

## Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Social Connectedness of Senior Box Recipients in Houston

**Xin Ying Tong**, Katelin Brooke Taylor, Deborah R. Franklin, University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, School of Dentistry, Houston, Texas, USA.

**Objective:** Social isolation and/or loneliness (SI/L) is strongly linked to poor health outcomes such as dementia, depression, and death. We examined the social effects of the COVID pandemic on SI/L in the recipients of the Houston Food Bank's Senior Box Program. It was found that seniors with meaningful social interaction were better able to cope with the pandemic. We hypothesized that seniors with a poor social support network experienced poorer health outcomes, and we aimed to identify how this community has been affected and what interventions might be most useful.

**Experimental Methods:** Seniors enrolled in the Houston Food Bank's Senior Box Program were called and asked a series of questions regarding their social connectedness and wellbeing. The results were sorted by question, and the data was qualitatively analyzed for trends. These trends were compared to established frameworks of geriatric SI/L.

**Results:** Positive feelings were associated with social connectedness and negative feelings were reported when dealing with a loss of a meaningful connection. Out of 56 responses, 10 reported few interactions with family/friends, while 46 reported frequently interacting with family/friends.

**Conclusion:** The geriatric population is at high risk for SI/L, and the need for social distancing due to COVID-19 should be carefully balanced with the need for community. In our study, seniors with meaningful social connections were able to positively cope with the isolation imposed by the pandemic. This supports Wigfield *et al.*'s proposed framework of SI/L, the socioemotional selectivity theory, and the findings of a Kaiser Foundation study reporting less feelings of anxiety and depression due to COVID-19 in the geriatric population than younger adults. We suggest that facilitating community living could improve senior SI/L for those with fewer meaningful social connections.

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