

## LEARNING TOGETHER DURING A PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN: CONNECTING OLDER MENTORS WITH NURSING STUDENTS

Alison Phinney,<sup>1</sup> and Frances Affleck,<sup>2</sup> 1. *University Of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada,* 2. *University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada*

Nursing education tends to focus on complex clinical issues affecting older adults who are acutely ill or in long-term care. This creates challenges for educators wanting to expose students to a greater range of experience, including realities of healthy aging. Opportunities to do things differently were presented when an established undergraduate nursing course on complex aging care underwent significant adjustment in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the course was condensed and moved online and clinical sites closed, invitations were extended to community-dwelling older people who wanted to “help teach nursing students about aging”. The response was overwhelming; over nine days, 118 people (ages 65-94) volunteered to be mentors. Through weekly online/ phone conversations, each person guided their assigned student to learn about diverse experiences of aging. Post-survey results showed the impact of these conversations. Over 90% of mentors felt they had contributed in a meaningful way to student learning and would do it again and recommend it to others. 85% of students felt it was a meaningful experience, offering comments like: “I am more mindful of my assumptions now” and “I learned to approach interactions with older adults as a collaboration; we have so much to give each other”. These results provide a needed counterpoint to the predominant COVID discourse of older people as “isolated, helpless, and needy”. Students came to understand that older people were also “engaged, active, and contributing” and identified how this had changed their view of aging. Implications for nursing education are explored.

## LIVING ALONE DURING COVID-19: SOCIAL CONTACT AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AMONG OLDER ADULTS

Yee To Ng,<sup>1</sup> Karen Fingerman,<sup>1</sup> Shiyang Zhang,<sup>1</sup> Katherine Britt,<sup>1</sup> Gianna Colera,<sup>2</sup> Kira Birditt,<sup>3</sup> and Susan Charles,<sup>4</sup> 1. *The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, United States,* 2. *Texas State University, Austin, Texas, United States,* 3. *University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, United States,* 4. *BSS, Irvine, California, United States*

The COVID-19 outbreak and the associated physical distancing measures dramatically altered the social world for most older adults, but people who live alone may have been disproportionately affected. The current study examined how living alone was related to social contact and emotional well-being among older adults during the pandemic. Adults (N = 226) aged 69+ completed a brief survey assessing their living situation, social contact with different social partners (in person, by phone, electronically), and emotions during the morning, afternoon and evening the prior day. Older adults who live alone were less likely to see others in person or to receive or provide help, and reported less positive emotion the prior day than those who lived with others. Living alone was associated with more positive emotions concurrent with in-person contact. In contrast, phone contact was

related to higher levels of negative affect among those living alone, but not among those who live with others. Findings suggest older adults who live alone may be more reactive to social contact during the COVID 19 outbreak than older adults who reside with others. In-person contact appears to confer distinct benefits not available via telephone contact, suggesting that possible interventions during the pandemic may work best with safe forms of in-person contact.

## LONELINESS AMONG RURAL AND UNDERSERVED OLDER ADULTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Lindsay Wilkinson,<sup>1</sup> Julie Masters,<sup>2</sup> Christopher Kelly,<sup>1</sup> Michelle McKelvey,<sup>3</sup> Ladan Ghazi Saidi,<sup>3</sup> and Toni Hill,<sup>4</sup> 1. *University of Nebraska Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska, United States,* 2. *University of Nebraska Omaha, Lincoln, Nebraska, United States,* 3. *University of Nebraska Kearney, Kearney, Nebraska, United States,* 4. *University of Nebraska - Kearney, Kearney, Nebraska, United States*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, older adults are among the most vulnerable populations to the medical complications of COVID-19; however, they are also deeply affected by the unintended consequences of social distancing and sheltering in place. Social distancing effectively mitigates the spread of COVID-19, but this practice can also lead to social isolation and loneliness. Drawing on a sample of adults age 60 or older receiving Meals on Wheels/Grab and Go Meals in the state of Nebraska, this study investigates loneliness among rural and underserved older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. Surveys were distributed to 3725 meal recipients across Nebraska's eight Area Agencies on Aging in July 2020 (response rate = 50%), and a stratified random subsample was selected for preliminary analysis (N = 240). Logistic regression models were used to estimate the effects of COVID-19 and its associated safety precautions on loneliness. The findings reveal that 1 in 10 older adults have not left their home in over a month, and 38 percent feel lonelier due to the impact of COVID-19. Older adults who engaged in more community activities before the pandemic, reported leaving their home less, and experienced a longer absence of social interaction since the pandemic all had significantly increased odds of feeling lonelier in the COVID-19 era. Longer duration of sheltering in place was marginally associated with increased loneliness. The findings from this study show the consequences of social distancing on rural and underserved older adults, which calls for coordinated intervention.

## LONELINESS DURING COVID-19: DOES LIVING SITUATION OR ABILITY TO ACCESS INFORMATION ABOUT SOCIAL ACTIVITIES MATTER?

Patti Parker,<sup>1</sup> Verena Menec,<sup>2</sup> and Nancy Newall,<sup>3</sup> 1. *University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada,* 2. *University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada,* 3. *Brandon University, Brandon, Manitoba, Canada*

Social isolation is deleterious for both mental and physical health (Coyle & Dugan, 2012; Hawkey et al., 2006). Conversely, social participation has mental and physical health benefits (Novak et al., 2013). In light of the current Covid-19 pandemic requiring social distancing, the present study examined whether living situation and ability to access information about social activities are associated with older adults' loneliness during the pandemic. Specifically, we surveyed ninety-one