

# Diary entries reveal emotional toll of lockdowns on older Australians

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Lonely older Australians experienced immense emotional suffering, suicidal thoughts and felt rejected by society during the pandemic, a study led by Monash University has revealed.

"Pandemic diaries: lived experiences of [loneliness](#), loss, and hope among older adults during COVID-19," published in *The Gerontologist*, is based on diaries completed by 32 [older adults](#) during the arduous Victorian

lockdowns in mid to late 2020.

It provides a snapshot of the impact of stay-at-home orders on already lonely older Australians, with participants recording and sharing their perceptions and experiences twice daily.

Lead researcher, Monash University's Dr. Barbara Barbosa Neves, said lockdowns exacerbated loneliness for study participants, presented new triggers and upended their usual coping strategies.

"Diary entries mentioned frequent crying, distress, sadness and anguish, with many reporting feeling devalued, unimportant and purposeless," Dr. Barbosa Neves said.

"Their [close relationships](#) were affected and previous coping mechanisms such as volunteering or going on outings were discontinued, interrupting their social lives and making activities such as shopping for essentials of importance as they provided socialization opportunities."

Some participants included entries about passive suicidal ideation and withdrawing from life. Most blamed themselves for not being more interesting or more proactive in making friends, or for being introverted or lazy.

All did not want to burden their families and communities, preferring to endure loneliness in silence.

Participants were both men and women and were aged between 69–96. Of the group, six were based in regional Victoria, which was under slightly looser restrictions than metropolitan Melbourne at the time.

Many reported how loneliness permeated their entire day instead of moments as it had previously, and their homes became a space of

confinement and imprisonment.

Some reported using digital technologies to maintain [social connections](#), but several found it superficial and ultimately increased their sense of disconnection and loneliness.

Others were unwilling to use or depend on [digital technology](#) or felt intimidated by it with no assistance to learn how to use it.

"The [social stigma](#) of acknowledging loneliness tangled with the stigma of being old, and in many cases, frail, was akin to personal failure for some participants," Dr. Barbosa Neves said.

"They struggled with a compromised sense of personhood and identity."

Researchers said understanding lived experiences of prolonged loneliness in later life was essential to help inform an inclusive post-pandemic recovery that does not forget lonely older Australians.

"We must understand how lonely older people live through and manage their loneliness if we want a society that does not further marginalize those who already feel at the margins," Dr. Barbosa Neves said.

She added that addressing the stigma of loneliness in later life was key ahead of developing programs and interventions to alleviate it.

**More information:** Barbara Barbosa Neves et al, Pandemic diaries: lived experiences of loneliness, loss, and hope among older adults during COVID-19, *The Gerontologist* (2022). [DOI: 10.1093/geront/gnac104](https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnac104)

Provided by Monash University

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