

Factors predicting loneliness among ageing populations in the Baltic states during Covid-19

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During Covid-19 social isolation has become more common worldwide, and elderly people might have experienced dramatically limited communication. The study was based on a sample of individuals aged 50+ from wave 7, wave 8 and Covid-19 addition of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) between 2017-2020. The sample size consisted of 4429 respondents from Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. In order to assess the effects of factors associated with the first wave of Covid-19 predicting an increase in the intensity of loneliness symptoms, a multivariate binary logistic regression was used, including several health determinants in the model. The results indicated that in Latvia, the main predictive factors for the increase in the intensity of loneliness, by the adjustment for other factors, were increased nervousness (OR 44.39; 95%CI 41.06-48.00) and interrupted or reduced contact with children (OR 1.82; 95%CI 1.76-1.88). In Lithuania, the main predictors for the increase in the intensity of loneliness were high levels of nervousness (OR 6.80; 95%CI 6.56-7.04), deterioration of health (OR 2.51; 95%CI 2.44-2.59) and limited daily activity due to health conditions (OR 2.11; 95%CI 2.05-2.18). In Estonia, the most relevant predictive factors for the increase in the intensity of loneliness were financial difficulties (OR 5.65; 95%CI 4.76-6.71), interrupted or reduced contact with parents (OR 5.42; 95%CI 4.38-6.71), increased nervousness (OR 4.15; 95%CI 3.50-4.92) and limited daily activity due to health (adjusted OR 7.75; 95%CI 6.60-9.11). A relationship between an increase in the intensity of loneliness was mainly related to increased nervousness during the first wave of Covid-19 in all Baltic states. However, reduced or interrupted social contacts and health related factors were also found to be important predictors for loneliness.

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Key messages:

- Public health incentives should be aimed towards reducing Covid-19 related stress among ageing populations.
- Promotion of skills and access to digital communication would reduce loneliness among elderly.