

Prevalence and Correlates of Fear of Falling in Community-Dwelling Older Adults

Patrícia Pires^{1,2,3}, Joana Carvalho⁴, Anabela Pereira^{1,3}, Telma Pires⁵ & Oscar Ribeiro^{1,3}

¹Department of Education and Psychology, University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal; ²School of Health / Clinical Academic Center of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (CACTMAD), University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, Vila Real, Portugal; ³RISE-Health; ⁴Research Center in Physical Activity, Health and Leisure (CIAFEL), Faculty of Sports, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal; ⁵School of Health, Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, Bragança, Portugal; Research Centre for Active Living and Wellbeing (LiveWell), Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, Portugal.

Introduction

Background:

- Fear of Falling (FoF) is common in later life and may reduce mobility, lower physical activity (PA), and increase fall risk and the frequency of falls.
- Understanding correlates in community-dwelling older adults can guide screening and tailored interventions.

Objective:

- To estimate fall risk and the prevalence of FoF, and to examine their associations with demographics, mobility and balance, physical activity, and fall history in community-dwelling older adults.



Methods

Design: Cross-sectional study.

Participants: community-dwelling adults aged ≥ 65 years without cognitive impairment.

Measures: FoF (FES-I), fall risk (Morse Fall Scale), mobility/balance (Timed Up and Go, TUG), physical activity (Brief Physical Activity Assessment, BPAA), demographics, and fall history.

Statistics: Pearson's correlation coefficient, chi-square, t-test, and ANOVA ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Results

Sample: $n = 300$; mean age 74.7 years; 55.3% women.

Higher FoF in women ($M = 30.4$, $SD = 10.3$)

and in those **aged 80+ years** ($M = 33.1$, $SD = 13.3$)

FoF correlated positively with mobility impairment (TUG: $r = 0.453$)

and with **fall risk** (Morse: $r = 0.399$).

FoF correlated negatively with PA (BPAA: $r = -0.351$).

FoF showed a strong association with prior falls ($r = 0.660$).

All $p < .001$



Correlates of FoF (FES-I)

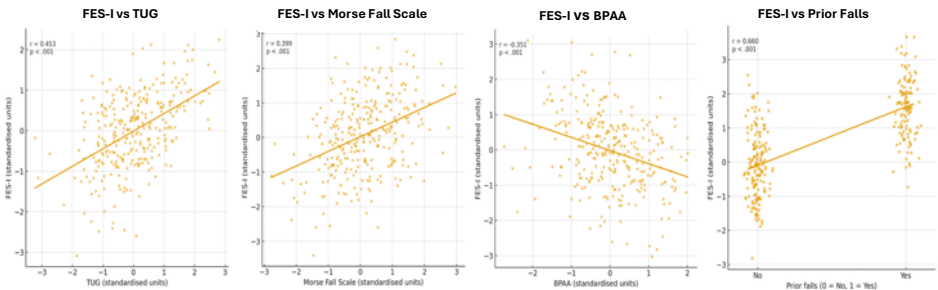


Figure 1 — Correlation of FoF with TUG, Morse Fall Scale, BPAA and Prior Falls

Conclusions

FoF is highly prevalent among older adults and should be systematically addressed through early, tailored interventions to preserve mobility, independence, and quality of life.

Implications for Practice

Screen routinely for FoF (FES-I) alongside fall risk in primary/community care.

Prioritize women and adults ≥ 80 years or those with **history of falls**.

Intervene with multicomponent programs: gait/balance training, strength, and behavioral PA support.

Monitor TUG and PA to track progress.

Abbreviations:

BPAA = Brief Physical Activity Assessment; FoF = Fear of Falling; FES-I = Falls Efficacy Scale-International; PA = Physical Activity; TUG = Timed Up and Go.

Corresponding author:
anabela.pereira@ua.pt

