

Household factors may exacerbate COVID-19 health risks

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Household factors such as access to outdoor space, overcrowding as well as financial and employment precarities make some households significantly more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19, according to a new study carried out at the University of St Andrews.

Researchers found certain types of households were particularly at risk of both short and long-term socio-economic or [health problems](#) and that existing health and [economic inequalities](#) could be exacerbated by the virus.

The study examined data from around 19,500 households from a cross section of society across the UK. Researchers used multiple household-level indicators and principal components analysis to derive the different dimensions of household vulnerabilities which are critical during the COVID-19 epidemic: health, employment, housing, financial and digital.

Although COVID-19 health risks are concentrated in retirement-age households, the team found a substantial proportion of working-age households also face these risks.

Different types of households exhibit different vulnerabilities, with working-age households more likely to face financial, housing and employment precarities, and retirement-age households health and digital vulnerabilities.

The researchers also found that there are area-level differences in the distribution of vulnerabilities across England and the constituent countries of the United Kingdom.

Households in London and Scotland were more vulnerable to digital and housing precarities than other regions of the UK, and those in Northern Ireland more likely to be vulnerable to financial precarities.

One of the lead authors, Dr. Katherine Keenan of the Population and Health Research Group in the School of Geography and Sustainable Development at the University of St Andrews, said: "The findings imply that the short and long-term consequences of the COVID-19 crisis are likely to vary by household type.

"Policy measures that aim to mitigate the health and socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic should consider how vulnerabilities cluster together across different household types, and how these may exacerbate already existing inequalities."

Joint lead author, Dr. Julia Mikolai, also of the Population and Health Research Group, added: "Taken together, the findings suggest that policy measures that aim to mitigate the adverse effects of COVID-19 should not only consider health vulnerabilities at the individual level, but also household structure and household-level disadvantages such as poor housing conditions, economic insecurity, and no access to modern technology."

More information: Julia Mikolai et al. Household level health and socio-economic vulnerabilities and the COVID-19 crisis: An analysis from the UK, (2020). [DOI: 10.31235/osf.io/4wtz8](https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/4wtz8)

Provided by University of St Andrews

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