The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased strains on the rapidly increasing aging population’s mental, emotional, and physiological health. COVID-19, which belongs to a family of respiratory viruses, was first detected in China before spreading to other parts of the globe. Due to underlying health conditions and weakened immune systems, the aging population is at greater risk for contracting COVID-19. To better prepare for a future pandemic, it is necessary to explore the psychosocial impacts of limited human interactions to make the aging population feel safer while mitigating harm to their mental and emotional health. The purpose of this study is to highlight the experiences of the aging population with COVID-19, including psychosocial, behavioral responses to the pandemic, and older adults’ overall well-being.

We surveyed a total of 203 adults 55 and older regarding their experiences with the pandemic. Survey components included the COVID-19 Household Environment Scale (Behar-Zusman, Chavez, & Gattamorta, ND), the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978). Preliminary analyses indicate that most participants had not experienced any COVID-19 symptoms, nor did they know anyone who had passed away from the virus. However, participants did report loneliness and less family cohesion because of the pandemic. Findings from this study will be used to help older adults cope with the impact of the current pandemic and future pandemics.

OLDER AGE AND OTHER PROTECTIVE FACTORS OF MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE US

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Research conducted early in the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., March 2020) suggested that older adults were less likely to experience negative pandemic-related mental health than younger people. We investigated whether this age-related advantage persisted during the July 2020 spike in COVID-19 cases and investigated links between coping strategies and mental health. We used data from the Understanding America Study (UAS) to conduct a secondary data analysis of participants (N = 5,753) aged 18-110 years (M=46.20, SD=12.88) who completed online self-report surveys twice—one immediately prior to the July spike in cases, and again during the spike. Surveys assessed engagement in protective behaviors (e.g., wearing a mask, washing hands), coping strategies (e.g., calling family/friends, getting extra exercise, meditating), and anxiety and depressive symptoms (using the Patient Health Questionnaire PHQ-4). Multiple regression analyses were used to identify predictors of anxiety and depression during the spike, controlling for previous anxiety and depression, race, ethnicity, income, education, and marital status. Older age and engaging in protective behaviors were associated with less anxiety, whereas coping by calling family/friends was associated with more symptoms, R^2 = .71, F(16, 5736) = 885.90, p < .001. Coping by calling and getting extra exercise were associated with fewer depressive symptoms, whereas coping by using social media was associated with more symptoms, R^2 = .72, F(16, 5736) = 906.65, p < .001. These findings highlight age as a protective factor for anxiety but not for depression and underscore the importance of social support as a protective factor for mental health.

ONLINE LEISURE ACTIVITIES FOR SUSTAINED MENTAL HEALTH WELL-BEING IN OLDER ADULTS WITH COVID-19 MITIGATION

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Older adults (OA) experience psychosocial distress from the COVID-19 pandemic mitigations. While their participation in leisure and recreation activities (LRA) would be ameliorating, we do not know how LRA OA engages for their mental health (MH) well-being with COVID-19 mitigation. This scoping review aimed to trend the evidence on the types of LRA OA engage for their MH well-being across the young-old continuum (60-69 years) through to older-old (80 years and above) in the COVID-19 pandemic. We searched the following electronic databases (PubMed, Embase, CINAHL, Cochrane, JBI-ES, and Epistemonikos for LRA studies by OA with COVID-19 mitigation. To be included, we considered empirical articles published in English on LRA of OA 55+ years-old. Another criterion required articles describing those activities’ qualities and the impact of LRA on MH and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. We resulted in seven empirical studies, two of which implemented in the USA and one from the USA and Canada, Spain, Israel, and Japan. Findings following narrative synthesis revealed trending evidence on OA to engage in online LRA for social, cognitive/intellectual, and emotional health. Leisure-time physical activity reduced negative MH symptoms as anxiety and depression in OA under COVID-19 threat. In conclusion, the present review’s trending evidence suggests that OA engagement in social, physical, mental, and cognitive LRA enhanced their MH and overall well-being. Activities delivered by way of the Internet and television provided a cluster of beneficial opportunities for the OA mental health needs under the COVID-19 pandemic.

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON OLDER ADULTS’ MENTAL HEALTH AND BARRIERS TO MENTAL HEALTH CARE

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COVID-19 disproportionately impacted older adults in terms of fatalities, but also increased stress, isolation, and loneliness (Chen, 2020). We examined older adults’ anxiety, depression, and barriers to mental healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic and their perceptions of these variables prior to the pandemic. Further, we explored whether any perceived changes differed based on geographical location (rural, suburban, urban). Data were collected online between mid-June and mid-July of 2020 from 244 individuals aged 65-82 years (M=68.3, SD=3.5). The sample was primarily White (91%) and female (60%); most (n=119) lived in suburban settings, with 63 in urban and 60 in rural settings.
PERSONALITY AND CHANGE IN PERCEIVED CONTROL ACROSS THE FIRST FOUR MONTHS OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

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Objective: This study examined change in perceived control (PC) across the first four months of the global coronavirus pandemic and whether change varied significantly by age and personality traits during the first four months of the pandemic.

Methods: Personality was assessed prior to the pandemic in a large national sample of 2,455 American adults (18-100 years) from a preregistered online survey (https://osf.io/q8cpd), first conducted between January 31, 2020 and February 10, 2020. Three additional follow-up waves were conducted: mid-March 2020 (following the World Health Organization declaration of the coronavirus pandemic), late April 2020 (toward the end of the White House’s 30 Days to Slow the Spread guidance), and late July 2020 (when patient deaths in the U.S. reached 132,918). PC was assessed in Waves 2-4.

Results: There were age differences in the trajectory of PC such that PC increase for middle-aged and older adults, whereas younger adults had lower PC and did not increase over the follow-ups. All personality traits but Openness were associated with PC at the first assessment. Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Agreeableness positively predicted PC change over time. The association between Conscientiousness and Extraversion and increased PC over time was stronger at older ages.

Conclusion: Pre-pandemic personality predicted PC and PC change during the first four months of the pandemic, with middle-aged and older adults showing better adaption than younger adults. This study provides new evidence for PC change and associations between personality and PC during the COVID-19 pandemic.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, SOCIAL SUPPORT, AND MOOD IN OLDER ADULTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Research shows that increased physical activity is associated with improved mood and reduced symptoms of depression in older adults. Prior research has also found that loneliness and social isolation have a significant impact on the mental and physical well-being of older adults, with higher levels of social connectedness and social activity associated with positive mood states. Older adults, whereas younger adults had lower PC and did not increase over the follow-ups. All personality traits but Openness were associated with PC at the first assessment. Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Agreeableness positively predicted PC change over time. The association between Conscientiousness and Extraversion and increased PC over time was stronger at older ages.

Conclusion: Pre-pandemic personality predicted PC and PC change during the first four months of the pandemic, with middle-aged and older adults showing better adaption than younger adults. This study provides new evidence for PC change and associations between personality and PC during the COVID-19 pandemic.

PROTECTIVE AND RISK FACTORS OF DEPRESSION AMONG OLDER ADULTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic adversely impacted the mental health of older adults. This study aims to explore the associations between protective/risk factors of depression during the pandemic and to examine the differences in these associations by marital status. Data from the Health and Retirement Study 2020 COVID-19 module, released in February, 2021, were used. The level of resilience during the pandemic was selected as a protective factor. The level of COVID-19 pandemic concern was selected as a risk factor. Among older adults aged 51 years and older, the weighted regression model found that higher levels of COVID-19 concern were associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms (p<0.05), whereas higher levels of resilience were associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms (p<0.05). Marital status moderated the association between COVID-19 concern and depressive symptoms. Never-married people were at higher risk of depressive symptoms than married people when COVID-19 concerns increased. It is important to enhance support for never-married