

**Submission Id:** 4006

**Title**

*The importance of proximity in the social network of older persons living alone during the pandemic*

**Priority 1 (Research Category)**

Geriatrics

**Presenters**

Nadia Sourial, PhD, Elise Develay, MSc, Amelie Quesnel-Vallee, Paul Holyoke, Lise Dassieu, Patrick Archambault, MD, FRCPC, MSc, Claire Godard-Sebillotte, MD, MSc, Sathya Karunanathan, Svetlana Puzhko, PhD, MD

**Abstract**

Context

The COVID-19 pandemic may have particularly impacted older adults living alone who are at increased risk of social isolation and its negative consequences. This risk may have been further exacerbated due to public health measures and disruption of services and social support.

Objective

This study aimed to understand the experiences and social connectedness of older persons living alone during the COVID-19 pandemic in Quebec.

Study design

A qualitative study with 14 semi-structured interviews was conducted by telephone. The first part of the interview guide focused on social isolation and perceptions of loneliness, while the second part focused on of their perceived impact of the pandemic on their health and social network during the third to the fourth wave of the pandemic. Two independent analysts used Dedoose® software to conduct an inductive thematic analysis based on the transcribed interviews.

Population studied

Persons aged 65 and over living alone.

Setting

An urban (Montreal) and semi-rural (Chaudière-Appalaches) region of Quebec, Canada.

Results

We suggest two preliminary themes from our analysis: (1) autonomy and adaptability in the face of the pandemic, (2) the importance of social connections and services in close proximity. Despite challenges posed by the pandemic participants consistently reported a strong desire to limit burden to their family and pride in maintaining their autonomy. While some participants reported a deterioration in their physical and mental health due to the confinement measures, most reported little impact on their sense of loneliness. The fact that they had already been living alone for several years helped them to readily adapt. Day-to-day interactions with their immediate environment (neighbors, pharmacist, etc.) and helping others (accompanying friends, organizing social activities, etc.) within this network were consistently found to be important coping mechanisms.

## Conclusions

Neighborhood contacts and services in close proximity were found to be important elements in promoting the well-being of older persons living alone. Health professionals should consider the importance of social interactions in close proximity when caring for older persons living alone.