



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

### Disclaimer:

This *Quick Response Report* was published on July 8, 2020. Given the rapidly changing nature of the coronavirus pandemic, some of the references included in this report may quickly become out-of-date. We further caution readers that researchers at the Newfoundland & Labrador Centre for Applied Health Research are not experts on infectious diseases and are relaying work produced by others. This report has been produced quickly and it is not exhaustive, nor have the included studies been critically appraised.

### 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

British Psychological Society. **Psychological impact of the response to the coronavirus/COVID-19 on older people: For service providers, policy makers and decision makers.** March 19, 2020. ([LINK](#))

- “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.”

World Health Organization. **Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak.** March 18, 2020. ([LINK](#))

- “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in isolation and those with cognitive decline/dementia, may become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated and withdrawn during the outbreak or while in quarantine.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:

- Inter-Agency Standing Committee. **Interim Briefing Note: Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of Covid-19 Outbreak** (Version 1.5). March 17, 2020. ([LINK](#))
- Government of Canada. **Social isolation of seniors - Volume 1: Understanding the issue and finding solutions**. 2017. ([LINK](#))
- 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

Public Health Agency of Canada. **COVID-19: Resources for seniors and their caregivers**. June 17, 2020. ([LINK](#))

- 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

- Aravena et al. 'Drawing on Wisdom to Cope with Adversity:' A Systematic Review Protocol of Older Adults' Mental and Psychosocial Health During Acute Respiratory Disease Propagated-Type Epidemics and Pandemics (COVID-19, SARS-CoV, MERS, and Influenza). June 7, 2020. ([LINK](#)) **Preprint – not yet peer reviewed.**
- Quin, Zhou, and Wang. A meta-analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the mental wellbeing of elderly population. May 11, 2020. ([LINK](#))
- Xu and Lu. The psychological impact of 2019 novel coronavirus pneumonia (COVID-19) and mental healthcare strategies: a systematic review and meta-analysis of current evidence. April 6, 2020. ([LINK](#))

## Other Reviews

### Impact of Self-Isolation

Sepúlveda-Loyola et al. **Impact of Social Isolation due to COVID-19 on Health in Older People: Mental and Physical Effects, and Recommendations.** June 10, 2020. ([LINK](#))

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

Yellowlees Douglas. **The Costs of Social Isolation: Loneliness and COVID-19.** April 29, 2020. ([LINK](#))

- “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. ([13](#))”

### Related:

- Dubey et al. **Psychosocial impact of COVID-19.** May 27, 2020. ([LINK](#))
- Panchal et al. **The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use.** April 21, 2020. ([LINK](#))

### Mitigating the Impact of Self Isolation

Scientific Resource Center. **Rapid Evidence Product: Addressing Social Isolation to Improve the Health of Older Adults: A Rapid Review.** February 2019. ([LINK](#))

- “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:

- Zoya Punjwani. **Social Isolation in Older Adults During and Post COVID-19.** June 11, 2020. ([LINK](#))

## Primary Research

### Impact of Self-Isolation

Jia et al. **Mental health in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic: early observations.** May 19, 2020. ([LINK](#)) **Preprint – not yet peer reviewed.**

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

Baker and Clark. **Biopsychopharmacosocial approach to assess impact of social distancing and isolation on mental health in older adults.** May 7, 2020. ([LINK](#))

- “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:

- Kwong et al. **Mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic in two longitudinal UK population cohorts.** June 18, 2020. ([LINK](#)) **Preprint – not yet peer reviewed.**
- Lopez et al. **Psychological well-being among older adults during the COVID-19 outbreak: a comparative study of the young–old and the old–old adults.** May 22, 2020. ([LINK](#))
- Płomecka et al. **Mental Health Impact of COVID-19: A global study of risk and resilience factors.** May 19, 2020. ([LINK](#)) **Preprint – not yet peer reviewed.**
- Weinstein and Nguyen. **Motivation and preference in isolation: a test of their different influences on responses to self-isolation during the COVID-19 outbreak.** May 13, 2020. ([LINK](#))
- Kristyn Frank. **COVID-19 and social support for seniors: Do seniors have people they can depend on during difficult times?** April 30, 2020. ([LINK](#))
- Berg-Weger and Morley. **Loneliness and Social Isolation in Older Adults During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Implications for Gerontological Social Work.** April 14, 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

Armitage and Nellums. **COVID-19 and the consequences of isolating the elderly.** May 5, 2020. ([LINK](#))

- “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.”

Brooke and Jackson. **Older people and COVID-19: Isolation, risk and ageism.** April 2, 2020. ([LINK](#))

- “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.”

American Psychological Association. **COVID-19 isn’t just a danger to older people’s physical health.** March 18, 2020. ([LINK](#))

- “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:

- Banerjee, Debanjan. **The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Elderly Mental Health.** May 4, 2020. ([LINK](#))
- Meng et al. **Analyze the psychological impact of COVID-19 among the elderly population in China and make corresponding suggestions.** April 11, 2020. ([LINK](#))
- Heidi Oi-Yee Li. **Long-term social distancing during COVID-19: A social isolation crisis among seniors?** April 9, 2020. ([LINK](#))
- American Psychological Association. **Psychologists emphasize more self-care for older adults.** March 27, 2020. ([LINK](#))
- Lima et al. **The emotional impact of Coronavirus 2019-nCoV (new Coronavirus disease).** March 12, 2020. ([LINK](#))

#### Mitigating the Impact of Self-Isolation

Galea, Merchant, and Lurie. **The Mental Health Consequences of COVID-19 and Physical Distancing: The Need for Prevention and Early Intervention.** April 10, 2020. ([LINK](#))

- 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:

- Tierney, Mahtani, and Turk. **Can social prescribing support the COVID-19 pandemic?** March 25, 2020. ([LINK](#))
- AARP (American Association of Retired Persons). **How to Fight the Social Isolation of Coronavirus.** March 16, 2020. ([LINK](#))

## 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](#))

- “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](#))

- “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](#))

- “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:

- Johns Hopkins Hub. **The impact of COVID-19 on older adults.** May 5, 2020. ([LINK](#))
- Journal of AHIMA. **COVID-19 and Social Isolation Puts Elderly at Risk for Loneliness.** April 14, 2020. ([LINK](#))
- ABC News. **The unspoken COVID-19 toll on the elderly: Loneliness.** April 14, 2020. ([LINK](#))
- 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](#))

### Mitigating the Impact of Self-Isolation

Science Magazine. **Protecting older adults during social distancing.** April 23, 2020. ([LINK](#))

- “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](#))
- Psychology Today. **How to Help Older Adults Fight Loneliness During COVID-19.** April 3, 2020. ([LINK](#))

## 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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