

Poster Presentations

168 ANXIETY SYMPTOMS AMONG OLDER PEOPLE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: PREVALENCE AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS

A. Robinson, M. Ward, R.A. Kenny, R. Briggs
The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing, Dublin, Ireland

Background: There are concerns that the COVID-19 pandemic could lead to a rise in mental health problems including anxiety amongst older people, especially those shielding alone during the pandemic.

The aim of this study therefore is to examine the prevalence of anxiety symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic amongst older people and clarify factors associated with higher burden of symptoms.

Methods: We analysed data from the COVID-19 study of The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing, conducted on over 3,100 community dwelling people aged ≥ 60 years from July–November 2020.

Anxiety symptoms were measured with the Generalised Anxiety Disorder-7 Questionnaire with a score ≥ 10 indicating moderate–severe anxiety.

Linear regression models were used to assess the association of variables of interest with anxiety symptoms.

Results: Almost 9% of participants ($n = 3,128$; mean age 71 years) had moderate–severe symptoms of anxiety.

Factors independently associated with a higher burden of anxiety symptoms included female sex ($\beta = 0.60$ (0.33–0.87)); living alone ($\beta = 0.72$ (0.41–1.02)); ≥ 2 chronic diseases ($\beta = 0.85$ (0.41–1.30)); heart disease ($\beta = 0.95$ (0.45–1.46)) and reporting frequent loneliness ($\beta = 6.59$ (6.03–7.16)). Age ≥ 80 years ($\beta = -0.77$ (–1.16–0.37)) and tertiary level education ($\beta = -0.48$ (–0.86–0.10)) were associated with lower anxiety symptom burden.

Conclusion: Almost 1 in 10 of this population-representative sample of older people had moderate to severe anxiety symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Strategies to address loneliness, which was particularly strongly associated with anxiety symptoms during the pandemic, should be a priority.