

The Impact of COVID-19 on Older Adults in Rural Alabama

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Honors Capstone Proposal

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I. Introduction

Our research team is interested in finding out what impact COVID- 19 has had on older adults in rural areas of Alabama and their perceptions of how their quality of life has been impacted, especially with social isolation. We will be gathering information from mailed out surveys and analyzing these responses to form conclusions. This research will contribute to the understanding of social situations of older adults and provide direction for further research and interventions for rural older adults.

II. Background & Literature Review

There have been multiple studies calling for the further exploration of the effects of social isolation, specifically on older adults(Newall & Menec, 2017)(Henning-Smith, 2020)(AARP Foundation, 2020). In rural areas the likelihood of adults becoming disengaged with their communities is much higher given their geographic isolation from others (Kaye, 2018). There is proven association between loneliness and negative health effects such as depression, weakened immune system, and cognitive decline (Newall & Menec, 2017). The social situation of older adults in rural areas has been shown to be worth studying further in order to better understand the effects on their health and wellbeing in the midst of a global pandemic. The results of this study could be applied to develop methods to help these individuals cope with social isolation in rural areas.

III. Research Design and Methods

We will be sending out a survey by mail or email to older adults (people 65 years old and older) from rural areas around the state. The survey survey will be conducted using the Dillman Total Design Method. We would provide the individuals with a cover letter explaining the survey; the survey; either paper or email; and a self-addressed, stamped envelope to return the survey if paper is used. One week after the initial mail out date, a postcard reminder will be sent out to non-responders. This step will be repeated at the 3-week and 7-week mark after initial survey mail-out. At the 9-week mark the survey will “end” in that the team will stop accepting responses, and begin tabulating results. Once responses are gathered and analyzed using Qualmetrix and SPSS, the data will be used to complete a paper outlining how the perceptions of quality of life and social isolation of older adults in rural Alabama have been affected by COVID-19.

All of these activities will be done remotely as to comply with any and all UAH COVID-19 regulations. The tentative timeline for the project is as follows:

Activity	Jan				Feb				Mar				Apr				May				Jun				Jul			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Revising Survey	■																											
IRB Application	■																											
Recruiting Subjects					■																							
Mail Out Surveys									■																			
Send out Reminders													■															
Collect Responses									■																			
Compile/ Analyze Data																	■											
Write Article																									■			

IV. Conclusion

This study should be done in order to support further research into the connection between social isolation and a change in the health of older adults during periods of social isolation, their social isolation being exacerbated by rural dwelling. This study will serve to observe and understand such a correlation. The methods of collecting data by survey were decided upon since in-person interviews with such a large and geographically varied population, especially during a time of social distancing, is impractical.

V. References

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