INTRODUCTION

This project is intended to help explain why older adults may possess a fear of falling from an as-of-yet unexplored angle - one that is purely based on stereotyping and expectations about falls that they may apply to themselves. Although it is generally understood that older adults are more vulnerable to falls than are younger adults, the nature of this belief (or stereotyping) has not yet been investigated.

Previous research clarified various risk factors for the development of a fear of falling, including psychological factors such as general anxiety and non-psychological factors such as gender, medication intake, age, and more. However, no one has yet investigated the potential role of stereotyping in the development of a fear of falling.

Part one of this study was a questionnaire in which participants answered questions focused on the ability of adults of various ages (i.e., 20-100, by decade) to maintain their balance in general and in specific situations (e.g., getting dressed or undressed). After these lifespan questions, they were asked questions focused on their own balance, how it has changed in the past, and how they expect it to change in the future.

Regarding my psychological attributes, I have over their balance, and their balance in the same seven specific situations as for each age group as age increased. For study two, we hypothesized that having experienced a fall or knowing someone who had experienced a fall would be associated with a greater fear of falling, especially for older adults.

METHOD

Participants

For both parts, younger adult data was gathered from UWEC undergraduate students who participated through the SONA online research pool; participants received course credit or extra credit for participation. Older adult data was gathered using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk, through which participants were paid. Participation followed informed consent and ended with debriefing.

Ratings of control over current balance did not differ between age groups. There was a statistically significant decrease in fear among people with the largest decreases occurring in mid-life. I do not find control over my balance will be like the future (% Agreement).

RESULTS

In a chi-square test of independence, we found that older and younger adults differed in their degree of fear of falling based on whether they had experienced a fall personally or not. No such difference existed between whether participants knew someone who had fallen in the past 10 years or not.

In general, each age group’s sense of balance is:

Balance ratings differed the most between older and younger adults for decades in mid-life. In young adulthood and older adulthood the ratings are the same. These data are consistent with our pilot study.


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