

AB016. The differences in the elderly's travel behaviour during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic: metro and health cohort study in Hong Kong

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Background: The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic led to unprecedented changes in people's activities, travel behaviour, daily life and overall well-being. In particular, the absence of adequate movement and outside contact for the older people has become a hazard to serious public health concerns in Hong Kong.

Methods: This study used longitudinal data from the Metro and Elderly Health in Hong Kong study, which is a natural experiment to investigate the impact of new MTR stations on elderly health. Baseline data were collected between May and December 2019 before the pandemic. In May 2020, we conducted a telephone-based survey of COVID-19's potential impact on the elderly's travel behaviour. We compared the differences in overall active travel and public transport use between participants at baseline and follow-up surveys.

Results: The results showed significant decline in the older people's travel behaviour during the pandemic. Active travel declined significantly more among the older people with lower activity levels and less social networking. Another finding was that public transport use reduced more among the older people living in the higher perceived neighbourhood walkability area than those living in the lower perceived neighbourhood walkability area. It suggests

that the older people of high walkable neighbourhoods tend to avoid using public transports and stay within walking distance in the neighbourhood area.

Conclusions: This study highlights the difference of older people to change their travel behaviour in the face of the pandemic. The uneven impacts of COVID-19 on the elderly's travel and public transport use could widen health inequalities in the older population. During the pandemic, addressing equity concerns on various changing policy instructions must be a priority for decision-makers in government.

Keywords: Coronavirus disease pandemic (COVID-19 pandemic); travel behaviour; physical activity; older people

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Footnote

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