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# MENTAL HEALTH OF THE OLDER PEOPLE DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### Abstract

Older adults aged 60 years and above are among the most affected demographic by the COVID-19 because of the measures initiated to address the public health. Social isolation is among the WHO's primary public health measures to curb the virus (Webb, 2020). The older generation is adversely affected once social isolation is initiated because they pride in interactions, value communication, and engagements, and wish to remain in touch with the family. A sudden change in their regular life puts them at risk of mental health challenges such as depression, stress, and anxiety, as cited by Ayalon et al. (2020). The paper has made suggestions on eradicating mental health challenges using technological means such as telehealth and mobile communications with the elderly. The report contains details of the connection between mental health challenges and the older generation. One factor that stands out is the information that elders are more susceptible to COVID-19 than other demographics. This paper has followed a literature review guidelines, incorporating the methodology, and relaying details on the older generation.

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*Keywords:* COVID-19, coronavirus, the older people during the Pandemic, the older people's mental health, and depression and stress during COVID-19



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## 1. Introduction

Since COVID-19 was acknowledged as a universal pandemic by the WHO, the virus was given a sharper focus by governments. They sought means of protecting their populations and scientists, and they tried to understand the novel virus. However, despite the devastating effects of the virus, one element that stands out is individuals' mental health, cutting across all generations. This paper will consider the mental health of elderly persons aged 60 years and above and how the coronavirus affected their wellbeing. COVID-19 is known to have a devastating effect and unprecedented on people's lives, regardless of their social demographics, as indicated by Armitage and Nellums (2020). The Pandemic affected all humans across the world in different ways, with the elderly taking a toll on their mental and psychological wellbeing.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, people aged 60 years and above have been encouraged to self-isolate as a precautionary measure. As instructed by the WHO, one of the steps the population ought to take is social isolation, as indicated by Berg-Weger and Morley (2020). It is stated that the elderly population is at risk of developing mental health issues as they get older. However, it is indicated that their mental health could be affected sooner if stressors are introduced. The senior citizens are undergoing loss in functional abilities; they are experiencing long term care and reduced mobility (Hwang et al., 2020). Most older people are in good health; they are at risk of developing mental challenges during the Pandemic. The standard way of life has been significantly altered.

Increasing claims made by the WHO and various other organizations and governments is that the elderly persons are at a greater danger of getting infected with the coronavirus because their immune system is less robust and prone to developing pneumonia. Compared to middle-aged persons, elderly patients present a higher likelihood of the infection spreading to multiple lobes of the lungs. COVID-19 has not been around for long, but early evidence from Italy and China indicated that older adults in the hospitals were most affected psychologically, and their symptoms were becoming intense (Gyasi, 2020). The two primary mental issues that affect the older generation include depression and stress. The physical distancing initiated in most parts of the world to regulate the spread of the illness has affected the older generation by increasing their stress levels and worsening their medical conditions (Steinman et al., 2020). This paper will analyze various mental challenges that older people have faced during the coronavirus period, the infection rate, and how they overcome it. The study will concentrate on individuals aged 60 years and above, categorized and older adults. The study will increase the knowledge and general awareness of COVID-19 and social isolation as a public health measure for older adults' mental and emotional wellbeing. The findings and a discussion that follows will inform the public health official's decisions on how to help mitigate the impact of coronavirus and reduce the mental health risks.

## 2. Methodology

This study will follow a systematic review to identify, summarize, and evaluate the findings of relevant studies over the Pandemic and older adults aged 60 years and above and make available evidence accessible to decision-makers. The systematic review will be analyzed through a pool of ten formidable databases, which include Cochrane Library, PsycINFO, ERIC, PubPsych, JSTOR, MEDLINE, PubMed,

CORE, EMBASE, and CNKI. The articles collected from these databases must be documented between December 2019 and August 2020. The researcher will only identify the most relevant articles using several keywords, including; COVID-19, the Pandemic, mental health, coronavirus, the older people during the Pandemic, the older people's mental health, and depression and stress during COVID-19. While selecting the articles necessary for the study, it is imperative to indicate that the researcher will not rely on the title alone and publication category, discipline, year of publication, the article's language, and place of publication to ensure their legitimacy. The researcher has a broader scope of time to select articles and develop the most detailed and authentic sources.

### 3. Research Questions

**RQ1:** What are the effects of social isolation throughout the Pandemic among older people, and how does it affect their mental health?

**RQ2:** Advanced age is a predisposing factor for mental and physical health; how are the changes witnessed during the COVID-19 likely to affect the elderly patients?

**RQ3:** How has the information circulated across the world during the coronavirus impacted the mental health of people aged 60 years and above?

**RQ4:** Is accessibility to medications and health facilities a significant challenge affecting the elderly patients during the coronavirus pandemic period?

### 4. Effects of Social Isolation

Social isolation refers to the objective state of initiating less or infrequent social relations or contact with others. Social isolation is a severe yet underestimated public health risk that affects the significant portion of older people. According to statistics, a quarter of the population is composed of older people who are socially isolated. This number has increased significantly over the past few months because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, which has social isolation as one of the public health measures to control the spread of the challenge (Radwan et al., 2020). Most nations have banned nursing home visits and initiated stay-at-home orders to control general movement. Before coronavirus, most people aged 60 years and above participated in social events such as church activities, traveling, attending senior centers, and social events (Morrow-Howell et al., 2020). As they grow older and experience cognitive and functional impairment, their families are regularly present or employ a caregiver who will at all times be with the elder for support. For those in nursing homes, family visits make them experience social connection and link to the outside world. This freedom was halted suddenly at the onset of coronavirus and the need to mitigate spreading, especially among the older adults (Krendl & Perry, 2020). Social isolation among older patients has devastating effects on their mental health since it increased anxiety, stress, and risk of depression.

Without meaningful and frequent social connections, older adults have had their cognitive functioning declining faster. As days of social isolation increase, more senior people become susceptible to anxiety, depression, and fraction getting suicidal thoughts. The elderly connect with the world through the few meaningful social interactions they make with family or peers (Joyce & Xu, 2020). Because of their health and degenerating mental capacity, it becomes easy for the elderly to succumb to mental health challenges such as depression, as indicated by Holmes et al. (2020). The elderly might not succumb to

coronavirus because they are isolated, but they will surely succumb to mental challenges because of the heightened susceptibility.

## **5. COVID-19 Information Affecting the Older Persons**

As one age, the risk for severe illness from coronavirus increases with people aged 60 years and above the most affected. As one age, the risk of being hospitalized for COVID-19 surmounts hence the need to protect oneself. According to the CDC, 8 out of every 10 COVID-19 deaths reported in America are adults aged 65 years and above, as cited by Satre et al. (2020). With such statistics, the constant information passed on to the people is that the older ones are at a higher risk than any other individual. The older generation has been targeted majorly and given a higher focus because of the need to protect them from coronavirus. The older people who have a degenerating cognitive ability feel negatively branded and ill targeted because they have been in the limelight since the outbreak (Goodman-Casanova et al., 2020). Some of them have expressed their disgruntled nature since they feel the CDC and WHO, among other organizations, are not fair.

This constant flow of information about the Pandemic could be a source of anxiety and stress for the aged. The older people's continual exposure to the daily news as the media houses announce the mortality rate makes it uncomfortable for them, resulting in anxiety (Damiot et al., 2020). This constant information could also cause sleep disturbance and low mood among elderly individuals, which could have a detrimental effect on life quality.

## **6. Accessibility to Medications and Health Facilities**

Most older persons are suffering from various health challenges facilitated by their degenerating functional and cognitive abilities. As their immune reduces, the elderly is diagnosed with multiple medical issues that affect their essential health. According to Brooke and Jackson (2020), some of the natural illnesses affecting most older people include incontinence, dementia, cancer, arthritis, glaucoma, lung disease, cataracts, Parkinson's disease, and adult diabetes. Most of these illnesses force many to visit healthcare centers frequently, while others are forced to join a nursing home for more specialized care. COVID-19 has made it challenging for older people to see hospitals because of the risk of contracting the virus. Hospitals are flagged as hotspots making it difficult for people to allow their parents to visit the hospital (Chu et al., 2020). Some hospitals have prioritized care for COVID-19 patients making it difficult for older patients with other challenges to get medication. The drastic disruption has caused excruciating pain to the older generation and affected their quality of life, posing a risk to their mental health as indicated by Armitage and Nellums (2020). Many have had uncontrolled sugar levels because of anxiety and other mental issues such as stress and depression.

## **7. Discussion and Conclusion**

This researcher has proven that social isolation, one of the public health measures to control the spread of COVID-19, contributes to older people's mental health challenges. Without close relations, interactions, and communication with peers, caregivers, or family, the older people resent themselves

leading heightened anxiety, stress, and depression. Upon realizing the public health challenge, some nations initiated measures such as technology use. Mobile technology has proven useful during the coronavirus period since families have communicated continuously with their older kin and ensured they are comfortable even at their absentia, according to Tyrrell and Williams (2020). The technology has been used to provide the needed social support through instant messaging applications or videos.

As people age, their mental, physical, and general health begin to degenerate, and their immunity reduces extensively. These changes have exposed them and made them vulnerable to COVID-19. This report has indicated that older people are prone to the virus, which stresses them and increases the risks of depression. Peer support has materialized through social media platforms and helped spread critical information such as counseling, health promotion, information resources, professional support, and problem-solving assistance (Wand et al., 2020).

With the older people remaining at the mercies of their cellphones, television, and other gadgets for communication, the news outlets have given continuously world figures of people who have succumbed to the virus. The highest number is the older generation, which serves as a risk to depression. The older adults need to stay physically active by taking walks in the neighborhood and connecting with others remotely. The healthcare facilities serving older adults have various strategies to reach out to their clients and ensure they receive healthcare through online platforms. The hospitals dispatched medicine from the facility and delivered to the patient while at home. Coronavirus has affected the normal operations but avoids the pending risk of mental health challenges; it is imperative to find the alternatives and utilize them accordingly.

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