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262

### THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES ON THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF MEN AND WOMEN IN LATER LIFE

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**Background:** Despite the burgeoning literature on the impact of Covid-19 on the lives of older populations, gaps remain in our knowledge around the lived experience of social relationship change during the pandemic, and the implications for longer-term relational well-being. Even with the clear significance of Covid-19 for older populations across Europe, research involving cross-national comparisons of these experiences is largely absent. Addressing these gaps is critical given concerns for some older people's social connectedness, their future relational embeddedness, and our societal preparedness for pandemic and other public health crises. The aim of this paper is to chart the impact of the pandemic on older people's subjective lived experience of social connectedness across seven countries, and to contrast the differential impact of public health measures, if any, in these jurisdictions.

**Methods:** The analysis draws on 210 semi-structured interviews with men and women aged sixty-five and over across Austria, Czech Republic, Ireland, Israel, Norway, Spain, Sweden (as part of a wider study into exclusion from social relations), with a focus on direct social distancing measures and people's response to these measures.

**Results:** Four themes emerged from the data: reduced informal social contact, depleted social opportunities, fear and lack of social confidence, and relational life course and impacts in context. Given the largely common approach to preventing the spread of the virus, more cross-national similarities than differences, although there were clear exceptions to this in relation to approach, and cultural nuances are evident. Cross-cutting these themes, structural and self-ageism emerged as intensifying formal constraints for some participants, in some settings.

**Conclusion:** For most participants, public health measures had a negative impact on their subjective well-being, while others experienced disruption to their relational life course trajectories. The data points to a clear need to consider the social infrastructure of older people, particularly in times of crises.