

COVID-19 THROUGH THE EYES OF SENIORS

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: to reveal how older people experience and find a personal meaning during the pandemic.

A total of 46 study participants participated as the research respondents (women - 35, men - 11; age - 60-84 years). An online qualitative survey was used to obtain detailed data on subjective experiences from the perspective of the research participants (Braun et al., 2020). The survey was conducted in April-May 2020. Thematic analysis was performed according to Braun and Clarke (2006) using MAXQDA2018.

The current COVID-19 pandemic raises mental and physical health challenges. Older people are at particular risk (World Health Organization, 2020). Most studies report that quarantine and social isolation policies can have profound negative consequences, especially if pursued over a longer period of time (Lithander, et al., 2020). Priorities of COVID-19 research include investigating the impact of the virus on older people and its implications for their physical, cognitive and psychological health to ensure the best health and social care for older people (Richardson, et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important to understand the experience of older people in the context of the pandemic at the beginning of the quarantine declared in Lithuania in 2020.

EXPERIENCES OF OLDER PEOPLE

PERSONAL MEANINGS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Meaningless

I do not find any sense M07

Existential (be alive)

The current global pandemic makes me think about the fragility of life, human helplessness against the virus, and trust in God. V01

Social (be with people)

I realized that reducing communication, which may not have been very necessary and meaningful, made me feel calmer. M28

Psychological (be with inner-self)

Self-analysis - what have you done in your life? You realize you haven't done anything good. M20; It's an opportunity to better listen to your inner-self. M09; Get to know yourself as an even stronger personality. M35

UNCERTAINTY AND VULNERABILITY: *Uncertainty ripped M24; I feel vulnerable. M27; I am in a closed environment where I will have to stay for an indefinite time. M27.*

ANXIETY AND STRESS: *After all, a raging enemy is invisible and very dangerous, and is currently travelling very fast around the world. M27 I'm afraid to go to the stores, I'm afraid if I get stuck and I need help. M05; worried about the future, little money saved, my children and their jobs. V04.*

LIFE AT HOME: *I am feeling safe at home M18; I try to be at home with things to do. M27; tired of being at home M04; feeling more friction with my family members. M29.*

RESTRICTED ACTIVITY: *lack of walks in the fresh air V04; I can't go to the malls, I have to wait for supplies. M22.*

NARROWED SOCIAL LIFE: *I feel depressed that I cannot hug, my children and grandchildren. M30; there are no more opportunities to participate in public life, you are dependent on everyone, you cannot communicate with the loved ones. M20; Forced closure from social relations is a bit depressing. M10.*

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION: *No challenges, I stay calm in the current situation. M30; I try [...] calmly to live a normal daily life. M33; feeling more relaxed, less rush. M29.*

FOCUS ON PRAYER AND CREATION: *I have more time for prayer, which became better, I fulfilled the old desire of mine to pray for 1 hour. to be alone in church [...], I did a lot of creative work, which I discovered due to this quarantine. V10.*

Discussion: The following aspects of the research findings are newly revealed: meaninglessness and existential meaning related to spirituality and values. An individual could face an existential crisis in the context of the pandemic (Wong et al, 2020; Yıldırım, et al, 2021), which may also affect the adaptation of older individuals. Such an assumption can be made on the basis of the data obtained from the experiences of older people: constrained activity, narrowed social life, experienced uncertainty and vulnerability, anxiety and tension. In an existential sense, older people experience the temporality of life, their limitations, and a deepening of spiritual values.

For further research it is recommended to carry out investigations on older people who are particularly vulnerable: those who do not use digital technology, who live alone or in a care home.
Conclusions: The experiences of older people and finding personal meanings during the pandemic have been identified.