

Ladder falls have long-lasting consequences for older blokes

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It only takes a moment to fall off a ladder, but the psychological impacts are long-lasting, particularly for older males.

In the world's first study of long-term impacts from [ladder](#) falls, Queensland researchers have found half of fallers experience a deterioration in their psychological wellbeing for at least six months after the incident.

The University of Queensland's Dr. Rob Eley said those who fell experienced sleeping problems, anxiety, depression and pain well after checking out of hospital.

"Ladder falls go far beyond that of the physical injury; they significantly impact a person's mental health and the whole family," Dr. Eley said.

"It's frustrating because ladder-related falls are frequently preventable, yet they're a common cause of injuries presented at the emergency department.

"Our study found males over 55 years old are particularly at risk, making up more than half of all our ladder-related fall cases."

The researchers followed 134 Queenslanders who presented to emergency at Princess Alexandra and Nambour General Hospitals between October 2015 and October 2016 as a result of a fall from a ladder.

The team used the Assessment of Quality of Life (AQoL) scale to measure the subjects' physical and psychological recovery over time.

The patients spent an average of five days in hospital with the most common injuries including [spinal fractures](#), [rib fractures](#), tibia or fibula fractures, radius or ulna fractures, pelvic [fractures](#), and traumatic pneumothorax.

The study found that most injuries occurred in non-occupational settings during home maintenance.

Of those who were employed at the time, 80 per cent required at least four weeks off work, and 16 per cent were unable to return or perform their normal function after six months.

Dr. Eley said the study highlighted the need for improved safety designs and [injury](#) prevention strategies.

"Our research reinforces the need for mandated safety instructions for ladders, as well as [safety features](#) like rubber feet, hooks, extender arms, fasteners and stabilizers," Dr. Eley said.

"We suggest that at the place of purchase, older men are targeted to reinforce safety instructions, and perhaps are provided with mandatory stabilizing features.

"The community also needs to do more to educate people that it's OK to request help or employ home service contractors to complete tasks around the home that require a ladder.

"Ladder falls are frequently preventable and our findings demonstrate the need for [preventative measures](#) to be taken."

More information: Kym Roberts et al, Long term impact of ladder-related injuries as measured by the AQoL instrument, *PLOS ONE* (2020). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0235092](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0235092)

Provided by University of Queensland

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