

CRISIS – Correlates of Resilience in the context of Social Isolation of Seniors

FIRST REPORT

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Project Duration: 6 months

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THE CRISIS STUDY

In the current COVID-19 crisis, older adults are at particular risk for severe health outcomes and increased mortality. From the start, efforts were made to shield them from exposure to the virus to prevent contraction. Whereas it is of prime importance to raise public awareness that older people are exposed to a higher risk, and a reduction of in-person contact necessary to protect vulnerable groups, the secondary effects of these measures and their communication to the public must be considered. Several position papers raised concern on the secondary impacts of protective strategies and policies on older adults' subjective well-being, mental health and further development (EFPA SC GeroPsychology; ROSEnet COST Action CA15122). This was the starting point of the present project. By giving a voice to the older people themselves, we focused on how the Covid-19 crisis as well as related measures are experienced by those concerned.

Aims of the Study and Research Questions

CRISIS tackles the question how COVID-related safety measures and their communication to the public are experienced by adults 60+ in Luxembourg. Examining psychological and behavioral correlates/outcomes, we focus on the following questions:

- 1) How are claims of being a risk group and COVID-19 related ageing stereotypes incorporated into views of the self and the perception of others and how are these related to psychological and behavioral consequences, e.g. regarding the experience of self-efficacy and agency?
- 2) How is subjective risk experienced and how do older people commit to protective measures and guidelines, also in relation to their views of themselves as person at risk?
- 3) How can the risk of social isolation and loneliness be reduced? This includes the availability of appropriate information and communication channels.
- 4) What are resilience factors that protect older adults from negative mental health outcomes and help to maintain subjective well-being?

Methodology

The present study targeted the population 60+ in Luxemburg, comparing younger old (60-69 years), mid-old (70-79 years) and older old adults (80+ years), living independently and in residential settings. We have assessed two time-points to explore processes and detect possible mid-/ long-term effects.

- A quantitative survey (about 15 minutes) with two measurement points (first wave in June, $N = 611$; second wave in September/October, $N = 520$) using online and telephone interview techniques with independently living older people, was carried out by TNS-Ilres.
- Interviews with $N = 84$ residents of 3 selected CIPAs (Centre Intégré pour Personnes Âgées = retirement homes) were conducted using a shortened questionnaire version.
- In addition, we carried out $N = 6$ qualitative in-depth interviews with CIPA directors and care personnel.

This present summary focusses on the results of the first data collection wave (June 2020) with independently living persons 60+, carried out by TNS-Ilres.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Most participants (90.8%) agreed that older people are at a particular risk concerning the Coronavirus and must be protected.**
- **Older people in Luxembourg are mostly satisfied with the countries' response to the pandemic.**
Most respondents felt
 - well informed about the Coronavirus (94.6%),
 - were of the opinion that Luxembourg has reacted well to the virus (95.9%) and
 - that the government put all possible measures into action to fight the virus (93.3%).
 - Just under a third (30.3%) considered the measures to be excessive.
- **Risk for contracting the virus is perceived as rather low.**
 - Only about a quarter of respondents (27%) considered it likely to personally contract the virus.
 - However, half of the participants (50%) considered it likely to develop a serious condition if they contracted the virus.
- **Worries were mostly related to the country's economy and loved ones becoming infected.** A majority expressed worries about the country's economic future (77.6%),
 - but most of respondents were not worried about their personal financial situation (80.9%).
 - Less than half of the participants responded that they are afraid of becoming sick with Covid-19 (42.9%),
 - but many—especially the young and mid-old participants--were worried about their loved ones getting sick with the virus (72%).
- **Activities were still reduced after restrictions of the first wave of the pandemic were eased.** This was true mostly for cultural events (72.8%), but also for social activities (40.4%) and about a fifth of respondents reported to continue keeping medical visits or related activities (e.g. physiotherapy) reduced. The reasons for doing so varied from,
 - protection for themselves from infection (79.1%) or
 - to protect others from infection (54.8%), or
 - to oblige with Government demands (29.3%).

- **Meetings were moved to the outside.** Most participants, especially the youngest age group, tried to meet other people as often as possible outside (67.6%), while 70% indicated that they tried to avoid meeting people inside.
- **About a fifth of participants reported at least some age discrimination.** In media coverage, medical care and everyday life, the feeling of being unfairly treated due to their age was higher compared to social relations with family and friends.
- **Most participants did not feel lonely during the pandemic, but missed company.** Most notably, the lack of togetherness was reported to weigh heaviest in the total sample (a large number of respondents felt to lack company at least sometimes (40.5%) or even (very) often (28.3%), with an accentuation of feelings of loneliness, isolation and exclusion in the oldest-old group.
- **Digital and phone communication increased during the pandemic, while neighborhood communication remained mostly stable.** A proportion of 37.1% of all participants indicated that they communicated now more often with their friends and family on the phone. Digital communication (via Whatsapp, messenger, e-mail, etc.) and use of video call (Zoom, Skype, etc.) increased by a third, whereby the increase was less highly pronounced in the oldest-age. As regards communication with neighbours there was no clear picture with some participants indicating more frequent communication (14.4%) and others less (19.8%) but most reported no change.
- **Life satisfaction was high even during the pandemic.** Almost all participants reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their lives before the coronavirus with an overall agreement of 97.2%, whereas 9.7% reported being unsatisfied since the onset of the pandemic.