The Psychological Impact of Self-Isolation on Older Adults Living in the Community

Original Inquiry
What is the psychological impact of self-isolation on older adults living in the community?

Summary
- We found eleven guidance documents, one systematic review, three systematic review protocols, six other reviews, nine primary research articles, eleven expert opinion articles, and ten news articles.
- Loneliness is associated with a variety of poor health outcomes and older adults are prone to feelings of loneliness, even during times of normalcy. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced social-isolation on most of the population, but this isolation has been especially difficult for older adults, many of whom may not have easy access to, or the capacity to use, technology for socialization.
- The majority of the findings agreed that social-isolation or self-isolation may have negative impacts on the mental health of older adults. However, the findings of three primary research articles (Plomecka et al., Jia et al., and Weinstein and Nguyen) did not support the suggestion that social isolation is associated with poorer mental health in older adults.

Guidance Documents
Impact of Self-Isolation
- “The self-isolation of members of the older population is likely to result in higher levels of mental distress and loneliness in this population, which requires attention alongside slowing the spread of the virus.”

“Older adults, especially in isolation and those with cognitive decline/dementia, may become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated and withdrawn during the outbreak or while in quarantine. Provide practical and emotional support through informal networks (families) and health professionals.”

Related:
- Centres for Disease Control. Loneliness and Social Isolation Linked to Serious Health Conditions. ([LINK])
- Campaign to End Loneliness. Risk to Health. ([LINK])

Mitigating the Impact of Self-Isolation
- Resources for preventing COVID-19 and tips for taking care of physical and mental health.

Public Health Wales Observatory. How might the wellbeing of older people living in the community be supported when shielding and social distancing has been recommended for an extended period of time? Rapid summary. 2020. ([LINK])
- Evidence summary for organizations that support older adults.

Related:
- Centres for Disease Control. Coping with Stress. June 12, 2020. ([LINK])
- Razai et al. Mitigating the psychological effects of social isolation during the covid-19 pandemic. May 21, 2020. ([LINK])
  - Guidance for primary care practitioners to provide care to socially isolated patients during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- HealthLink BC. Mental Health and COVID-19: Older Adults. Last updated: May 6, 2020. ([LINK])

Systematic Reviews
Mitigating the Impact of Self-Isolation
Noone et al. Video calls for reducing social isolation and loneliness in older people: a rapid review. May 21, 2020. ([LINK])
- “Based on this review there is currently very uncertain evidence on the effectiveness of video call interventions to reduce loneliness in older adults. The review did not include any studies that reported evidence of the effectiveness of video call interventions to address social isolation in older adults. The evidence regarding the effectiveness of video calls for outcomes of symptoms of depression was very uncertain.”
Systematic Review Protocols


Other Reviews

Impact of Self-Isolation

- “Conclusion: Mental and physical health in older people are negatively affected during the social distancing for COVID-19.”

- “Quarantines that last 10 days or longer may result in increased probabilities that individuals show symptoms of PTSD in the weeks and months after quarantines ceased.”

Related:
- Panchal et al. The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use. April 21, 2020. (LINK)

Mitigating the Impact of Self Isolation

- “Physical activity interventions to reduce social isolation showed the most promise at improving the health of older adults; however, effects were inconsistent and short-term.”
- “Interventions that connect socially isolated older adults to health services are conceptually promising and need good-quality studies.”

Related:
Primary Research
Impact of Self-Isolation

- “In contrast, both men and women aged over 65 years had anxiety and depression scores consistent with previous population norms.”


- “Although justified and necessary, this process of isolation is likely to have a negative impact on the mental health of these vulnerable groups, especially older people. It will become increasingly important for community health professionals to assess subtle changes in older persons' mental health, as the duration of this period of isolation remains unclear.”

Related:
- Kristyn Frank. COVID-19 and social support for seniors: Do seniors have people they can depend on during difficult times? April 30, 2020. (LINK)
- Gerst-Emerson & Jayawardhana. Loneliness as a Public Health Issue: The Impact of Loneliness on Health Care Utilization among Older Adults. May 2015 (LINK)

Expert Opinion
Impact of Self-Isolation

- “Self-isolation will disproportionately affect elderly individuals whose only social contact is out of the home, such as at daycare venues, community centres, and places of worship. Those who do not have close family or friends, and rely on the support of voluntary services or social care, could be placed at additional risk, along with those who are already lonely, isolated, or secluded.”

“These ageist discourses and the subtext of negativity and devaluing of older people can and will very likely contribute to feelings of worthlessness in older people, a sense of being burdensome and having no value. These factors when considered in relation to current social restrictions make older people particularly vulnerable to a range of negative health and social outcomes, particularly social isolation and loneliness.”


“We have good evidence that the effect sizes of these social factors — lack of connection, social isolation and loneliness — are comparable to many of these other risk factors we take quite seriously.”

**Related:**
- Meng et al. **Analyze the psychological impact of COVID-19 among the elderly population in China and make corresponding suggestions.** April 11, 2020. ([LINK](https://www.banerjeeconsultancy.co.uk/2020/05/04/the-impact-of-covid-19-pandemic-on-elderly-mental-health/))
- Heidi Oi-Yee Li. **Long-term social distancing during COVID-19: A social isolation crisis among seniors?** April 9, 2020. ([LINK](https://www.banerjeeconsultancy.co.uk/2020/05/04/the-impact-of-covid-19-pandemic-on-elderly-mental-health/))
- American Psychological Association. **Psychologists emphasize more self-care for older adults.** March 27, 2020. ([LINK](https://www.banerjeeconsultancy.co.uk/2020/05/04/the-impact-of-covid-19-pandemic-on-elderly-mental-health/))

**Mitigating the Impact of Self-Isolation**


- Describes 3 steps that should be taken to prevent mental health consequences of the pandemic: (1) plan for loneliness and intervene; (2) have mechanisms for surveillance, reporting, and intervention of abuse; and (3) prepare the mental health system for upcoming challenges.
- “Extra efforts should be made to ensure connections with people who are typically marginalized and isolated, including the elderly, undocumented immigrants, homeless persons and those with mental illness.”

**Related:**
News Articles

Impact of Self-Isolation

Johns Hopkins Hub. **Survey finds increase in psychological distress reported among U.S. adults during the COVID-19 pandemic.** June 3, 2020. ([LINK](https://example.com))
- “The researchers also found that psychological distress in adults age 55 and older almost doubled from 3.8% in 2018 to 7.3% in 2020.”

Vox. **Coronavirus will also cause a loneliness epidemic.** May 12, 2020. ([LINK](https://example.com))
- “If older and sick people have to refrain from these activities for months on end, their lives will be worse, and the rhythms and relationships that once sustained them may prove hard to rebuild.”

The Canadian Press. ‘**Some days I get very depressed:** Ontario seniors discuss isolation amid coronavirus pandemic.** May 6, 2020. ([LINK](https://example.com))
- “Psychologists worry about the “echo pandemic” – the mental health crisis that will remain in the wake of COVID-19. Isolation is a major contributing factor to that looming crisis, experts say.”

Related:
- Journal of AHIMA. **COVID-19 and Social Isolation Puts Elderly at Risk for Loneliness.** April 14, 2020. ([LINK](https://example.com))
- ABC News. **The unspoken COVID-19 toll on the elderly: Loneliness.** April 14, 2020. ([LINK](https://example.com))
- Healio. **COVID-19’s mental health effects by age group: Children, college students, working-age adults and older adults: Older adults need connection all the time, not just during a pandemic.** April 8, 2020 ([LINK](https://example.com))

Mitigating the Impact of Self-Isolation

Science Magazine. **Protecting older adults during social distancing.** April 23, 2020. ([LINK](https://example.com))
- “Data indicate that the elderly view television as a medium to cope with depressive symptoms...”
- “[E]xisting mental health support hotlines could add outgoing calls during which mental health professionals could reach out to the elderly and screen for symptoms of anxiety and depression.”

Related:
- University of Toronto. **U of T Students Work to Combat Social Isolation in Seniors During COVID-19.** April 15, 2020. ([LINK](https://example.com))
- Psychology Today. **How to Help Older Adults Fight Loneliness During COVID-19.** April 3, 2020. ([LINK](https://example.com))
Methodology
Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Applied Health Research (NLCAHR) COVID-19 Quick Response reports are initiated by, and shared with, our partners in the provincial health system, including the four Regional Health Authorities, the Departments of Health and Community Services and Children, Seniors and Social Development, and public health officials.

NLCAHR staff work with topic submitters to clarify the research question. We then search for related systematic reviews, meta-analyses, other reviews, interim and other guidance statements, primary research, expert opinion and health and science reporting.

We use several search strategies, with a focus on the following databases:

- Alberta Health Services
- CADTH
- Canadian Pharmacists Association
- Campbell Collaboration
- Cochrane Collaboration
- Centre for Disease Control (CDC)
- Centre for Evidence Based Medicine (CEBM)
- Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre
- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
- Health Canada
- HIQA
- Joanna Briggs Institute
- Johns Hopkins
- MedRxiv
- National Collaborating Centres on Methods and Tools (NCCMT)
- National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)
- National Library of Medicine
- Public Health Agency of Canada
- Trip Database
- World Health Organization

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