



Ageing in Europe



# Newsletter

Special Issue 28, Summer 2020:  
**COVID-19 situation in Europe**

This special issue of the Newsletter of the ESA Research Network on Ageing in Europe (RN01) is focused on the COVID-19 situation in Europe. We present selected research projects and initiatives (including call for papers) across Europe that are related to COVID-19 in the context of old age. We also welcome a commentary on challenges for PhD students during a pandemic.

## Editorial Board

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# Message from the Coordinator of the Network



Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the summer Newsletter of the ESA Research Network on Ageing in Europe. In this edition we focus on the COVID-19 situation in Europe. One of the key roles of the Network is to share initiatives and practice in ageing research across Europe. This edition is therefore dedicated to projects addressing the substantial and unprecedented challenges of COVID-19.

The Research Network Board decided that this focus for the newsletter was essential because of the profound impacts that COVID-19 has, and will continue to have, upon older people. The current situation will prompt substantial socioeconomic changes that will affect the ongoing delivery of health and social care services. The impact of COVID-19 will also shape the nature of intergenerational relationships and conceptualisations of ageing and old age. It is therefore vital that research is configured to address this very complex and challenging situation.

Our call for this newsletter prompted 14 submissions from across Europe. These submissions demonstrate significant geographical spread, with the north, south, east and west of the continent represented below. This level of response shows how sociologists and researchers in the field of ageing respond promptly to changing social conditions.

In this edition we present selected research and ongoing projects, including a call for papers, related to the COVID-19 situation. We have also retained a regular newsletter feature that addresses the work of a current PhD student, but on this occasion reflections are offered on the challenges of 'completing a PhD during a pandemic'.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed material to this newsletter. We hope that you, our readers, find the content below useful. Contact details are provided with each submission if you require further details on any of the listed initiatives.

We hope you are keeping safe and well in these challenging times.

With best wishes,

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## **#CovidAgeism: EuroAgeism and COVID-19**

The Innovative Training Network EuroAgeism, funded under Horizon 2020 and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, aims to tackle ageism and raise awareness of ageist practices and policies in clinical, social and everyday settings. During the outbreak of COVID-19, we have seen manifestations of ageism unfolding in our societies to an even greater extent. Social tension among generations and implicit age stereotypes have been brought to the surface by the emergency. We have witnessed ageist accounts, as well as the ageist implementation of policies in social security and medical care systems, in the labour market, in access to services and technologies, and media coverage. We have witnessed debates on prioritising lives based on age, neglect in care homes, and age-based isolation restrictions among other ageist acts.

We emphasize the importance of recognizing ageism as prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination based on age, and acknowledging its dangerous impact on the ongoing pandemic. Unchallenged ageism will have long-term consequences for us and our society, as we all continue to age. Chronological age, which is now frequently used in political decisions and measures, does not reflect the heterogeneity of the group that it encompasses. Vulnerability often originates from an intersection of inequalities created by psychophysical and socio-financial conditions, gender, location, digital and medical literacy, and access to services and technologies. Not solely from age. Such a narrow vision can, at worst, lead to violations of the basic human right to life, and fortify the pre-existing ageist discourses. Highlighting COVID-19 only as a problem for older generations, creates tension between generations, discriminates older people through cocooning and self-isolation measures, and devalues the important contributions older adults make to our societies.

At MSCA ITN EuroAgeism we have the primary goal of developing innovative research on ageism that manifests on a wide range of areas and levels in our society. Our Early Stage Researchers investigate ageism in the labour market structures and practices, care and long-term care services, prescribing medication, social media, technology accessibility,

use and design, access to goods and services and access to care among migrant populations. As COVID-19 has exposed ageism in our feelings, behaviours, attitudes and social structures now more than ever before, our research has become increasingly important to tackle the unwanted consequences of ageism.

Our second mission, especially during this pandemic, is to advocate for a society for all ages. With our research and actions, we aim to raise awareness of ageism and encourage researchers, experts in the field, decision-makers and individuals to refrain from ageist actions, practices and measures.

To address the current situation, we have launched a Twitter campaign #CovidAgeism that raises awareness of ageist practices during COVID-19 pandemic. This campaign also includes a series of blog posts published on our website, Twitter and Facebook. So far, our topics have covered useful resources, internet connectedness and digital divide, labour market changes, age-based restrictions, intergenerational solidarity and 'Embrace the Gray' movement. We are currently working on more content to support our campaign and are open to cooperation and collaboration with interested parties.

Join our **#CovidAgeism** campaign and discussions on social media.

For more information, visit: <https://euroageism.eu>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ITNEuroAgeism>

Twitter: [@ITNEuroAgeism](https://twitter.com/ITNEuroAgeism)



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 764632.



## **Everyday lives during the pandemic: Written stories from Finnish, English and Russian speaking older persons in Finland and Belgium**

The Centre of Excellence in Research on Ageing and Care (CoE AgeCare, [jyu.fi/agecare](http://jyu.fi/agecare)) is collecting data in Finland and Belgium regarding how older people have experienced the exceptional circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to confine it. The data is gathered via calls for written stories, to which the respondents can participate electronically or via regular mail. The data is collected and analysed by two research groups in CoE AgeCare, one in the University of Jyväskylä and another in the University of Helsinki. The research is funded by the Academy of Finland.

The University of Jyväskylä research group is primarily focusing on the experiences of Finnish people aged 70 or over: how they have perceived the guidelines of the Government of Finland to stay in quarantine-like conditions? In the call for stories, the writers are encouraged to write freely on their situation, or ponder changes e.g. in their living environment, homes, received services, and day-to-day life.

The University of Helsinki research group has translated the slightly modified call for stories into Russian, targeting Russian-speaking persons who are aged 70 years or over and live in Finland. The Russian call is distributed through different Russian-speaking non-governmental organisations and communities. The Russian data collection is a joint effort of the CoE AgeCare and Digiln projects (funded by the Strategic Research Council at the Academy of Finland).

The University of Helsinki research group also collects stories from English-speaking persons who are aged 65 or over and live in Finland, and from younger English-speaking persons who live in Finland and have older relatives living in other countries. Similar stories are collected from Finnish- and English-speaking people living in Belgium who are aged 65 or over or, who have older relatives living abroad from Belgium. The data

collection among the younger respondents specifically focuses on transnational families and care in times of the pandemic.

CoE AgeCare is open to collaboration with researchers who have collected, or have plans to collect, similar data in other countries. Please, contact our coordinator Emilia Leinonen ([emilia.a.leinonen@jyu.fi](mailto:emilia.a.leinonen@jyu.fi)).



## Existential concerns of older adults during Coronatimes

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Existential issues can be described as fundamental issues of human life such as what makes life worth living and how do I cope with the finality of my life. Difficulties to find answers on these questions can result in existential suffering and distress. Challenging situations, like the current COVID-19 pandemic and the social isolation might intensify existential concerns and distress, especially for older adults since they are a risk group for COVID-19 and are asked for thorough social isolation. This study will investigate whether existential concerns are more prominent for older adults during this pandemic compared to a matched-control pre-COVID19 group of older adults

In addition, this study will assess how these concerns are related to depressive symptoms during the pandemic and compare these findings with findings of a pre-COVID19 sample. The study is a cross-sectional questionnaire study (online survey) - data collection started at the 5th of May 2020 and is assessing community-dwelling older adults (65+) in Flanders.

*The study is registered at World Pandemic Research Network: <https://wprn.org/item/435752>*



## Experiences of the pandemic among marginal older people in Switzerland and the U.S.<sup>1</sup>

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In many countries, political authorities have instituted measures to contain COVID-19 and especially to protect so-called 'vulnerable' groups. These strategies target older people, based on the consideration that the risk of dying from COVID-19 is especially high for them. Our research aims to explore how people aged 65 and over experience these measures and the fact of being labelled as vulnerable. Based on fieldwork taking place in the Swiss Alps and in different regions of the U.S., it focuses in particular on older people who were already facing social and economic precarity prior to the pandemic, and whose daily lives are now also shaped by their belonging to an 'at risk' group in the context of the COVID-19.

We are conducting a series of 50 semi-structured interviews with marginalized older people. Some of them have limited access to the internet; in such cases, we contact them by phone. For others, interviews are done online (e.g., with Zoom). All interviews are

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<sup>1</sup> The authors thank the University of Applied Sciences and Arts HES-SO Valais, Switzerland for financing the Swiss part of this research.

recorded and anonymized. Finding respondents in this context is challenging, in part due to the pandemic. But in addition, it can be more difficult to construct the rapport and trust with marginalized groups that we need to conduct interviews successfully. Consequently, we are obtaining our respondents with the support of local social and care organizations and individuals who serve as intermediaries helping to facilitate contacts between scientists and possible interviewees, and explaining to the latter the aims of the research. By doing so, they reassure older people and motivate them to participate. During interviews, we discuss such topics as (1) how participants perceive the measures meant to protect older people from COVID-19; (2) how they experience physical isolation and the consequences for their social integration; (3) how they perceive the relaxation of certain measures as well as the use of apps aimed at tracing the population.

Preliminary results reveal that the measures aimed to protect older people from COVID-19 can reinforce the marginalization that some had experienced prior to the pandemic. Several factors likely influence this. For instance, we find that most of the Swiss interviewees rarely or never use new internet technologies, which restricts their access to information and limits their possibilities for maintaining contact with their families and friends. By contrast, a minority can navigate the web easily, and feel like this helps them to feel less lonely and more included in social life, because they can use those tools (e.g., Whatsapp, email or Skype) to chat in groups and share ideas. They can also access online services (e.g., libraries that lend books online or an online gym class) as well as information. We also find that the loneliness that many older people experience in this context and their feeling that they are particularly subject to restrictions can make them think that they need to behave differently based on their new, at-risk status, i.e. not appear in public spaces, even to get basic needs such as food. Sometimes, they interpret this situation as going beyond the context of the pandemic, and reflecting a broader rejection of older people by the rest of the society. Finally, we identify a tendency to 'reverse the risk'. Some interviewees understand the measures targeting older people to mean not that they are a 'person at risk' and therefore 'in danger', but instead that they are themselves 'dangerous people', i.e. they are an important vector of transmission. As a result, whilst our respondents generally find that the measures are needed, often, the fear of contaminating others is greater than their fear of being contaminated.



The Pontifical University  
of John Paul II  
in Krakow



## Global Ageing Research Partnership

**Global Ageing Research Partnership** project has been implemented at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow since December 2018. The project is a response to a need that arose among gerontologists, educators, sociologists, psychologists, demographers and other researchers of ageing processes, to analyze the methodological foundation of research on ageing in terms of its diversity and differences in objectives of individual studies. We may observe a gradual shift from treating ageing as a separate, complex phenomenon to greater generalizations in research on ageing. The phenomenon itself is highly topical, growing and, in case of the absence of strategic thinking, alarming from the economic, social, medical and political perspective. Diagnostic and forecasting studies always constitute groundwork for any strategies. Examination of the relevance of such research appears to be a key factor for developing effective strategies and ideas pertaining to ageing.

The aim of the project is to commence in-depth methodological consideration of standards and procedures, as well as the process of research on ageing of representatives of a wide circle of international specialists, who have extensive research experience and whose studies have been conducted in a variety of perspectives, cultures and circumstances.

The partnership consists of University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria (Austria), Jean Monnet University (France), University of Ottawa LIFE Research Institute (Canada), as well as Sau Po Center on Ageing, Hong Kong University (Hong Kong).

Thus far, as part of the project, the book entitled *Researching Ageing: Methodological Challenges and their Empirical Background*, Maria Łuszczynska (ed.) has been developed and will be published by Routledge – with the planned date of publication being July 2020. A methodological workshop has been conducted in Canada.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has forced the leader of the project to alter activities. All partners have collectively decided to make an attempt to present the reality of research

on ageing in the COVID-19 reality in a documentary that will be based on common ideas of the project partners and will be shot in the autumn and winter of 2020.

The main objective of the production of the documentary is to demonstrate the role and importance of research on ageing in an international perspective. The specific goals of this undertaking are as follows:

1. Presentation and consideration of the course of the future scientific output of particular partner countries against the backdrop of COVID-19.
2. Analysis of changes affecting the community of researchers and scientists worldwide, as a result of the sudden and unpredictable pandemic situation.
3. Development of a project output that may serve as promotional and educational materials for scientists, researchers, practitioners, decision makers and older adults themselves.
4. Sustaining the current international collaboration within the consortium, which was formed alongside the project and which will constitute a foundation for building new networks, coalitions, working groups and projects.
5. Inspiring authors pursuing their careers in the gerontological research to embark on further research projects.
6. Drawing attention of those who may have influence over social policies and actions for older adults, to research on ageing and its findings.

We are planning to make the film available to a wider audience by means of social media. The premiere of the documentary is planned for May 2021, at the International Conference – *Bringing to light methods in research ageing – international perspectives*, scheduled for 5-6 May 2021 in Krakow.

Except the film we are preparing the book "Ageing and COVID-19, which will be published in Routledge in 2021. Scholars from all over the world will show their perspective on how COVID-19 has influenced ageing studies and situation of older adults.

More details about the project and its activities can be found on the website <http://garp.upjp2.edu.pl> or at the email address: [maria.luszczynska@upjp2.edu.pl](mailto:maria.luszczynska@upjp2.edu.pl).

## **Health and support in times of the new corona virus. Pilot study**

**In times of the new corona virus, what does it mean to support others for example with hands-on-care? How do individuals in need of support cope with this new situation?**

These questions motivate a new pilot study at TU Dortmund to shed light on individual challenges as well as opportunities the COVID-19 pandemic brings. Based on quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews we aim to learn more about the changes in health and support systems experienced by middle aged and older Germans (40+). For example, we investigate to what extent individuals with health impairments experience changes in their access to and utilization of health care services, as well as receipt of support. Further, we explore how caregivers cope with the new situation and the challenges they face in their everyday lives when, for instance, support provided by professional services is unavailable. Last but not least, we want to assess social inequalities in the health and support systems of middle aged and older Germans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **What does the study cover?**

Between May and June 2020 we collect comprehensive information on the following aspects using quantitative online and telephone surveys targeted at Germans aged 40+ as well as structured expert interviews with senior service professionals:

- Information about the virus:
  - How well informed do the respondents feel about the new corona virus?
- Health care:
  - Do individuals refrain from necessary doctor visits or other health services?
- Support provided & received:
  - Are respondents still able to provide informal care? Do they perhaps help even more (i.e. neighbours, acquaintances)?

- Do respondents in need of support continue to receive enough support? If not, what are the main reasons for this lack of support?
- Loneliness & communication:
  - (To what extent) does the spread of the corona virus increase loneliness?
  - What is the role, if any, of new communication technologies (e.g. social media, or Skype)?
- Socio-demographic information:
  - To what degree do group specific differences, e.g. according to gender, age, education, health or migration background, exist?

Our results will be published as soon as possible, hopefully enabling better informed decisions about how to improve the living conditions of disadvantaged groups (e.g. people in need of care, caregivers) in this crisis.

### **Where can I get more information or even take part?**

The study is conducted both by Prof. Dr. Martina Brandt (quantitative survey) and Prof. Dr. Monika Reichert (qualitative interviews) and their teams at TU Dortmund. All information and news to the projects can also be found online at:  
[bit.ly/tu-do-alternde-gesellschaften-projekte](https://bit.ly/tu-do-alternde-gesellschaften-projekte)

### **Contact**

If you have any questions, please contact us at [coronastudie.sowi@tu-dortmund.de](mailto:coronastudie.sowi@tu-dortmund.de)



## Loneliness and social contact before and during the COVID-19 pandemic: Data from Switzerland

### **Funding body:**

State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) and the School of Social Work, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW). This project is associated with the National Innovation Network "Ageing in Society" (AGENT).

### **Research team and authors:**

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The current COVID-19 pandemic has limited in particular older adults from direct physical contact with others in society. Older adults comprise a group that is collectively considered to be highly vulnerable to COVID-19. They often suffer more throughout the course of the disease due to multimorbidity. Therefore, older adults with pre-existing conditions are encouraged to maintain physical distance from others during the pandemic. These behavioural changes will likely affect older adults' social contact and may also exacerbate their feelings of loneliness. However, despite the current pandemic being a global concern, research about the changes in social contact of older adults due to the pandemic is scarce. This kind of research would facilitate the understanding of older adults' subjective evaluation of physical distancing during the pandemic. To shed light on this research question, the research team behind the Swiss Survey65+ of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW) will utilise an existing and an ongoing survey.

The first data source for analysing the possible effects of the pandemic is based on the FHNW's national Survey65+, a representative Switzerland-wide survey focusing on older

adults' material, social and individual resources. The main research aim was to determine which pattern of resources is most helpful for an older adult living independently at home. From January to May 2020, 1,900 people aged 65 and older were interviewed using a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) approach supplemented by paper-and-pencil surveys. Of the sample (n=1,900), 57% were male and 43% were female, and the mean age was 73 years. Based on the media releases of the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health regarding the official response of the government to the COVID-19 pandemic, the sample was divided into the following four sub-groups based on the date the interview was conducted: a) from start of the survey (27 January 2020) until the 'call for special protection of older adults' (n=391), b) from this time to the Federal Council declaring an 'extraordinary situation' (n=582), c) from this time to the Federal Council deciding on a gradual easing of the shutdown (n = 757) and d) from this time until the end of data collection on 5 May 2020 (n=260). Initial analysis demonstrated that the subjective feeling of loneliness, determined by the loneliness scale created by de Jong Gierveld and van Tilburg (1999), increased from (a) to (c) and to some extent, stabilised during (d). Further analysis will follow, and the results will be subsequently published.

The second data source is a short and ongoing survey conducted in May and June. It was conducted within a Swiss Omnibus Survey using the CATI approach. Here, the target sample is 1,000 persons aged 50 and older living in the German- and French-speaking parts of Switzerland. The questionnaire includes questions about the retrospective evaluation of changes in social contact due to the pandemic, including personal contact and contact via telephone, letters or the Internet. This additional survey complements the Swiss Survey65+ by including information about the subjective evaluation of contact changes and changes to coping mechanisms in everyday life (e.g., mobility, food supplies and self-efficacy). Given that the survey is ongoing, the results will be communicated shortly after the data collection is completed.

## Older adults' representation and management of the risk of COVID-19: A qualitative study

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Compared to most Swiss Cantons, the number of fatalities related to COVID-19 has been significantly higher in the Canton of Ticino, which borders with the Lombardy region, Italy's epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak. Consequently, Ticino implemented stricter public health measures compared to the rest of the country. Furthermore, evidence suggests that information on the measures taken by the Italian authorities – which were introduced earlier and were not only more restrictive but also legally enforced compared to the rest of Switzerland – might have amplified the climate of uncertainty among the population. Public health measures were particularly stricter for older adults aged 65 or older who, similarly to those with chronic diseases and in poor health, are at higher risk for a serious course and complications from COVID-19. No evidence is available on what this unexpected "at risk" label has meant for older adults' identity and daily lives.

The present study aimed at qualitatively investigating how older adults reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic response measures and policies in Ticino since they were first introduced. Specific objectives included eliciting the impact of the current emergency on (1) participants' identity, (2) their relationship with the "other" and (3) their perceptions related to the future. The Ethics Committee of the Canton of Ticino issued a favorable opinion on the study (ID REQ-2020-00291).

We conducted a qualitative study through individual, remote interviews. We recruited a convenience sample of 16 participants from a database of contacts who previously took part in other qualitative studies carried out by the research team. Three additional participants were recruited through referral using a snowball sampling technique. We conducted all interviews over the phone and audio-taped them after obtaining participants' oral consent. Data collection took place between April 2 and May 13, 2020. The interviewer was a female research assistant who, at the moment of data collection, was undertaking her postgraduate training in cognitive psychology and had substantial experience in qualitative research. Debriefing between the interviewer and another, more experienced member of the research team took place shortly after each interview. Subsequently, we transcribed the interviews verbatim and the interviewer conducted a thematic analysis of the transcripts. Extensive discussion between the interviewer and two, more experienced members of the study team took place several times to refine the analysis and the labelling of study findings.

Interviews lasted between 16 and 120 minutes. Most participants were women ( $n = 12$ ), Swiss nationals ( $n = 14$ ), retired ( $n = 18$ ), resident in the Lugano district ( $n = 14$ ), and had obtained a secondary school degree ( $n = 14$ ). The average age was 75 ( $SD = 6.04$ ; range = 64 - 85). Most participants reported to be living alone ( $n = 12$ ) and in a flat ( $n = 14$ ). A preliminary analysis resulted in three themes: (1) a crisis of identity, (2) the other as a potential threat, and (3) the transformative power of the pandemic.

### 1. A crisis of identity

From the participant perspective, the pandemic has resulted in a crisis of identity, and has exposed them to new vulnerabilities. Some participants embraced their at-risk status, some completely rejected it, while others only partly accepted it.

### 2. The other as a potential threat

Participant perceived the other as a friend if a relationship were already in place, while perceived strangers as hypothetical transgressors of the COVID-19 preventive measures. Most participants reported that they followed the official recommendations to protect not only themselves but also others (such as children). By contrast, they felt that those who did not respect the measures were wronging them.

### 3. The transformative power of the pandemic

Participants reported that they had fears and concerns regarding the post-pandemic world. In particular, they perceived the pandemic as having the power to radically and permanently change relationship dynamics among people. Participants reported that a cold and disconnected world is waiting for them once the virus has stopped spreading.

With a strong focus on the mechanisms underpinning recommendations' acceptance and adherence, results will inform the adaptation of current and future outbreak response measures at a local level, aid in the development of future public health interventions and suggest tailored messages for effective disease prevention by public health authorities.

## Older People's Experiences of Solitary Home Confinement in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic



**A new research project, currently in progress in Portugal, led by** José de São José (University of Algarve-UAlg and CICS.NOVA, Portugal), together with colleagues Carla Amado (UAlg and CEFAGE-UAlg), Sérgio Santos (UAlg and CEFAGE-UAlg), Patrícia Coelho (UAlg) and Ana Teixeira (UAlg), in collaboration with Virpi Timonen (Trinity College Dublin, Ireland).

Home confinement of their citizens ("lockdown") was one of the key public health measures adopted in many countries around the world to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. The recommendation to "stay at home" was disseminated by health authorities and media. Home confinement as a public health measure to tackle pandemics is not new, as it was used in past pandemics (e.g. SARS, Ebola and Influenza H1N1). However, while in these past pandemics home confinement was recommended to those who were in contact with people confirmed (or suspected of being) infected, in this new pandemic, home confinement was, in many countries, recommended to the entire population. The older age group was subject to particularly strong recommendations regarding self-confinement. This prompted us to develop studies aimed at capturing the lived experience of home confinement in the context of this pandemic, particularly among older people who live alone. According to Eurostat data, in 2019, about 40% of single households in the European Union were composed by an older person.

The overall objective of this study is to understand, in-depth, the lived experience of solitary home confinement by older people in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. The specific research objectives are: (1) to understand the daily lives (and associated contexts)



of older people before home confinement; (2) to understand the daily lives (and associated contexts) of older people during home confinement; (3) to understand the changes in the lives of older people that resulted from home confinement, as well as the meanings and consequences of these changes; (4) to examine the extent to which the experience of solitary home confinement is shaped by gender, age, and educational level.

It is expected that this study will contribute to understanding the experience of solitary home confinement by older people, as well as to the discussion of public policy measures that can help prevent / mitigate potential negative impacts of this kind of confinement.

This is a qualitative study, currently in progress in Portugal, including an initial round of telephone semi-structured interviews, telephone diaries over a period of seven consecutive days, and a final round of telephone semi-structured interviews. The initial interviews and diaries have already been completed. The collected data will be analyzed according to the procedures of Framework Analysis.

The sample was gathered through a combination of convenience, snowballing and purposive sampling. It consists of 25 older people (aged 65 and over), men and women, living alone, with different ages and educational levels. At the time of the initial interviews and diaries, the participants were not diagnosed as being infected with COVID-19, were not in quarantine due to contact with someone infected with COVID-19 and had no acute symptoms of other diseases. Informed consent was obtained from all research participants.

The self-isolating requirement directed at older adults in particular (in some countries, termed 'cocooning') has sparked lively debate about its merits and disadvantages, and with the help of the empirical data that speaks to the experiences of older people themselves, we look forward to contributing to these conversations.

If you wish to get in touch with the project team, please email [jsjose@ualg.pt](mailto:jsjose@ualg.pt)

**This project is supported by:**

CICS.NOVA, CEFAGE-UAlg, Faro City Council and University of Algarve for the Third Age.

## **‘Standing together – at a distance’: documenting mental-health changes in Denmark during the COVID-19 pandemic**

On 27 February 2020, the first COVID-19 case was documented in Denmark; on 11 March, the Danish government and health authorities announced a lockdown of educational activities and many jobs. Legal sanctions were instituted against public gatherings of more than 10 people, and citizens were strongly encouraged to stay at home and maintain a physical distance of two metres from others. The official public-health recommendations emphasised protecting vulnerable people with an increased risk for severe outcomes: i.e., people age 65+ and people with immune-compromised and/or chronic illnesses (e.g., cardiometabolic or lung disease, diabetes type 1 and 2). The Danish government also negotiated elaborate economic-relief packages with labour unions and employer organisations to reduce financial anxiety.

The public-health recommendations and societal lockdown affected everyday life in Denmark as numerous employees suddenly worked from home, parents home-schooled their children, and many businesses were temporarily closed. Because both parents in many families work full-time, the lockdown of day-care institutions and schools in Denmark was expected to put considerable strain on families with children living at home. Although research has begun investigating Danes’ reactions to the so-called ‘corona crisis’, there is a lack of knowledge about how the chosen public-health measures impacted mental health. Specifically, how has the particular Danish combination of relative economic security, a lockdown of certain societal functions, and only partial restrictions on movement affected mental health?

To address this question, we established a research project **‘Standing together – at a distance: how Danes are living with the corona crisis’**. This project represents an

interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers at the University of Copenhagen's Department of Public Health, the Danish National Birth Cohort (DNBC), Steno Diabetes Center Copenhagen, and the Danish Diabetes Association. The project is based on two interrelated components: a series of timed online surveys and qualitative interviews to document the immediate effects of the Danish lockdown on mental health amongst different population groups. Alongside the data collection, we are also following the political initiatives being implemented to create timelines of the laws passed and the economic-relief packages.

The 'Standing together' project is documenting mental-health changes within three specific population groups in real-time: the general population, families with children living at home, and older people. As of 17 May, 11,494 people aged 18–87 have participated in the survey via our website, and we have conducted 32 interviews with people aged 24–83 (including many with chronic illnesses) from across Denmark. This data collection aims to investigate how both the lockdown and its related public-health measures have affected people's worries, quality of life, social isolation, relationships, and everyday behaviour.

Our preliminary results indicate that people living in Denmark have managed the COVID19 pandemic and its associated societal lockdown without alarming changes to their immediate levels of worry, quality of life, or social isolation. However, people expressed concern about their loved ones' health and the potential long-term socioeconomic consequences of the lockdown. Because such stressors can contribute to mental-health problems, it is important to closely follow changes in the population's mental health in the coming months. It is also necessary to investigate the implications of different lockdown strategies on mental health, and we hope that our data can contribute to future analyses of mental-health developments over time and across national contexts. The results of this study may also elucidate the long-term effects of the societal lockdown in Denmark, which may thereby inform governments and health authorities on how to more effectively manage both the current and future pandemics.

### **More about the project**

For more information about the interdisciplinary research project 'Standing together – at a distance: how Danes are living with the corona crisis' and details about our preliminary results, please visit our website: <https://coronaminds.ku.dk/english>

For access to the data collected in the project, please contact project leaders Naja Hulvej Rod ([nahuro@sund.ku.dk](mailto:nahuro@sund.ku.dk)) or Klaus Hoeyer ([klho@sund.ku.dk](mailto:klho@sund.ku.dk)). We welcome collaborations with both Danish and international research groups.



## Temporary suspension of visiting in nursing homes: Impact on loneliness, meaning in life, and health

**Team:** Meaning Research Late Life Team - Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences - KU Leuven – Belgium <https://dezutterjessie.wixsite.com/meaninginlatelife>

**Team PI:** prof. dr. Jessie Dezutter

**Team members:** Tine Schellekens, Laura Dewitte, Lindsay Desmet, Eva Buelens

In collaboration with several Flemish nursing homes and with approval of KU Leuven SMEC and ZorgnetIcuro

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We aim to investigate the impact of temporary suspension of visits due to the COVID19-crisis on feelings of loneliness, and on indicators of mental and physical health, namely depressive symptoms and subjective health status, in residents of nursing homes. We, furthermore, will assess whether specific social connectness-interventions implemented during the lockdown are effective in buffering for an increase in loneliness and depressive symptoms. A longitudinal quantitative study design is implemented with three waves: T1 during lock down, T2 when the suspension of visit is removed, T3 follow-up 6 months after T2. Data is gathered through an online Qualtrics survey. The survey is taken in a face-to-face assessment by nursing home personnel or in a skype-conversation by the PI.

*The study is registered at World Pandemic Research Network: <https://wprn.org/item/435652>*

## The consequences of quarantine and social distancing on older people living in the first European “Red Zone”

### Funding body

Fondazione Cariplo

### Research team

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As part of the two-year “Aging in a networked society. Older people, social networks and well-being” project, the study “The consequences of quarantine and social distancing on older people living in the first European “Red Zone” aims to shed light on the changes occurred in older people’s everyday life during the weeks of the lockdown in terms of isolation, social ties and the use of technology. The study is conducted in the first European “Red Zone”, the area located in the Southern part of Milan, in Italy.

According to Eurostat (2019), Italy detains the highest rate of older people within Europe. Moreover, its Southern welfare regime is tied within a familistic social structure, where the lack of public services designates a crucial role to informal and intergenerational ties (Ferrera 1996; Esping-Andersen 1999). When the first case of Covid-19 was identified in Northern Italy on february the 21st, Lombardy in particular was hit dramatically by the spread of the pandemic. The South of the region experienced a *de facto* quarantine, thus

becoming the first 'Red Zone' in Europe. Based on the John Hopkins University analysis, within this part of Italy, its wealthiest area, the community transmission of the virus was at its highest. The first Red Zone in Europe is thus a unique key study in order to examine the social consequences of containment measures and social distancing on older people's wellbeing.

Indeed, Covid-19 might have had a strong impact on older people's social isolation and loneliness. The first weeks of the lockdown resulted in a sudden change in everyday relations and activities. On the one hand, it could have increased older people's risk of exclusion. On the other hand, those who never experienced the lack of social participation before were challenged by the loneliness that may be experienced at older ages. According to the literature, the lack of social ties is more linked to Southern and familistic welfare system, such as Italy (Nygqvist et al. 2019). However, there is also evidence in support of the emerging role played by social technologies in reducing loneliness and isolation in older adults (Chopik 2016). From these premises, social technologies may have been employed as additional resources to face the social consequences caused by the quarantine.

The overall aim of the study is to explore the consequences of social distancing and throw light on the resources older people activated to face the lockdown. Specifically, we explore the changes in older people's everyday life, especially with respect to the sudden lack of social activities; we investigate the role of social technologies in fostering older people's social ties; we also want to throw light on the inter and intra generational support in stimulating positive attitudes towards social technologies.

The study is conducted on a purposive sample of 40 interviews (30 interviews collected so far) on older men and women aged 65 and over, living in the 10 municipalities belonging to Italy's first Covid-19 'Red Zone', that are located in the province of Lodi (southern part of Milan). Study participants were identified through a recruitment process involving the support of local communities (e.g., voluntary associations) and local institutions. Due to the government restrictions, the interviews are carried out using innovative methodologies for investigating older people, such as video-calls (e.g., Whatsapp, Google Meet, Skype). In carrying out the study, we developed methodological protocols specifically targeted at older people, involving recruitment, data collection and informed consent. The data collection started at the beginning of May 2020; the study is ongoing and is expected to finish at the end of June.



## More about the project

<https://aginginanetworkedsociety.wordpress.com/>

<https://www.researchgate.net/project/Aging-in-a-networked-society-Older-people-social-networks-and-well-being>

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## Call for papers: Frontiers



### Research Topic

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19): Socio-Economic Systems in the Post-Pandemic World: Design Thinking, Strategic Planning, Management, and Public Policy

### Go to [www](https://www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/13913/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-socio-economic-systems-in-the-post-pandemic-world-design-thinking-strat)

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### Submission Deadlines

- 31 August 2020 – Abstract
- 15 November 2020 - Manuscript

### Participating Journals

Manuscripts can be submitted to this Research Topic via the following journals:

- Frontiers in Sociology: Sociological Theory
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- Frontiers in Psychology: Organizational Psychology (Impact Factor 2018: 2.129)
- Frontiers in Education: Educational Psychology
- Frontiers in Built Environment: Transportation and Transit Systems
- Frontiers in Applied Mathematics and Statistics: Dynamical Systems
- Frontiers in Communication: Organizational Psychology
- Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems: Social Movements, Institutions and Governance

*\*\*\*Due to the exceptional nature of the COVID-19 situation, Frontiers is waiving all article publishing charges for COVID-19 related research works.\*\*\**

## Another 8 Miles: Completing a PhD during a pandemic

### Elyse Couch

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PhD topic is investigating the benefits of diagnosing  
dementia early

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Every four months, I complete a progress report for my PhD. I review the targets from the previous four months, and set targets for the next four. In February of this year, I set targets to take me through to the start of June. I hoped to complete the majority of recruitment and data collection for an interview study with people living with dementia. For the question "Do you anticipate any potential issues/problems which may hinder progress?" I answered: "none foreseen." It is now June and my study has been suspended. I had recruited and interviewed just one participant. If doing a PhD is a marathon, then completing a PhD during a pandemic is like being at mile 17 and finding out you have an extra 8 miles to run that you did not anticipate.

I felt like I had been sent back to the start of the race, like every step I had already taken did not count and I needed to find a new route to the finish line. My usual support network had disappeared. I could no longer see my colleagues, who provide so much encouragement, one of my advisors had been redeployed to front line clinical services, and I moved out of my home in London and back in with my parents in Oxford. Another blow was delivered earlier this week when the full extension I applied for was not granted. Being separated from my academic support network is difficult. While I am incredibly grateful to be surrounded by family members who are loving and supportive, they do not understand the race I am running, or even why I am doing it.

Before the pandemic, other academics, other PhD students felt like competition. Only one of us could win the race/ job/ fellowship/ publication in a high impact journal. But in these

difficult times, it is my fellow academics who have kept me going. A writing group of PhD students from different institutions, some of whom I had never met, helped me transition into remote working when the doors to our university buildings were closed. My office mate, a fellow PhD student, and I check on each other every day to stay motivated. My supervisor has offered me new opportunities to progress my career under lockdown. Even strangers on Twitter have shown me kindness. I posted a tweet asking if there were any existing qualitative datasets I could use for my PhD. The response was so heartening. I received a lot of helpful suggestions and people were more willing than I could've imagined to share their hard earned data.

I have thought a lot about the end of the race and what I want to do when I have finished my PhD. Before the pandemic, I had started to feel that I wanted to move on from the constant battle of an academic career. However, if the spirit of collaboration rather than competition this pandemic has fostered remains, I might be persuaded to stay. This feels like an opportunity to reset the way we work in the future.

But for right now, take care of yourselves and take care of your peers. I have recalibrated my pace to account for the for the extra 8 miles to the finish line. I will get there in the same way as before: one step at a time.



## Network

We are an association of researchers who are interested in ageing. We aim to facilitate contacts and collaboration among these researchers, and to provide them with up-to-date information. To reach these goals, we organize conferences and workshops, produce a newsletter, and maintain an email list. Because we are part of the European Sociological Association (ESA), many of our members work in sociology. However, we also have members who work in, for example, social policy or psychology.

Visit our homepage, where you can find information on all of our activities. If you have any questions or you want to contribute to the Newsletter, do not hesitate to **CONTACT US!**

<http://www.ageing-in-europe.net/contact.html>



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