

Pandemic depression persists among older adults, study finds

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health of older people living in the community, with those who are lonely faring far worse, according to new research from McMaster

University.

Using data from the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA), a national team of researchers found that 43% of adults aged 50 or older experienced moderate or high levels of depressive symptoms at the beginning of the COVID-19 [pandemic](#), and that increased over time.

Loneliness was the most significant predictor of worsening depressive symptoms, with other pandemic-related stressors, such as family conflict, also increasing the odds.

The study was published in the journal *Nature Aging* today.

The research was led by Parminder Raina, a professor in the Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact and scientific director of the McMaster Institute for Research on Aging.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionated impact on older adults, with groups of people who were already marginalized feeling a far greater negative impact," said Raina, lead principal investigator of the CLSA.

"Those who were socially isolated, experiencing poorer health and of lower socioeconomic status were more likely to have worsening depression as compared to their pre-pandemic depression status collected as part of the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging since 2011."

The research team included CLSA principal investigators Christina Wolfson of McGill University, Susan Kirkland of Dalhousie University, Lauren Griffith of McMaster, along with a national team of investigators.

They used telephone and web survey data to examine how health-related factors and [social determinants](#) such as income and social participation, impacted the prevalence of depressive symptoms during the initial lockdown starting March 2020 and after re-opening following the first wave of COVID-19 in Canada.

Caregiving responsibilities, separation from family, family conflict, and loneliness were associated with a greater likelihood of moderate or high levels of depressive symptoms that got worse over time.

Women were also more likely to have higher odds of depressive symptoms during the pandemic compared to men, and a greater number of women reported separation from family, increased time caregiving as well as barriers to caregiving.

Overall, older adults had twice the odds of [depressive symptoms](#) during the pandemic compared to pre-pandemic. But those with lower income and poorer health, either due to pre-existing health conditions or health concerns reported during the pandemic, experienced a greater impact.

"These findings suggest the negative mental health impacts of the pandemic persist and may worsen over time and underscores the need for tailored interventions to address pandemic stressors and alleviate their impact on the mental health of older adults," Raina added.

The findings mark the first published COVID-19 research emerging from the CLSA, a national research platform on aging involving more than 50,000 community-dwelling middle-aged and [older adults](#) at recruitment. The platform is funded by the Government of Canada through and Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Canada Foundation for Innovation.

More information: Parminder Raina, A longitudinal analysis of the

impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of middle-aged and older adults from the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging, *Nature Aging* (2021). [DOI: 10.1038/s43587-021-00128-1](https://doi.org/10.1038/s43587-021-00128-1).
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