

Older Adults' Coping during a Pandemic

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Abstract : During a pandemic like the one we are in with COVID-19, older adults, especially those who live in a senior retirement facility, experience even bigger challenges as they are often dependent on other individuals for care. Many older adults are dependent on caregivers to assist with their instrumented activities of daily living (IADL). With travel restrictions imposed during a pandemic, there is a critical need to ensure that older adults who are homebound continue to be able to participate in physical exercise, cognitive exercise, and social interaction programs. The objective of this study was to better understand the challenges that older adults faced during the pandemic and what they were doing specifically to cope with the pandemic physically, mentally, and through social interaction. A focus group was conducted with ten older adults (age: 82.70 ± 7.81 years; nine female and one male) who resided in a senior retirement facility. During the course of one hour, seven open-ended questions were posed to the participants: a) What has changed in your life since the start of the pandemic, b) What has been most challenging for you, c) What are you doing to take care of yourself, d) Are you doing anything specifically as it relates to your physical health, e) Are you doing anything specifically as it relates to your mental health, f) What did you do for social interaction during the pandemic, g) Is there anything else you would like to share as it relates to your experience during the pandemic. The focus group session was audio-taped, and verbatim transcripts were created to evaluate the responses of the participants. The transcript consisted of 4,698 words and 293 lines of text. The data was analyzed using content analysis. The unit of analysis was the text from the audio recordings that were transcribed. From the review of the transcribed text, themes and sub-themes were identified, along with salient quotes under each sub-theme. The major themes that emerged from the data were: having a routine, engaging in activities, attending exercise classes, use of technology, family, community, and prayer. The quotes under the sub-themes provided compelling evidence of how older adults coped during the pandemic while addressing the challenges they faced and developing strategies to address their physical and mental health while interacting with others. Lessons learned from this focus group can be used to develop specific physical exercise, cognitive exercise, and social interaction programs that benefit the health and well-being of older adults.

Keywords : cognitive exercise, pandemic, physical exercise, social interaction

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