

Seniors struggle with anxiety when personal needs not met

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Credit: University of Michigan

Older adults who struggle with dressing, bathing and preparing meals, but don't get the help they need, may experience high levels of anxiety that can lead to adverse consequences, such as wearing soiled clothes or going hungry.

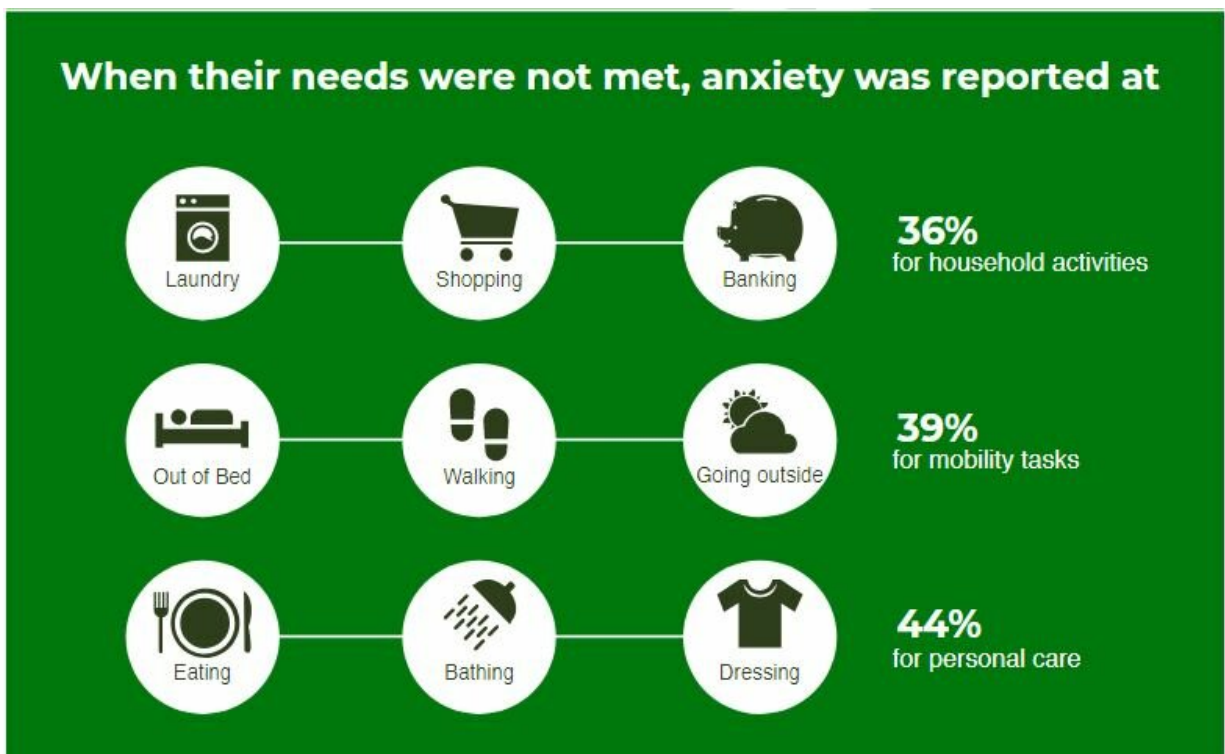
A new study by University of Michigan researchers tracked the behavior of [older adults](#) whose needs were not handled properly, leading to elevated anxiety symptoms. This created "a [vicious cycle](#) that may lower the quality of life of older adults," said Xiaoling Xiang, the study's co-author and assistant professor of social work.

"Our findings reinforce the notion that needs for [mental health services](#) and community-based long-term services and supports are interconnected," she said.

Data came from the National Health and Aging Trends Study, collected from 2011 to 2016. The sample involved 3,936 Medicare beneficiaries with activity limitations at age 65 and older.

The relationship between anxiety and unmet needs for personal assistance may or may not differ across age groups. The sheer number of older adults with disabilities and who are at risk of having unmet needs makes this an important public health issue, Xiang said.

In fact, the numbers may be larger than what the study reported. Since the collected data had been self-reported, some people might not have disclosed everything happening in their lives.



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"Adverse consequences due to unmet needs may be underreported because of feelings of shame and embarrassment, particularly in a society that values self-sufficiency," said lead author Ashley Zuverink, a U-M alumna who is now with the Detroit Health Department.

Researchers note that doctors and other health care providers working with older adults may consider screening for anxiety and other mental health symptoms. In addition, these experts can factor the patients' mental health status when devising plans for long-term services and supports.

More information: Ashley Zuverink et al. Anxiety and Unmet Needs for Assistance With Daily Activities Among Older Adults, *Journal of Aging and Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0898264319830805](https://doi.org/10.1177/0898264319830805)

Provided by University of Michigan

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