

The Communication Style of the Older Adults during COVID-19 Pandemic

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Article Type:

Letter to Editor

Article History:

Received: 4 Jan 2022

Revised: 8 Feb 2022

Accepted: 16 Feb 2022

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[DOI: 10.29252/jorjanibiomedj.10.1.37](https://doi.org/10.29252/jorjanibiomedj.10.1.37)

Abstract

Although social isolation could be easily implemented during COVID-19, it affects the elderly and increases their loneliness. Our experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has been unpleasant, changes in the style of social communication in the elderly and their using of new technologies indicate resilience and adaptation in the face of crises in the elderly, which is a valuable lesson learned from the circumstances.

Keywords: Communication [[MeSH](#)], Frail Elderly [[MeSH](#)], Pandemics [[MeSH](#)]

Highlights

- The resilience of the elderly is visible in the social dimension during pandemic
- We could look for new technology markets for older adults

Statement

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced a global pandemic of COVID-19 infection. Under the circumstances, social isolation is considered to be the best preventive strategy (1).

Although social isolation could be easily implemented, it affects the elderly and increases their loneliness. To these individuals, social isolation leads to the avoidance of contact with their families and friends, problems in preparing essential goods or medications, and difficulty leaving home (2, 3).

The concept of health in the elderly is a combination of daily life and medical interventions, and daily life is considered more important to the elderly. Decreased engagement with the community could decrease cognitive stimulation and change/deteriorate the cognition or mood of the elderly (4). Along with the restrictions imposed on the elderly, there are also restrictions for their family members and caregivers as their presence could increase the risk of COVID-19 in the elderly (5). Therefore, senior club services, charity activities, health and business interactions, and social activities, in which the care services for the elderly are prepared, are suspended during the pandemic (6).

An important lesson to be learned from the pandemic is the inapplicability of our major programs, the gaps in which have not been bridged, causing many systems to collapse during the COVID-19 pandemic (7). The WHO is concerned about the mental and psychosocial health of the elderly, recommending adequate

emotional support provided by informal and healthcare professional networks (8).

The elderly is used to face-to-face interactions and outdoor meetings, while the new generation is inclined toward virtual communication and online shopping. During the COVID-19 pandemic and social isolation, they have been forced to learn to use virtual communication within a short time, and keeping up with the growing world of technology might seem difficult to these citizens (9, 10).

We live in the age of communication and smart media, and the digital era is a social reality that will affect everyone in the society, even the elderly (11). In order to help the elderly, the virtual capacity must be taken advantage of as some efforts have been made to provide social support to the elderly via social media. For instance, the United Kingdom has developed social networks in the WhatsApp app, which encourage the elderly to communicate and talk with other people through the network. Another activity has been provided through the Nextdoor app, a platform in which neighbors are encouraged to communicate with others. These creative technologies have enhanced the sense of belonging, thereby diminishing the loneliness and lack of support in the elderly (12).

In New York, 70 volunteer staff members of the Hiram Brown Program have started providing one-on-one tech education to every elderly member in order to help them attend virtual classes every week. These elderly members engage in beneficial activities such as yoga, memoir writing, and arts (13). In Japan, the maintenance of physical activity in the elderly at home has been facilitated during social isolation as the care-home operator of Human Life Care has prepared the "Human Taiso" video on YouTube for the elderly (14). Moreover, ZoraBots Company in Belgium has created a robot that is able to virtually communicate, and the innovation has been welcomed by the elderly care homes to facilitate the communication of the residents with their loved ones during the coronavirus pandemic (15). In Sweden, new

digital services have been designed to help the elderly keep in touch with their families (16).

These are a few examples of social practice and the efforts of the elderly during the social isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have dramatically and rapidly changed the communication styles of the elderly.

Conclusion

Although our experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has been unpleasant, it has resulted in some changes that have been imposed on societies. Changes in the style of social communication in the elderly and their using of new technologies indicate resilience and adaptation in the face of crises in the elderly, which is a valuable lesson learned from the circumstances. The crisis has also shown that the resilience of the elderly is visible in the social dimension, and we could look for new technology markets for these citizens as new customers in the near future and possible after the crisis.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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How to cite:

Kheibar N, Nasiri H. The Communication Style of the Older Adults during COVID-19 Pandemic; *Jorjani Biomedicine Journal.* 2022; 10(1):37-40.