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Reduced ability to engage in social and physical activity and mental health of older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic: longitudinal analysis from the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging

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Abstract

Background Restrictions implemented to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 have affected the ability of many older adults to engage in social and physical activities. We examined the mental health outcomes for older adults whose ability to be socially and physically active was reduced during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods Data from the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA), a nationally representative longitudinal cohort of Canadian residents aged 45–85 years, at CLSA baseline (2012–15), follow-up 1 (2018), COVID-19 baseline (April–May, 2020), and COVID-19 exit surveys (September–December, 2020) were used. Participants were asked the degree to which their ability to participate in social and physical activity had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Binary logistic regression was used to examine the relationship between the risk of a positive screen for depression (Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale score >10) and anxiety (Generalised Anxiety Disorder Assessment-7 score >10) and reduced participants' ability to participate in social and physical activity. Models were adjusted for age group, dwelling type, geographic area, household composition, Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale, and smoking status at COVID-19 baseline; alcohol consumption at COVID-19 exit; and multimorbidity, physical activity, income, social participation, and diagnosis of anxiety or mood disorders before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings Of the 24 108 participants who completed the COVID-19 exit survey, 5219 (22.0%) screened positive for depression and 1132 (5.0%) screened positive for anxiety. Depression and anxiety were associated with a decreased ability to participate in social activity (odds ratio [OR] 1.85 [95% CI 1.67–2.04] for depression; 1.66 [1.37–2.02] for anxiety) and physical activity (2.46 [2.25–2.69] for depression; 1.96 [1.68–2.30] for anxiety).

Interpretation Older adults whose ability to participate in social and physical activities was reduced during the COVID-19 pandemic had poorer mental health outcomes than those whose ability remained the same or improved. Individuals who had low pre-COVID-19 levels of social and physical activity had a higher frequency of positive depression and anxiety screens. These findings highlight the importance of fostering social and physical activity resources in advance of, and during, future lockdown measures.

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Contributors

TDC led the project conceptualisation, data management and analysis, results interpretation, drafting and revision of the abstract, and had access to all the data in this abstract. JB contributed to the project conceptualisation, data management and analysis, results interpretation, drafting and revision of the abstract. IR, LK, and AW contributed to the project conceptualisation, results interpretation, drafting, and revision of the abstract. The members of the CLSA team have contributed to the collection of the data across Canada. All authors approved the final version of the abstract for submission.

Declaration of interests

We declare no competing interests.

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