

Impact of Measures during the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Survival of Seniors in selected social Service Facilities

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Original Article

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Abstract:

Objective: The aim of the research was to find out seniors' experiences with pandemic measures in social service facilities.

Design: Descriptive cross-sectional study.

Participants: The file consisted of 44 clients of facilities for seniors in the Košice self-governing region.

Methods: Self-constructed questionnaire aimed at finding out which areas of seniors' lives were most affected by measures related to COVID-19. Data processing through descriptive statistics.

Results: We identified the negative experience of limited contacts of seniors with their family, the impossibility of performing leisure activities and participating in cultural and

social events. Negative experiences were also supported by the disease itself, as 34 respondents overcame the disease of COVID-19.

Conclusion: The results of our research indicate the need to support a multidisciplinary approach in addressing the effects of social isolation. We propose to strengthen the development of digital skills among seniors in order to maintain contact with their families and loved ones.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the lives of people all over the planet. Governments and states around the world have gradually introduced protective measures in varying degrees of intensity in order to mitigate the spread of the virus. In Slovakia, on March 13, 2020, the first nationwide measures against the spread of this disease began to apply. Seniors were and are one of the most endangered groups, because many health problems are associated with respiratory diseases. The measures limited the life and functioning of facilities for the elderly, as the elderly were considered by experts to be one of the most endangered groups.

There was information in the media that in several facilities for seniors, employees or clients have overcome COVID-19. The employees were quarantined in the facility, personal contact with the family was prohibited. Every facility for seniors tried to ensure the best possible quality of life for clients even under anti-epidemic conditions.

Based on the recommendations of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, it was possible to provide seniors with the necessary care in facilities for seniors, however, visits could not be carried out, with the exception of e.g. clients in the terminal phase of life, while these visits had to be guided by anti-epidemiological measures. It was necessary to enable family members to take the client into home care. Other recommendations showed that clients staying in facilities for seniors should not participate in group activities, social contact with other clients was limited, clients should not leave the facilities. It was therefore necessary to carry out more individual activities, individual education about the disease COVID-19, so that clients do not underestimate the situation, but at the same time so that they do not have unnecessary fear (Recommended procedures and forms ..., 2021).

According to the WHO, older adults in nursing facilities were at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 compared to the general population. The task of individual facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic was to create a crisis plan that was supposed to deal with the situations that arose. The crisis plan is a document, an internal regulation, which defines procedures and measures to ensure the functioning of the social service in a facility for seniors during a pandemic in connection with the disease COVID-19 (Crisis management ... 2020).

For seniors, a stay in a facility can trigger such negative emotions as, for example, anxiety, the meaninglessness of life and existence, or stress, to which, incidentally, the anonymity and uniformity of the given institutions can also lead (Hasa, 2019).

Several foreign studies show that many seniors are less mobile due to several physical, social and psychological problems and thus more at risk of pandemic measures than the younger population (Lloyd-Sherlock P. et al., 2020). Many seniors experienced intense loneliness, social isolation, and prolonged grief due to separation from their families and friends (Goveas J.S., Shear M.K., 2020; Grossman E.S. et al., 2021). All the mentioned situations result in deterioration of the quality of life of seniors in the psychological and social sphere.

The extent to which the aging population of Slovakia is feeling the effects of COVID-19 has not yet been sufficiently scientifically researched and documented.

Methods

The study conducted had a descriptive cross-sectional study design. The file consisted of 44 recipients of social services in three facilities for seniors in the Košice self-governing region. The facilities confirmed their consent to data collection in writing. Data collection took

place in the period January - February 2022. During this period, facilities for seniors in Slovakia had restrictions on the entry of other persons, in two facilities data collection was carried out by social workers working in the facilities. The sample selection was purposefully available.

As a data collection method, we chose a self-constructed questionnaire. We focused on identifying the areas of seniors' lives that were most affected by the measures related to COVID-19 and who most often satisfied seniors' needs for safety and security. Socio-demographic variables were represented by the gender and age of the respondents.

Descriptive statistics methods in the SPSS 25.0 program were used to evaluate the data.

Results

The group consisted of 44 seniors, of the total number of respondents, there were 12 men and 32 women in the group. The determined age ranged from 68 to 93 years, average age 80.38 years, SD+ 6.1773. Due to the size of the set, analyzes of intersex and age differences between groups of respondents in the monitored areas were not performed.

Subsequently, we present in tables the absolute frequency of findings according to individual items, aimed at meeting the goals of the study.

Table 1 shows the findings of the respondents' subjective evaluation of the overall quality of life.

In their answers, the respondents tended to have a negative assessment of their quality of life in the period of pandemic measures in facilities for the elderly.

Table 1 Subjective assessment of quality of life (N= 44)

| How would you evaluate the quality of your life in terms of your physical health, mental well-being, and social relationships over the past six months? | n |
|---|----|
| Very good | 2 |
| Good | 8 |
| Neither good nor bad | 20 |
| Bad | 14 |
| Very bad | 0 |

To compare the findings presented in Table 1, we state that in a freely constructed item we subsequently asked what worsens their quality of life. The created common categories mainly contained statements: restriction of visits, non-personal visits, inability to go to the city for walks, deteriorating health, overcoming COVID-19, missing family, pandemic measures taken.

In Table 2, we present the summary findings in the items aimed at expressing the degree of restriction of contacts with family and other clients in facilities according to the respondents.

Table 2 The degree of impact of measures on respondents' contacts during the COVID-19 pandemic (N=44)

| To what extent have the measures related to COVID-19 in the facility affected your personal visits with family and contacts with other clients: | with family n | with other clients n |
|---|---------------|----------------------|
| Very | 10 | 0 |
| Slightly | 26 | 4 |
| I can't judge | 2 | 14 |
| At least | 2 | 4 |
| At all | 4 | 22 |

Social isolation has become a new phenomenon across the population during the pandemic. It is a growing problem for the elderly. Social bonds, which are formed by regular interactions with family members and close friends, were perceived by the respondents as very or slightly influenced by measures in facilities for senior citizens. On the contrary, contacts with other clients in a closed community were not perceived as limited.

In Table 3, we present the summary findings in the items aimed at expressing the degree of limitation in participation in rehabilitation, therapies, leisure activities and in the availability of additional services in facilities according to the respondents.

Table 3 Impact of measures on respondents' activities during the COVID-19 pandemic (N= 44)

| To what extent they have affected the measures related to COVID-19 in the facility: | Rehabilitation and therapy n | Leisure Activities n | Cultural events n | Additional services n |
|---|---------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Very | 8 | 20 | 28 | 2 |
| Slightly | 6 | 16 | 6 | 16 |
| I can't judge | 6 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| At all | 24 | 8 | 8 | 26 |

In Table 4, we present the findings from the item focused on the degree of impact of pandemic measures on the respondents' mental and psychological well-being.

Table 4 Impact of measures on the psychological and mental well-being of respondents (N= 44)

| To what extent did they influence the measures in connection with COVID-19 in your mental institution and mental well-being: | n |
|--|----|
| Very | 18 |
| Slightly | 12 |
| I can't judge | 0 |
| At least | 4 |
| At all | 10 |

Table 5 Summary of the findings for two statements that were constructed as Lickert scales

| Attitude to the statement | The situation with COVID-19 has not affected my sense of security n | My rights and freedoms have not been violated in situations related to COVID-19 n |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| I totally agree | 6 | 8 |
| I agree | 20 | 18 |
| I can't judge | 0 | 14 |
| I do not agree | 8 | 0 |
| I don't agree at all | 10 | 4 |

In Table 5, we provide a summary of the findings for two statements that were constructed as Lickert scales. Respondents could express their attitude to the statements on a 5-point scale from complete agreement to complete disagreement.

Discussion and Conclusion

Ubiquitous information provided by the media during the COVID-19 pandemic increased the sense of isolation among seniors and may have caused many to feel ageism. Due to the high risk of death in case of infection, social isolation for seniors was paramount. Isolation has led to physical and psychosocial impacts that can be far-reaching in the years to come.

According to our findings, the pandemic measures taken in social service facilities caused seniors to be separated from family and friends, or any information about the happenings in the surroundings, which led to a negative evaluation of the subjectively felt quality of life, to a feeling of separation from the family. Several foreign studies support our findings (Goveas J.S., Shear M.K., 2020; Grossman E.S. et al., 2021). A positive finding of the authors of the Slovak study, Voľanská, Hlinčíková, Lutherová, (2022), is that children phoned their parents and older relatives to encourage them, or just to talk to them, to listen to them about how they live. Adult children have learned patience in communicating with grandparents, they are "more forgiving and kinder". Pandemic measures did not limit respondents' participation in rehabilitation and therapy in facilities for seniors. However, they felt limitations in participation in leisure activities, cultural events and partly also in the availability of additional services. Respondents also felt a deterioration in psychological and mental well-being affected by the measures taken. According to 26 respondents, the situation with

COVID-19 did not affect their sense of security, and according to 26 respondents, their rights and freedoms were not violated.

Ensuring and realizing the rights of citizens is the main mission of public administration. Likewise, to create suitable conditions for their life, as well as for the field of social care and social services for the target group of seniors. In the field of health, in multidisciplinary cooperation, use and more effectively apply the educational competence of nurses in practice (Gress Halasz, et al., 2020). One finds security in positive social relationships that help one overcome challenging life situations and represent a common source that enables experiencing the meaningfulness of life. The phenomenon of social support thus represents a social pool from which one can benefit in case of need; it influences the way one copes with difficult, challenging, and stressful events and alleviates their consequences. (Masan et al., 2021).

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