

Social Participation of Adults Aging with Long-Term Physical Disabilities: Investigating the Role of Transportation Mode and Urban vs. Rural Living

People aging with long-term physical disabilities face barriers to participation in social activities, including:

Personal barriers

Health conditions, symptoms (e.g., fatigue, pain, depression), demographic factors

Social factors

Location of residence, household income

Environmental barriers

Availability and accessibility of transportation



To learn more about the relationships among these factors, we examined data from our 3-year study of people aging with long-term physical disabilities.

The Study



Participants of the cohort study took a survey once a year for 3 years. For this cross-sectional study, we analyzed data from 331 people living in the state of Missouri who took the Year 1 survey.

Survey questions asked about:

- Demographics
- Area of residence
- Health and symptoms
- Disability (primary cause, duration)
- Environmental barriers to participation
- Ability to participate in social roles and activities
- Satisfaction with participation in social roles and activities
- Typical form of transportation

Results

Personal health and demographic factors played the greatest role in predicting social participation, especially:

- Pain
- Depression
- Race
- Physical function

For transportation, people who used public transportation, especially **paratransit services**, had the highest self-rated social participation.

Participants who relied on friends and family for transportation reported the lowest social participation.

Participation was also higher for people who lived in **urban areas** than those in rural areas; however, participants in rural areas reported more health conditions and symptoms.



Conclusions

Pain, physical function, demographic factors, and transportation barriers significantly affect social participation for people aging with physical disability.

Policy and environmental changes, including improving access to and availability of transportation, can promote social participation. These findings may help community organizations, policymakers, researchers, and urban planners help promote social participation for people aging with long-term physical disability.