Experiences and impacts of the Covid-19 outbreak for older adults: initial findings from the qualitative interviews

Sandra Varey, Carol Holland, Ian Garner, Fiona Eccles, Jane Simpson

Centre for Ageing Research, Lancaster University, UK

September 2020
Participant profile

- 20 participants taking part in qualitative telephone interviews
- 10 participants received a high risk letter (Cohort 1) and 10 are not high risk (Cohort 2)
- 12 women and 8 men
- Age range 70-85 years (mean age 74.4 years)
- 7 participants live alone, 13 live with a partner/spouse
- Cohort 1 (high risk) illnesses include: COPD, heart failure, hypertension, Motor Neurone Disease and lung cancer
Methods

• 40 qualitative interviews undertaken by telephone
• Two time points: Round 1: May 2020 and Round 2: June / July 2020
• All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed
• Interview transcripts and researcher interview notes analysed thematically using the software Nvivo
Social interactions and relationships
On the way home they’ll call in and they’ll give a bunch of flowers to [my wife] [...] just all bits of surprises and it makes the day, cheers you up.

***

Well I think phone calls from my brother that’s sort of increased [...] And oh something else, my brother started telling me that he loves me.
My husband has Alzheimer’s, he’s been in care since last year [...] The fact that I can’t go and see him now really upsets me [...] I do have **depressed days** where I have a cry to myself ...

***

We’re not going to be able to **hug them** before they [emigrate] [...] I mean normally if it hadn’t been for the virus we’d have been with them [...] on at least two occasions for several days at a time [...] Of course none of that happened.
Physical and mental health and wellbeing
Physically I’m fine, but I do find myself going into a little self bubble of thinking how crap it is really [...] I don’t know I just can’t relax [I’m very] lethargic [...] I am quite a big worrier about things, you know and that’s what I tend to do most of the time is worry about how things are going to happen.
I just can’t get motivated, I’m **lacking motivation** [...] I’m walking up hills [with the dog] and my breathing’s not been brilliant [...] I was thinking about going back to the gym and I thought crikey I’ll never get in my gym gear anyway ‘cos I’ve put on another couple of pounds.

***

Participant is not as active as she was before March. She feels creakier in her movements since not swimming and is not sleeping very well, due to the lack of exercise. (Researcher interview notes)
Uncertainty
Where is this going? We can’t live in lockdown forever.

***

The joy of retirement is doing what you want and it feels like that’s been taken away from me.

***

What’s the point? Are we going to get back to reality in the few years I have left?
Interviewer: What stopped you from going [to the GP] do you think?

Participant: Well it was really the fact that there was a chance of catching the virus, I just wanted to delay as long as possible [...] but it got that bad I just had to phone for an ambulance.
Concluding thoughts
Thank you to everyone who is taking part in and supporting this project.