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## Differences in the Severity of General Aviation Accidents by Age: A Preliminary Examination

Brandi N. Drye  
*The Citadel*, bdrye@citadel.edu

Karina Mesarosova  
*University of Zilina*, km@flightresearch.eu

Robert Walton  
*Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University - Worldwide*, waltonr@erau.edu

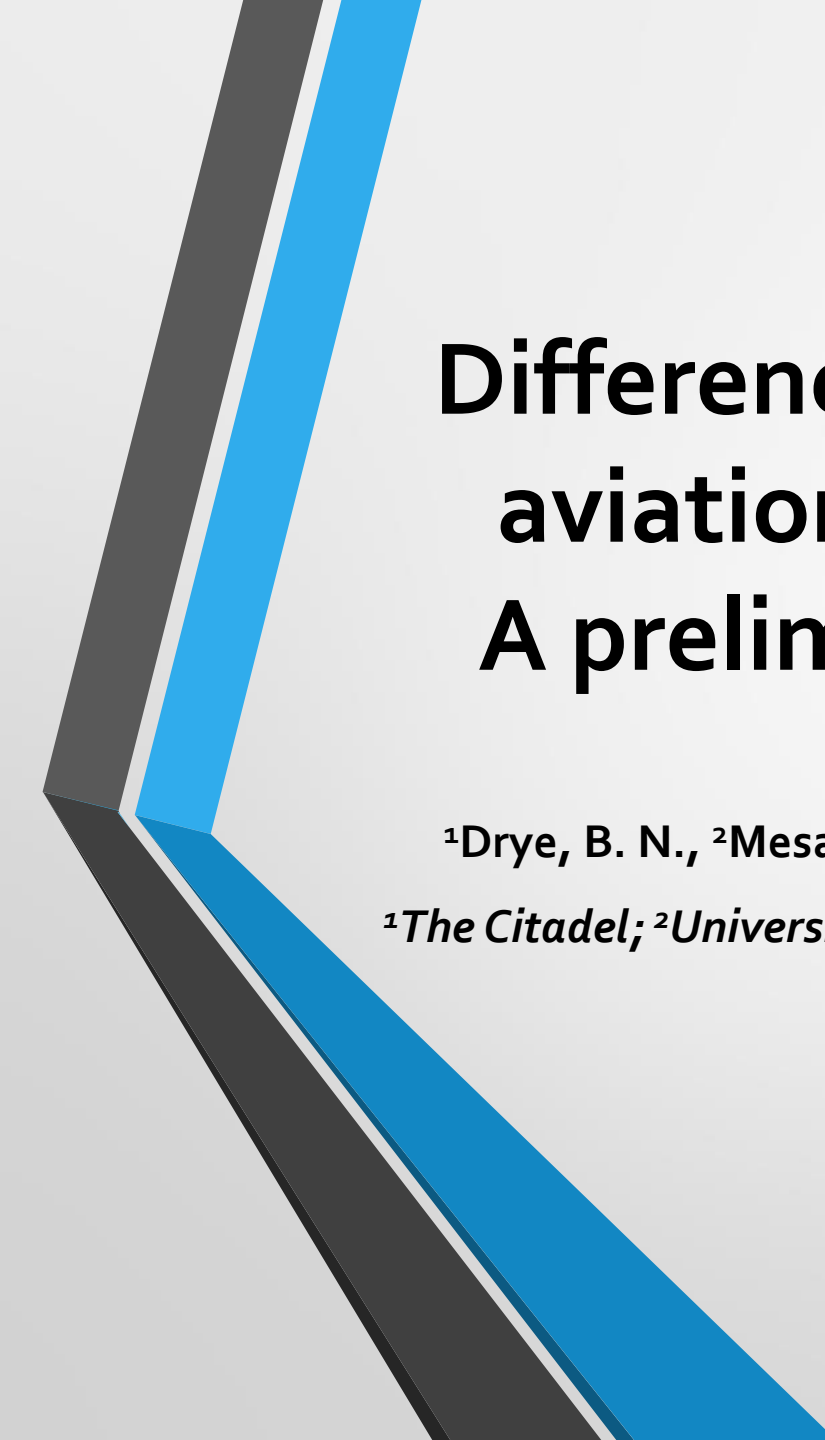
P. Michael Politano  
*The Citadel*, politanom@citadel.edu

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# Differences in the severity of aviation accidents by age: A preliminary examination

<sup>1</sup>Drye, B. N., <sup>2</sup>Mesarosova, K., <sup>3</sup>Walton, R. O., and <sup>1</sup>Politano, P. M.

*<sup>1</sup>The Citadel; <sup>2</sup>University of Zilina; <sup>3</sup>Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University*

# “I’m the schmuck that landed on the taxi way”

- 74 year old Harrison Ford (Star Wars star) told FAA after landing on a taxiway at John Wayne Airport in Orange County, California (in February 2017)
- Was this incident age related?

# Background

- Research examined age issues with pilots
- Industry continues to deal with pilot shortages
  - Allowing older pilots to fly past mandatory retirement age could reduce the impact
  - However, this brings up the question of flight safety, and if older pilots are indeed a risk.
- Purpose: Examine differences in the severity of accidents by age

# More Background

- Limited literature on the subject
- Most concerned with acute incapacitation
  - But age related mental and physical declines need to also be considered
- Problem is that everyone ages differently and at different rates

# Methods

- NTSB aviation accident and incident database (1982 – 2014)
- Accidents separated by Commercial and General Aviation (fixed wing)
  - Excluded home built aircraft, helicopters, gliders...
  - 74,686 total entries in data set
  - 7,203 commercial
  - 61,363 GA accidents
- Damage to the aircraft and injury of crew/passengers as a function of pilot age was examined separately using ANOVA for commercial and GA

# Results

- Commercial
  - male pilots 97.4%, (mean age = 41.75, ( $SD=10.88$ ))
  - Female pilots 2.6%, (mean age of 43.51, ( $SD=9.71$ ))
    - Ages were significantly different,  $t(7009)=8.76, p<.001$
- GA
  - Males 91.8%
  - Females at 3.7% (4.5% missing)
  - Average age for pilots was 45.29 ( $SD=14.63$ )

# Results

- Commercial operations
  - Damage levels of none, minor, substantial, and destroyed produced a significant difference by age,  $F(3, 7197)=40.558, p<.001$
  - All levels were significantly different with the exception of none and minor
  - Age decreased across the levels of damage from an average of 43.38 for none to 39.76 for destroyed
  - Highest level for damage was substantial, making up 47.26% of reports with an average age of 40.75
- GA
  - Damage level was also significant,  $F(3, 60302)=4.06, p=.007$
  - Significant differences between no damage and substantial ( $p=.001$ ) and destroyed ( $p=.005$ ) but no other levels



# Discussions/Conclusions

- Study indicated that there are differences in the degree of damage related to aviation accidents based on age
- Additional examination of the causes of accidents, and at what age the increase is observed, is needed to ensure aviation safety for aging pilots