

Impact of COVID-19 on Older Adults in Rural Alabama

Kris Warf & Lenora Smith, PhD, RN, CDP

Purpose

During the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing requirements were implemented. These regulations were for the safety of the public, however they surely have had negative effects on their socialization. During social distancing guidelines, older adults may not be able to see their friends and family or even get their own groceries. Rural areas tend to offer even fewer resources for assistance to older adults than urban areas which may have grocery delivery and public transportation. Furthermore, older adults in rural areas are more likely to be living under the poverty line. Due to these and other disparities, older adults in rural areas are more likely to experience social isolation and loneliness. Studies have shown a direct link between a lack of socialization and physical and mental health. The goal of this study is to contribute data and conclusions about the correlation between social isolation, loneliness, and physical and psychological health in older adults in rural areas during a pandemic.

Methods

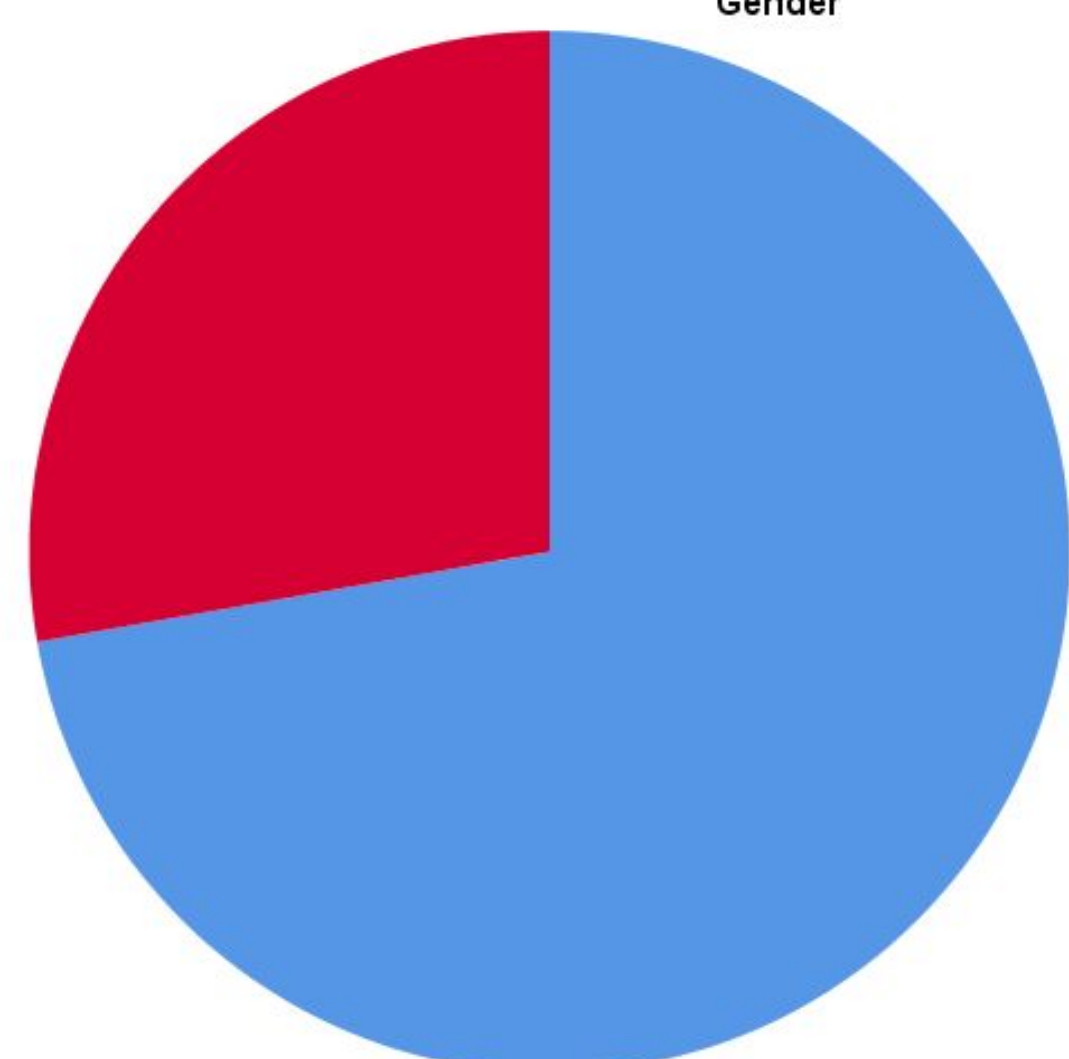
All variables were determined by a self reported survey. These surveys were handed out by local senior centers and returned to the researchers using self addressed and pre-stamped envelopes. Reminder postcards were sent using the same method 4 weeks after the surveys. Once surveys were collected, data was compiled in Qualtrics. The Qualtrics data was then transferred to SPSS for analysis.

Demographics of Participants

Age

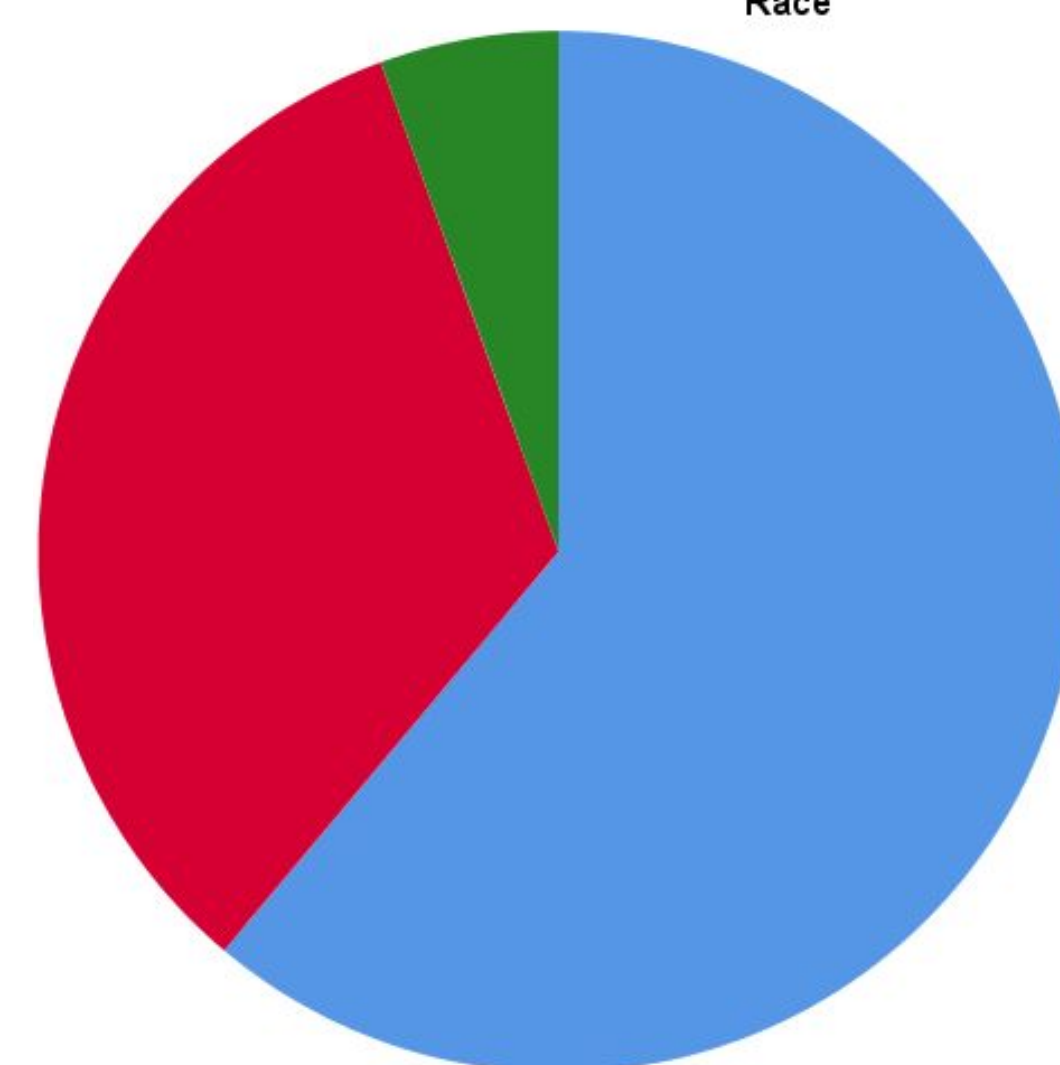
N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
17	62	90	75.06	7.909

Gender



Gender

Race



Race

African-American/Black
Caucasian/White
Native American/American Indian

Findings

Variable	Mean Before	Mean After	t	df	p-value
Cognitive Impairment	4.2	5.2	2.291	14	0.038*
Physical Health	29.0781	18.858	-2.849	8	0.022*
Depression	23.125	23.5	-0.334	11	0.744
Loneliness	6.8667	9.2	2.275	13	0.04*
Social Isolation	11.9091	6.1818	-2.262	8	0.054**

* values found to be statistically significant, ** values found to be clinically significant

Correlations

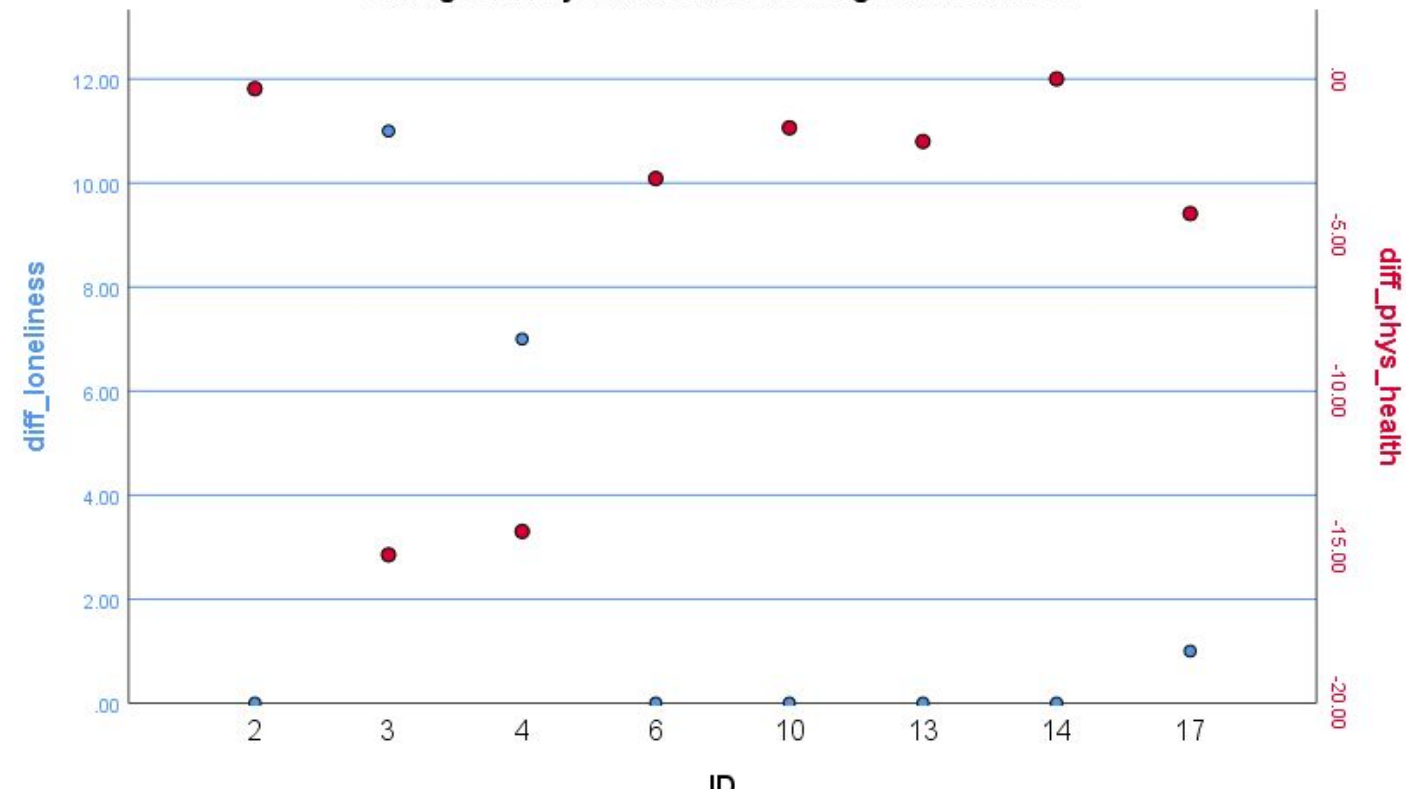
There is a statistically significant correlation between changes in cognitive impairment and loneliness, changes in physical health and loneliness, and changes in physical health and socialization.

Significant Correlations in Changes Between

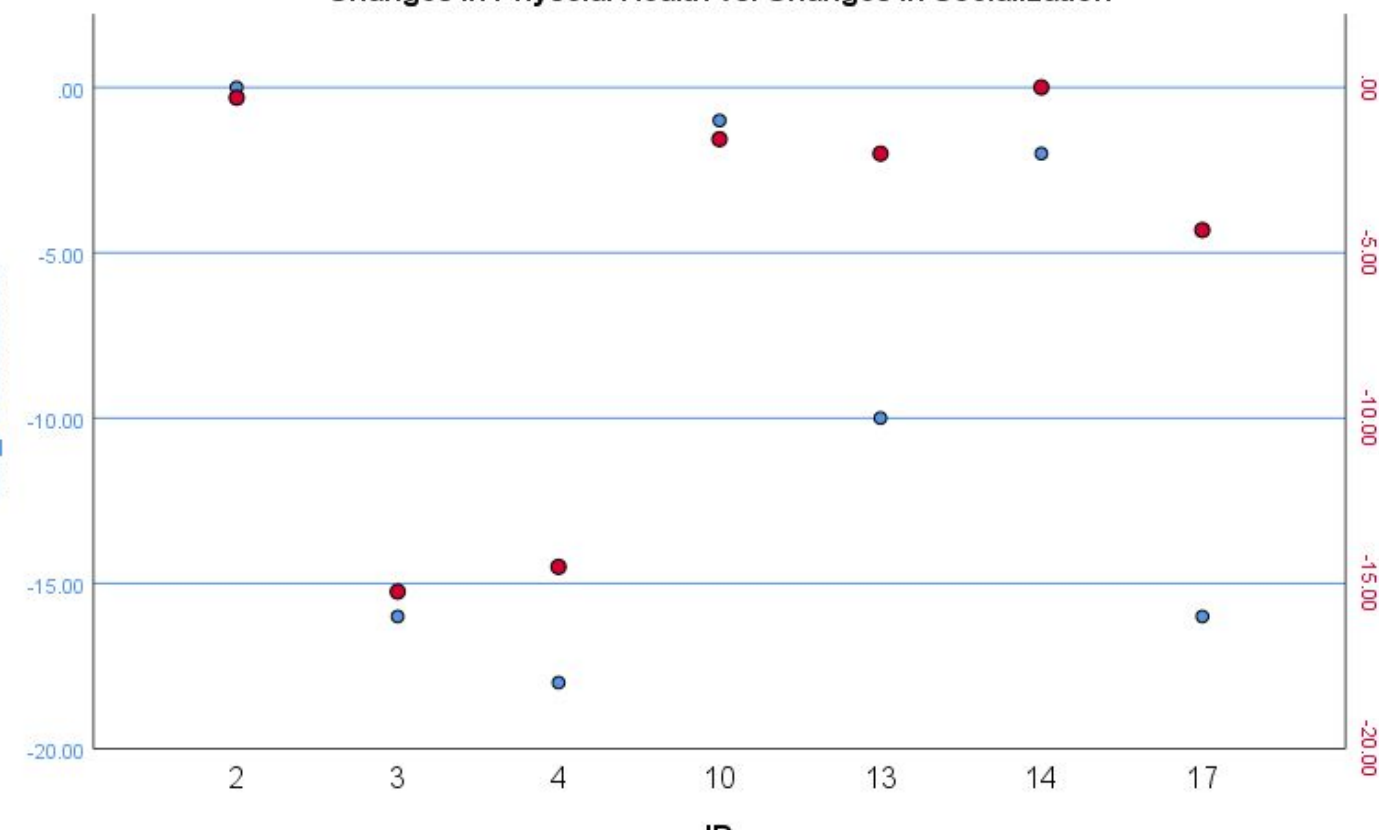
Spearman's rho Correlation Coefficient

Physical Health vs. Loneliness	0.005
Physical Health vs. Socialization	0.021
Cognitive Impairment vs. Loneliness	0.016

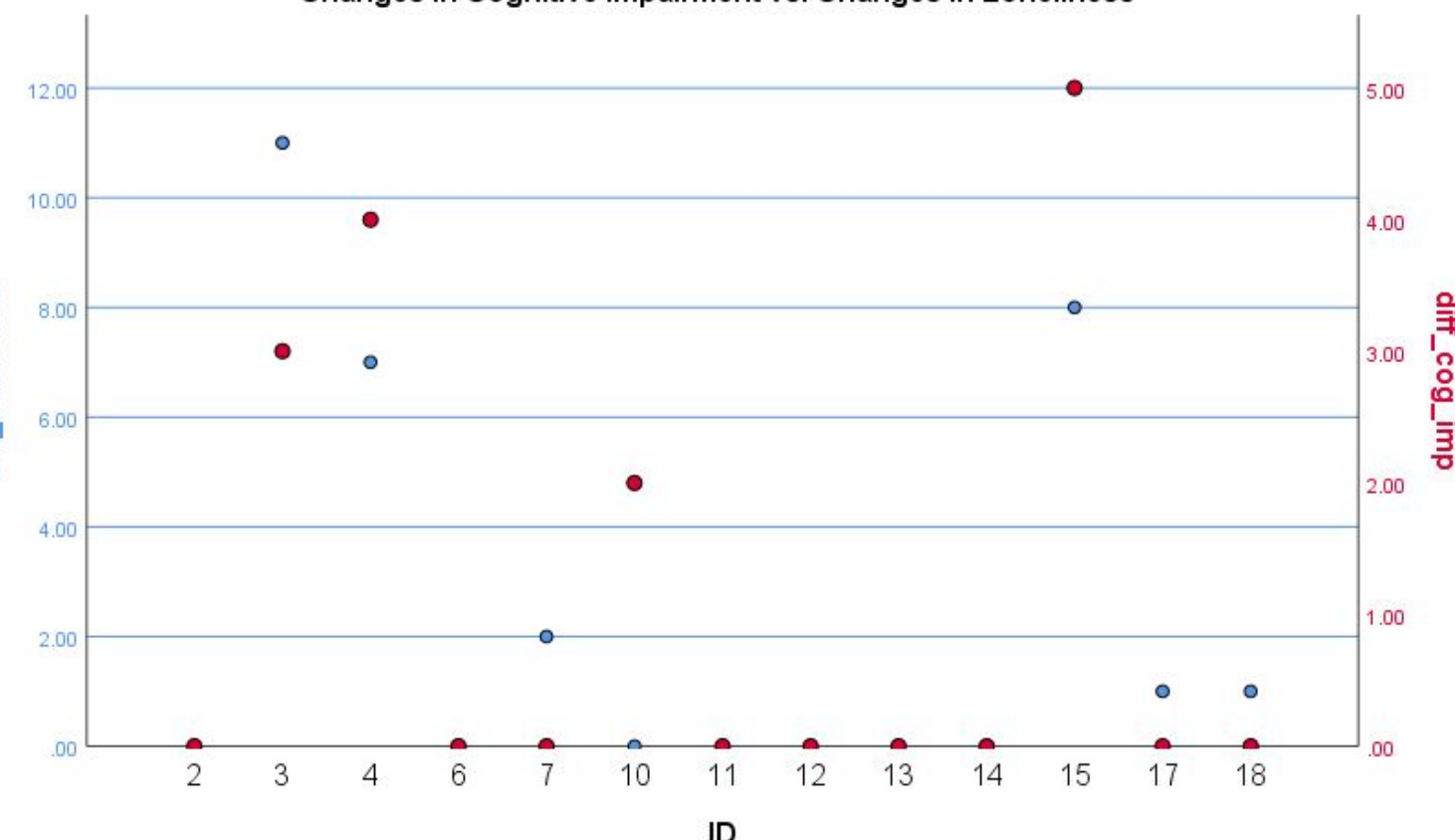
Changes in Physical Health vs. Changes in Loneliness



Changes in Physical Health vs. Changes in Socialization



Changes in Cognitive Impairment vs. Changes in Loneliness



References

- Brown, J. D., Vouri, S. M., & Manini, T. M. (2020, November 12). Survey-reported medication changes among older adults during the sars-cov-2 (covid-19) pandemic. *Research in Social Administrative Pharmacy*. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33221267/>.
- Henning-Smith, C. (2020). The Unique Impact of COVID-19 on Older Adults in Rural Areas. *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, 32(4-5), 396-402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08959420.2020.1770036>

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