospitalisations overall and this age group had the greatest increase in the number of admissions across the decade being examined," Professor Vallmuur said.

"Older men just don't bounce back as well as younger men. They often have other existing health problems, including fragility, eye-sight and

balance issues which potentially escalates their risk.

"Given the more substantial injuries reported for those aged over 60 and the growth in D-IY, there was a need to update our estimates of the extent and patterns of ladder-related injuries."

She said 226 patients had died as a result of a fall, 82 per cent of them were aged over 60.

The data also indicated an annual increase in falls among women aged over 60 at a similar rate to that of men.

"In the over 60s group, in terms of case numbers, there were 81 per cent more females and 73 per cent more males hospitalised in 2011/12 than in 2002/03.

"This represented an age standardised rate increase of six per cent annually in the over 60s.

"In comparison, for the under 60 year olds there was an increase in case numbers of about 30 per cent for both males and females in the same time period, and an age standardised rate increase of two per cent annually."

Professor Vallmuur said two-thirds of the hospitalised injuries were fractures, mainly of the upper and lower extremities, torso and spine along with head injuries, with cases involving those aged over 60 generally more serious.

"With fewer than 10 per cent of people aged under 60 had a length of stay in excess of one week, more than 20 per cent of those aged over 60 had a length of stay of longer than a week in hospital," she said.

Early findings for a further study to understand the circumstances of ladder-related falls indicated issues such as over-reaching, inappropriate footwear and unsteady or unstable surfaces contributed to the risk of falls.

Data collection had just been completed within two hospital emergency departments in Queensland and results from that study will be released in early 2017.

Professor Vallmuur said the research highlighted the importance of focusing on injury prevention efforts to reduce the growing number of ladder-related falls, and she supports campaigns such as the national product safety campaign Ladder safety matters.

**More information:** Ladder safety matters national campaign:  
[www.productsafety.gov.au/news/...rs-national-campaign](http://www.productsafety.gov.au/news/...rs-national-campaign)

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