Older People’s Non-physical Contacts And Depression During The COVID-19 Lockdown

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Demographic Aspects of the COVID-19 Pandemic and its Consequences
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Outline of the presentation

- Theoretical Background
- Aim of the study
- Research Questions
- The intergen_covid survey
- Results
- Conclusions
Theoretical Background

- One of the most evident and widespread indirect consequences of the pandemic due to the lockdown restrictions is the reduction in physical interpersonal contacts, which in turn may negatively affect mental health.

- Human relationships (both, intergenerational and non) are fundamentally important for mental health (Stress Process Model) as they can act as coping resources by dealing with stressful situations (e.g., COVID-19 lockdown).

- Limitations to physical interpersonal interactions may have subtracted a relevant coping resources but social relationships at distance may have (partially) compensated the detrimental effects of physical distancing.
Aim of the study

To examine whether older people that increased or maintained unchanged their nonphysical contacts during the lockdown have suffered less in terms of perceived feelings of depression compared to their peers who decreased nonphysical contacts.
Research questions

- Did mental health worsen during the pandemic?
- Did intergenerational non-physical contact increase?
- How are changes in intergenerational (and other) relationships associated with mental health?
- In particular, we focus on intergenerational relationships among people aged 50+
The intergen_covid survey

- Isolation and the stress caused directly and indirectly by the COVID-19 pandemic may had a negative impact on people’s mental health.

- We implemented an on-line panel survey based on quota sampling in Italy, Spain and France between April 14th and 24th 2020 focused on:
  - Intergenerational relationships
  - Mental health

- [https://sites.google.com/unifi.it/intergen-covid](https://sites.google.com/unifi.it/intergen-covid)
Methods

- Sample selection: age 50+ (N = 4,099)
- Logistic regressions
  - $Y: = 1$ "worsened" mental health; $= 0$ "unchanged" ("improved" are dropped)
  - $X = \text{changes in non-physical contacts}$
  - Control variables (including changes in physical contacts)
- Post-stratification weights based on official statistics
- Heterogeneity by: living arrangement, age, gender, country
Felt sad or depressed more often than usual

% by gender and country

Italy  Spain  France

Male  Female
Changes in non-physical contacts and depression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>β(SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased intergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)</td>
<td>-0.571*** (0.171)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unchanged intergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)</td>
<td>-0.944*** (0.166)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased nonintergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)</td>
<td>-0.113 (0.130)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unchanged nonintergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)</td>
<td>-0.409*** (0.137)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.0351 (0.241)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>4,207</td>
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</table>
Changes in non-physical contacts and depression by living arrangement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Living alone</th>
<th>Living with at least one co resident</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>β (SE)</td>
<td>AMEs (SE)</td>
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<td>Increased intergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)</td>
<td>-0.175</td>
<td>-0.040</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.498)</td>
<td>(0.114)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unchanged intergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)</td>
<td>-1.024**</td>
<td>-0.233**</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.508)</td>
<td>(0.115)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased nonintergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)</td>
<td>-0.297</td>
<td>-0.064</td>
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<td>(0.318)</td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
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<td>Unchanged nonintergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
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<td>(0.328)</td>
<td>(0.072)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.191</td>
<td>0.0447</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.636)</td>
<td>(0.263)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>674</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Heterogeneity of the associations

- Similar by gender

- Stronger benefits of increased/unchanged intergenerational non-physical contacts:
  - For the oldest individuals (70+)
  - In Spain
Concluding remarks

- Intergenerational (and other) non-physical contacts have been important for buffering the mental health consequences of the pandemic.

- Worsened mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic is a serious issue, needs more attention and should be addressed also in the longer run.
Physicall distant ≠ socially distant

- As a side note, given the importance of non-physical interactions among humans we suggest to avoid using the term “social distancing” and use “physical distancing” instead.

- Physical distance guidelines and policies need to be accompanied by measures for fostering social connectivity.
Thank you!

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