



Factors Associated with Fear of Falling in Community-Dwelling Older Adults in Regional New South Wales



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Introduction: Fear of falling (FOF) affects up to 85% of community-dwelling individuals aged 65 years or older and can lead to curtailment of activities, reduced mobility and an increased falls risk. The factors associated with FOF have not been explored within Australia.

Method: A cross-sectional study was undertaken with 136 community-dwelling people aged 65 years and older who were attending individual and group physiotherapy programs. Factors associated with FOF, measured by the Falls Efficacy Scale (FES-I), were identified using a series of univariate linear regression analyses. Those variables with an association, defined as a $p < 0.1$, were included in a final multivariate linear regression model.

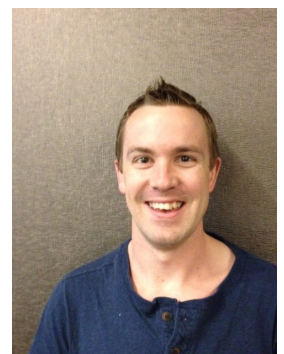
Results: Participants had a mean age of 80.5 (SD 6.7) years and 102 (75%) participants were female. High FOF was reported by 79 participants (58%). Univariate analysis indicated variables associated with FOF included age, gender, a history of a fracture from a fall, any previous falls, depression, anxiety, stress, Falls Risk Assessment Tool (FRAT) score, Timed Up and Go Test (TUGT) time, falls in the past 12 months, and a higher number of prescribed medications. Multivariate linear regression analysis defined a model including falls in the past 12 months ($p < 0.01$), number of prescribed medications ($p < 0.05$), stress score ($p < 0.001$) and TUGT time ($p < 0.01$). Together these variables explained 29% of the variability in FOF.

Conclusion: This study is the first of its kind to explore factors associated with FOF in an Australian setting. Factors found to be independently associated with FOF included stress, mobility performance, medications and recent falls history.

Implications: This study informs clinical practice by enabling the identification of people who experience FOF. The results indicate that there are several interventions worthy of inclusion within falls prevention programs. For those who have recently fallen, therapists should consider implementing interventions that target stress and pharmaceutical management as well as exercises targeting functional mobility and rapid position changes.

For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'

Peter is a Titled Gerontological Physiotherapist. He has worked clinically in hospital, community and residential care settings over the last 10 years in both public and private settings. Peter has a passion for working with older people, striving to improve the life of older Australian's through a proactive evidence-based approach to physiotherapy service. Peter combines his clinical role at Mercy Health, with employment at Charles Sturt University, assisting in programs that develop gerontology knowledge and skills for health professionals.



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