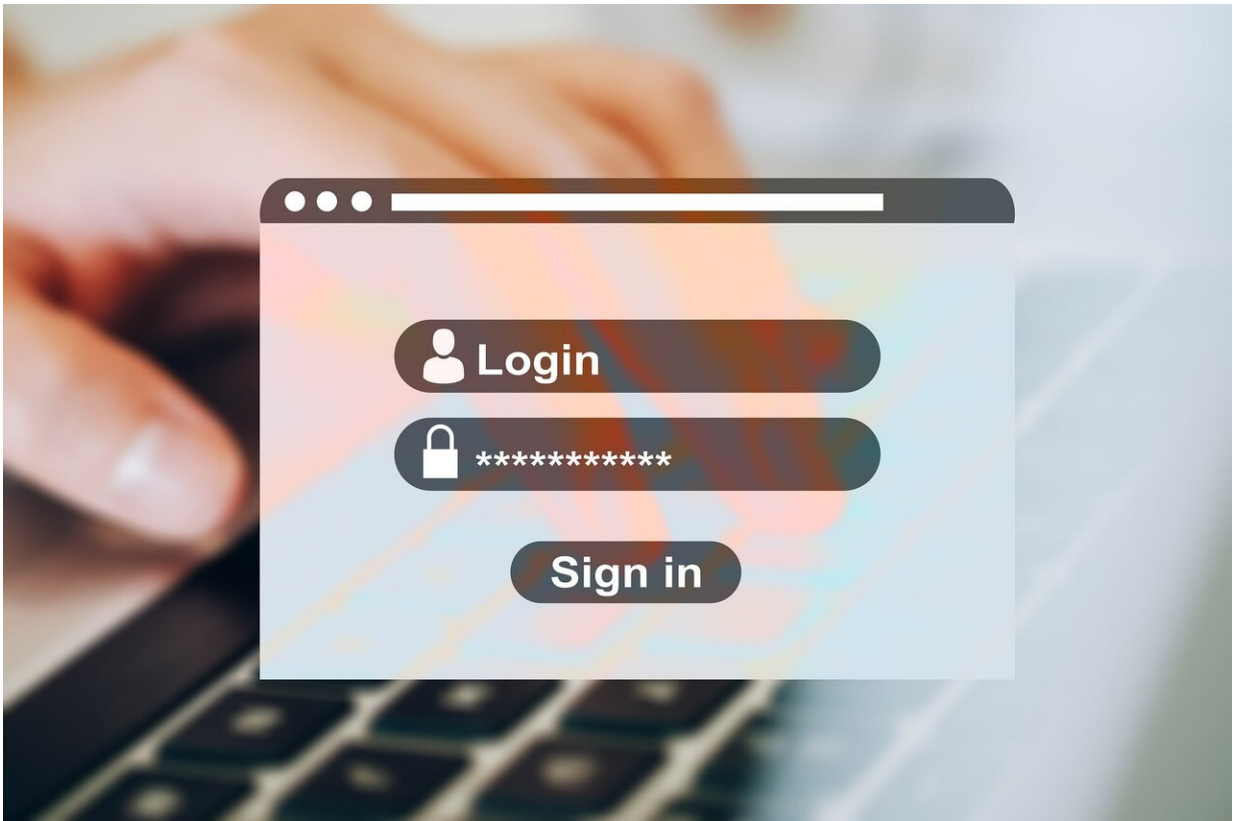


Why older adults use (and do not use) password managers

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Password managers are considered highly effective tools for increasing online security. A study presented at the 2019 Symposium On Usable Privacy and Security surveyed a predominately young population about

their use of password managers, finding several barriers to adoption and effective usage. However, little research has been done about the use of password managers among older adults.

Led by Adam J. Aviv, associate professor of computer science at the George Washington University, and Ravi Kuber, associate professor of information systems at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, a team of researchers recreated the 2019 survey with adults over the age of 60. The team conducted interviews with three groups of [older adults](#): Those who use password managers built into their browsers or [operating systems](#), those who use separately installed password managers and those that do not use password managers at all. They found:

- Among older adults, concerns about security seemed to outweigh the perceived benefits of password managers.
- Older adults that use password managers described being satisfied with their experiences overall. These adults note they feel confident using multiple features like the password generator and auto-fill.
- Older adults that do not use a password manager feel that their current way of storing passwords, such as writing them down, is a safe and easy method. These adults note the importance of having control over who has access to their passwords.
- Regardless of experience with password managers, older adults said that financial accounts were the most important to protect as threats to these could cause the most irreparable damage.

The researchers used their findings and the 2019 study to compare the use of password managers by older adults to a younger population. In comparison, the researchers found:

- Younger adults appear to offer more complaints about password managers. The researchers explain that this might be because

older adults use password managers less often in fewer contexts and utilize fewer features.

- Younger adults that do not use [password managers](#) valued having control over how their passwords are organized, such as physical lists in alphabetical order.
- As like their older counterparts, younger adults considered financial accounts most important to protect.
- Younger adults shared concerns about storing all of their passwords in one place and having a single point of failure. The researchers note older adults shared this concern.

"Once older adults did adopt a [password](#) manager, they were more positive about their experience compared to their younger counterparts. This may be due to a higher burden for older adults to adopt, such that a successful adoption leads to higher satisfaction and increased usage. So advocacy and encouragement, particularly from family and close friends can have a big impact. These kinds of advocates are crucial for broader adoption of older adults, and so efforts for improving younger users' experience will translate into increased adoption among older users," says Adam J. Aviv, associate professor of computer science at the George Washington University.

"Education and outreach can help older adults better understand the urgency of secure practices. Security-related classes offered at venues such as senior centers and libraries offer considerable promise for disseminating this information," says Ravi Kuber, associate professor of information systems at the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

More information: Why Older Adults (Don't) Use Password Managers. www.usenix.org/conference/usenixsecurity21/presentation/ray

Provided by George Washington University

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