



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

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*Published as: Arpino, et al. (2020), The Gerontologist.*

Demographic Aspects of the COVID-19 Pandemic and its Consequences  
1 December 2020

# 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+

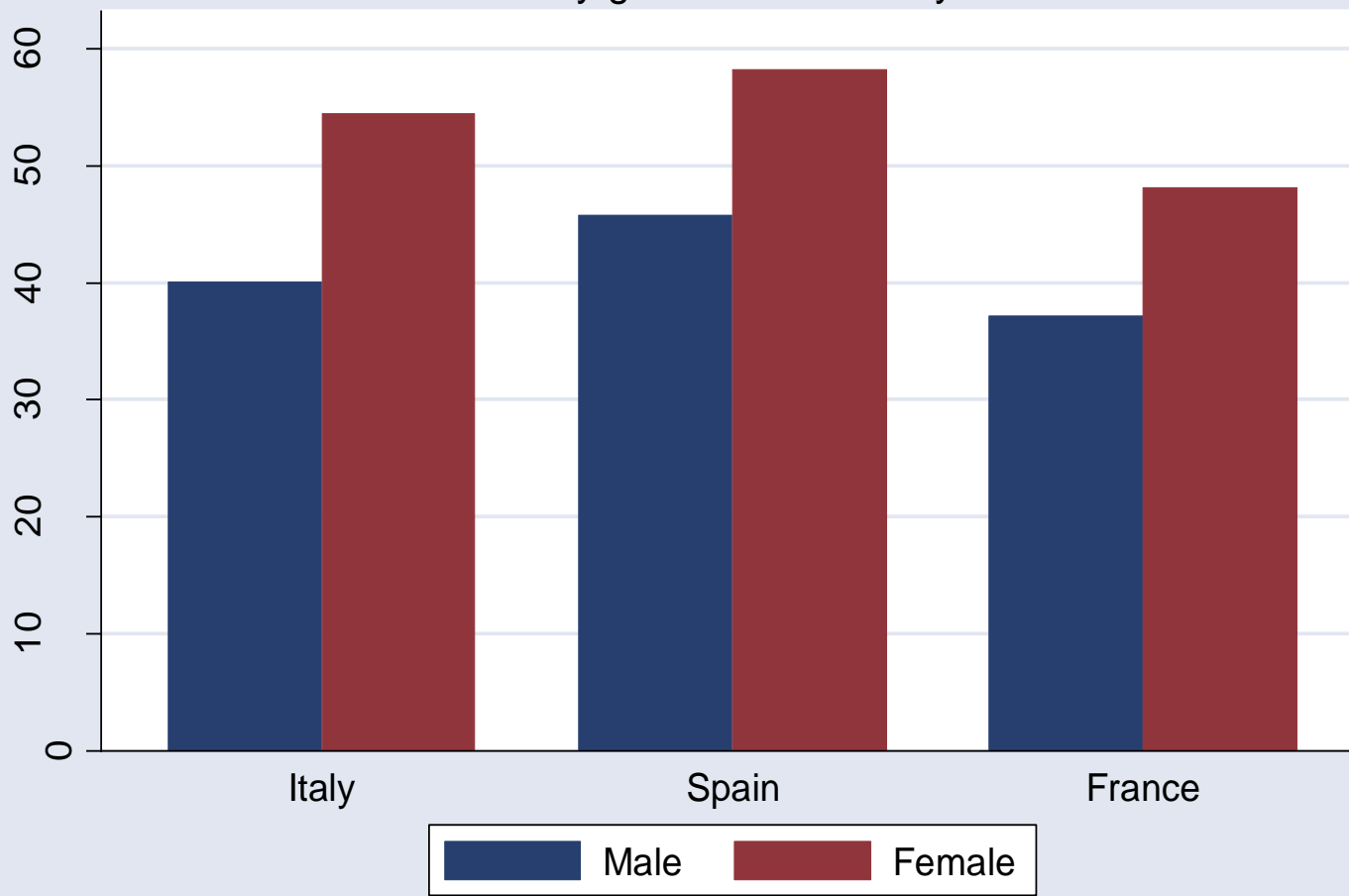
# The intergen\_covid survey

- Isolation and the stress caused directly and indirectly by the COVID-19 pandemic may have 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>

# Methods

- Sample selection: age 50+ (N = 4,099)
- Logistic regressions
  - Y: = 1 “worsened” mental health; = 0 “unchanged” (“improved” are dropped)
  - X = 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





# Changes in non-physical contacts and depression

Variables	Model 1	
	$\beta$ (SE)	AMEs (SE)
Increased intergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)	-0.571*** (0.171)	-0.134*** (0.039)
Unchanged intergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)	-0.944*** (0.166)	-0.220*** (0.038)
Increased nonintergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)	-0.113 (0.130)	-0.026 (0.030)
Unchanged nonintergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)	-0.409*** (0.137)	-0.093*** (0.031)
Constant	0.0351 (0.241)	
Observations	4,207	4,207

# Changes in non-physical contacts and depression by living arrangement

Variables	Model 2			
	Living alone		Living with at least one co resident	
	$\beta$ (SE)	AMEs (SE)	$\beta$ (SE)	AMEs (SE)
Increased intergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)	-0.175 (0.498)	-0.040 (0.114)	-0.641*** (0.180)	-0.149*** (0.041)
Unchanged intergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)	-1.024** (0.508)	-0.233** (0.115)	-0.942*** (0.172)	-0.218*** (0.039)
Increased nonintergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)	-0.297 (0.318)	-0.064 (0.069)	-0.0807 (0.143)	-0.018 (0.033)
Unchanged nonintergenerational contacts (ref. decreased)	-0.011 (0.328)	-0.002 (0.072)	-0.508*** (0.149)	-0.115*** (0.033)
Constant	-0.191 (0.636)		0.0447 (0.263)	
Observations	674	674	3,533	3,533

# 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

# Physical distant $\neq$ 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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