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Identifying risks related to road traffic accidents among vulnerable population in Moneragala district, Sri Lanka

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Objectives: To identify individual and environmental risks related to road traffic accidents (RTA) among elderly (>60 years) and disabled people (>5 years living with physical, sensory or mobility impairment) in Moneragala district.

Methods: Study was designed as community based participatory research. Participants were vulnerable road users (elderly and disabled). Eight focus group discussions (8-10 in each) were conducted with elderly and disabled to identify local and regional destinations that were most important to access, perceived risks related to RTA and needs/suggestions for road safety. Participants were encouraged to photograph the environment barriers and facilitators for road safety. 'Photovoice' is increasingly used as valuable adjunct in participatory research—a voice better heard through.

Results: Frequently visited places identified by older people were the hospital, temple, village houses, community hall and bank. For disabled it varied by age, as vocational training centre, special needs school and community hall. Mostly used travel modes were public bus, three wheeled-vehicles or walking. Transportation barriers for the elderly were identified as poor road conditions, lack of disability-friendly transportation system, financial constraints and negative human factors. Disabled found accessibility to public places a major barrier. These facts were supported by photographs. Suggestions for improvement included awareness programs among people involved in transportation, cost effective transportation modes, mass media acknowledgments of rights of elderly and disabled, more effective legislation and improved road infrastructure.

Conclusions: It is evident that many places the study population frequently travels are located in the city. They face many risks when travelling to these destinations. It is proposed to improve road conditions, modify modes of transportation, rigorous law enforcement and awareness programs among public to minimize the road related risks faced by disabled and elderly