

During COVID-19 lockdown, emotional well-being declined for adults with vision, hearing loss

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Older individuals with sensory impairment suffered from lack of social interactions during pandemic. Credit: Peggy Nelson

During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, many assisted living and senior center facilities were forced to close their doors to outside visitors to limit potential exposure to the virus. While it was a step to

keep the older residents physically healthy, those with sensory impairment found the isolation created mental and emotional issues.

Peggy Nelson, of the University of Minnesota, will outline the impacts in her presentation, "COVID-19 effects on [social isolation](#) for [older persons](#) with [sensory loss](#)," at the 181st Meeting of the Acoustical Society of America, which will be held from Nov. 29 to Dec. 3. The session will take place Wednesday, Dec. 1, at the Hyatt Regency Seattle.

Nelson and her team surveyed three groups of older adults from the Twin Cities community: people with [vision loss](#), people with hearing loss, and people without either condition. They asked the participants about their worries, well-being, and social isolation at six-week intervals from April 2020 to July 2021. The period corresponded to strict lockdowns in Minnesota, with some restrictions easing toward the end of the study.

All three groups of adults scored lower on a patient health questionnaire after the pandemic began. Additionally, people with vision or hearing loss faced unique problems.

"People with low vision were really hit hard," said Nelson. "Their whole mobility systems are built around public transportation and being around other people."

Masks made conversations especially difficult for adults with hearing loss, leading them to prefer virtual options for health care visits, among other scenarios. However, the overall quieter environment during stay-at-home orders may have compensated for some of the negative effects.

While Moore said the changes brought by the pandemic often led to a loss of independence for impaired adults, some solutions may be within reach.

"We'll hopefully find a new hybrid world," she said. "People with low vision can be close to other people as needed, and people with hearing loss can have [remote access](#) to clear communication when masks would prevent that."

More information: acousticalsociety.org/asa-meetings/

Provided by Acoustical Society of America

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