

Exploring the Experiences of COVID-19 Among Community-Dwelling Older Adults: A Mixed-Methods Dissertation

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Background and Importance: COVID-19 dramatically changed daily life for older adults in numerous and complex ways. Research is calling for an understanding on how COVID-19 has and will impact aging and older adults' lived experiences with aging within the context of the pandemic. Social and physical distancing guidelines have put older adults at an increased risk for social isolation. Intergenerational tensions have also intensified during the pandemic, and early research states the labeling of older adults (as a homogenous group) as "vulnerable" can lead to an increased risk of ageism in their communities. Additionally, it is imperative for researchers to consider how other forms of discrimination and prejudice (i.e., racism, sexism, heterosexism) shape the COVID-19 discourse among diverse groups of older adults.

Purpose and Objectives: The overall purpose of this dissertation is to broaden our understanding of older adults' experiences within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Phase 1 will explore how community-dwelling older adults (ages 65 and greater) experience daily life amid the COVID-19 pandemic using a biopsychosocial approach.
2. Phase 2 will explore the experiences of social isolation and ageism among older adults (ages 65 and greater) during COVID-19 and if/how these are linked to mental and physical health measures through a biopsychosocial lens.
 - a. An exploratory analysis will be conducted to understand if any potential associations are moderated by age, gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Methods: Phase 1 (Study 1) will explore the daily life experiences of five older adults as they navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. This study will employ a critical qualitative narrative inquiry design. Data will be collected through solicited diaries and semi-structured individual interviews (via telephone or video conferencing software). Data will be analyzed thematically and involve a re-storying of the data. Phase 2 will employ a two-phase mixed-methods parallel convergent design to explore the perceived experiences of ageism and social isolation on the mental and physical health of community-dwelling older adults. Cross-sectional quantitative survey data will be collected online through Qualtrics in Phase 2 (Study 2) ($n=250$). This investigation will also examine if any potential associations are moderated by age, gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation to see if/how multiple forms of discrimination outcomes may differentially relate to mental and physical health measures. Further, Phase 2 (Study 3) will explore the experiences of ageism and social isolation of 10 older adults, and how these experiences relate to mental and physical health as well as overall well-being, using semi-structured individual interviews, with researcher notes, conducted online through face-to-face video conferencing software.

Expected Outcomes: This dissertation will contribute to the overall understanding and current knowledge of older adults' first-person accounts of their experiences within the COVID-19 pandemic, using mixed methods. In turn, this will inform new and critical perspectives and broaden our understanding of how we, as researchers and advocates of health, can build, encourage, and support the health, well-being, and quality of life for older adults.