

'If It Makes Sense, I Would Do It' - Understanding Perceptions of Implementing Bathroom Modification Among Community-dwelling Older Adults

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Among community-dwelling older adults, high risk of unintentional home injuries particularly in bathrooms, is a main barrier to aging in place (National Safety Council, 2021; Hanba et al., 2017). Modifications in home areas, including bathrooms, are effective in fostering aging in place by improving independence and safety (Keglovits & Stark, 2020). Nevertheless, bathroom modification is not commonly adopted by older adults. It is essential to understand why or why not older adults choose to modify bathrooms, in order to promote related services. This project aimed to understand older adults' perceptions of bathroom modification and factors influencing their decision-making on implementing modification using qualitative interviews. Twenty community-dwelling older adults (mean age = 72) participated. Three main themes emerged after thematic analysis: (1) 'If it makes sense, I would do it' - Perceived need as the ultimate determinant, regardless of the awareness of benefits and recommendations from others. (2) Barriers to implementation: Cost, access, and 'look handicapped.' (3) Aging with choice: Alternative solutions to reduce risks of home injury. Findings indicated that even if older adults recognized the benefits of bathroom modification and had low perceived barriers, they would not take action if they did not believe in their actual needs for modifying bathrooms. Participants also reflected that though effective, environmental modification was just one helpful way to promote aging in place. Alternative solutions included doing physical exercises to stay healthy and active and moving to a more accessible home when functions started to decline. This study provided meaningful implications for OT practice. When working with older adults demonstrating potential needs for home modification, OTs should educate on benefits, understand individuals' barriers, provide opportunities to help overcome barriers, follow up regularly, and more importantly, respect their choice.

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