Mental Health Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Older Adults

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Abstract

Significant psychological effects such as anxiety, depression, stress, and loneliness are shown to affect the older adult population, individuals aged 65 years and older. The social isolation and disconnectedness related to the COVID-19 pandemic potentially worsens anxious and depressive feelings, increasing the risk for adverse outcomes in the high-risk older adult population. This project aimed to identify older adult patients at risk for acute, situational mental health issues associated with the pandemic.

A descriptive study design was used. Telephone interviews were conducted to explore effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health responses in older adults. A convenience sample of eight older adult patients and a purposive sample of one key informant were interviewed using open-ended, literature-based questions. Data were analyzed and coded into seven main themes: family, socialization, anxiety, loneliness, concern for others, the future, and benefits of the pandemic. Overall, the sample population of older adults did not experience any clinically relevant mental health effects (i.e., isolation, loneliness, depression, or anxiety) as a result of the pandemic. No notable challenges were voiced.

Older adults in this project did not experience disruptive life changes as a result of the pandemic restrictions. Rather, mental health protective factors (i.e., financial stability, good health, adequate social support, and health insurance coverage with routine medical care) potentially shielded patients from pandemic-related adverse mental health outcomes. Further refinement of these factors in a larger population is warranted to guide providers in strategies to assess possible mental health issues in the older adult population.

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