

Survey uncovers further aggravation of home care for older persons during the COVID-19 pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic places a particular focus on older persons. Therefore, it comes as a surprise that the high-risk group of around 2.6 million care-dependent older persons in Germany who receive care at home, predominantly from their relatives, has been largely ignored by scientists, politicians, and society in general during this crisis. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on old age care at home is a pressing issue since the considerable problems associated with old age care at home and the burdens of caring for relatives have been known for many years, long before the outbreak of the pandemic.

A survey undertaken under the leadership of Dr. Vincent Horn and Professor Cornelia Scheweppe of Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU) shows that the care situation of older people who receive care at home has deteriorated significantly during the pandemic. This is the case for both the persons in need of care and the [family caregivers](#). "Our results show that the already precarious situation of old age care at home is aggravating in the current circumstances. Persons in need of care have been identified as a particularly vulnerable group to be especially protected, but in fact they and their family caregivers prove to be a highly neglected group," stated Professor Cornelia Scheweppe of the JGU Institute of Education.

For the survey, 330 family caregivers were interviewed online. In addition, qualitative interviews were conducted. Nearly half of the

respondents stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has a negative impact on the health of the person in need of care. In many cases, important medical appointments and necessary hospital stays had to be renounced. In addition, nearly 75% of the respondents consider an increased occurrence of loneliness and/or depressive moods of the person in need of care. This shows the negative impact of the contact restrictions that have been put in place; indeed, 85% of respondents indicated that visits from relatives, acquaintances, or friends to the person in need of care were reduced due to COVID-19. In addition, almost half of the family caregivers also limited their contact with the person in need of care.

Family caregivers are increasingly strained and overburdened

The survey also reveals alarming results concerning the family caregivers. More than half of the respondents stated that providing care was more burdensome than before the outbreak of the pandemic. Thirty-eight percent even indicated that they feel overstrained by the current care situation.

The stressful care situation is also reflected in the worsening of the relationship between the person in need of care and the family [caregiver](#). This was reported by 75% of the respondents. Furthermore, one third of the respondents also indicated that they were coming into conflict with the person in need of care more often.

Due to the increase of burdens and overload of family caregivers as well as the strained relationship between the family caregivers and the persons in need of care, the researchers are also concerned about its possible impact on violence in old age care at home. "For a long time high burdens of family caregivers have been identified as an important factor for violence in old age care," said Dr. Vincent Horn of the Institute of Education at JGU. "The increase in stress caused by the current situation is thus troubling. In contrast to the discussion of the

possible effects of the COVID-19 crisis on violence against children and women, this topic has so far not been addressed with regard to the older population."

The survey also shows that 68% of the family caregivers feel abandoned by politicians during the COVID-19 crisis. "The implications are serious since family caregivers often do not have viable relief and support structures", emphasized Professor Cornelia Schweppe. Almost every third respondent has no person with whom they can talk about their needs and concerns and who they can ask for support.

Provided by Universitaet Mainz

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