

New research reveals challenges faced by older people during pandemic

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A new report launched today by The University of Manchester's Institute

for Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA) has revealed the challenges faced during the coronavirus pandemic by people aged 50 and over, especially those living in deprived areas.

The research—funded by Manchester City Council, the Center for Ageing Better and the National Lottery Community Fund's Ageing Better Programme—was designed to learn about the pandemic's impact on the everyday lives of older people, to examine the activities of community organizations working on their behalf, and to assist the local authorities and NGOs who work with them.

Many of those interviewed spoke of the challenges and difficulties experienced during the lockdown. Physical deterioration was reported—especially as a result of restricted mobility and lack of exercise—and [mental health](#) deteriorated in some cases through the effects of losing relatives, lack of contact with friends and family, the impact of shielding, and lack of access to meeting places.

Social isolation increased for some groups, for example single men living alone, and some South Asian women who had increased responsibilities for care in the home but less support as a result of social distancing. Digital exclusion was a factor in increasing [social isolation](#) for many of those interviewed.

The research found that older people worked within their communities to support others during the pandemic—as well as supporting themselves and their families—by befriending and volunteering, adapting to digital technology, drawing on their own lifelong interests and activities; accessing green spaces in the community and drawing on their religious faith and beliefs.

Organizations across Greater Manchester have played a key role in developing new forms of support to older people in the pandemic,

including providing welfare support, food distribution, IT assistance, telephone befriending, bereavement counseling, mental health and wellbeing support.

The report underlines the importance of developing a 'community-centered' approach in COVID-19 recovery planning, an essential part of which will be ensuring that the views of older people take center stage. This must also be embedded in tackling systemic discrimination affecting different groups within society, as the pandemic has exposed and exacerbated longstanding inequalities affecting ethnic minority groups across GM.

Working within neighborhoods is especially important given the possibility of continued unequal vaccination levels between different social and ethnic groups. This may give rise to localized epidemics amongst those communities most at risk of serious disease and death, extending the inequalities exposed by the pandemic during its initial and subsequent waves.

The research confirmed significant variations within the older population, especially in respect of adjusting to life after lockdown—these and other dimensions will need to be incorporated into new approaches and methods in developing a GM Age-Friendly Region post-pandemic.

"Our research has identified a range of challenges and responses from older people during the [pandemic](#), and a series of recommendations for policymakers and practitioners across the Greater Manchester region. It will be vital to strengthen the community organizations around which the response to COVID-19 has been built—despite their many successes, they are likely to need a commitment for additional funding to survive or meet the range of needs which are likely to emerge after three successive lockdowns." said Professor Chris Phillipson, the report's lead author

from The University of Manchester.

Provided by University of Manchester

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