

Oral Presentations

201 THE BI-DIRECTIONAL ASSOCIATION BETWEEN LONELINESS AND DEPRESSION, BEFORE AND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Background: During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, older adults in Ireland experienced a threefold increase in the prevalence of loneliness while the percentage experiencing clinically significant depressive more than doubled. While loneliness and depression are related, the nature and directionality of this association is still unclear. This study describes changes in both depression and loneliness from before to during the COVID-19 pandemic and adds to the limited literature on the potential bi-directional nature of the association between loneliness and depression.

Methods: Data are from The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), a prospective nationally representative study of community-dwelling adults recruited from community-dwelling adults aged 50+. Data from three waves of TILDA, including a COVID-19 specific sub-study (n = 3,964), were included in the analyses. An auto-regressive cross-lagged panel modelling approach was used to estimate the effect of depression on loneliness and vice versa.

Results: Neither loneliness nor depression increased between the two time points prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and increased significantly during the pandemic. There was a bi-directional association between loneliness and depression across time while the strength of the correlation between the two was stronger during the pandemic than had previously been the case.

Conclusion: The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant increases in both loneliness and depression among older adults. Furthermore, the bi-directional nature of the association between the two suggests that loneliness can both be considered a symptom of depression and that depression may foment a negative evaluation of an individual's social interactions resulting in greater loneliness.