



ORIGINAL

## Emotional manifestations and perceived social support in elderly adults in the face of the impact of Covid-19

### Manifestaciones emocionales y apoyo social percibido en adultos mayores ante el impacto de la Covid-19

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#### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** the confrontation with the pandemic has caused changes in the lifestyles of all people, to comply with the strict social isolation, and the elderly, a vulnerable group before covid-19, have had to modify their routines for a better adaptation to the current situation.

**Objective:** to determine the emotional manifestations and the social support perceived in elderly people facing the covid-19 pandemic, who belong to the clinic 24, Puerto Esperanza, Viñales municipality in the year 2021.

**Methods:** a descriptive study was carried out, based on the non-experimental and transversal method, working with a non-probabilistic sample of 30 elderly people, between 60 and 75 years old. Theoretical and empirical methods were used as the applied techniques: semi-structured interview, IDARE, MOS Social Support Questionnaire and Yesavage Geriatric Depression Test and descriptive statistics.

**Results:** there was a predominance of female sex, married marital status, no work relationship and the family structure were characterized by the presence of small and bigeneracionales family nuclei. Regarding the emotional level, there was a predominance of medium levels of anxiety as a state (86 %) and as a trait (76 %) and with respect to depression there was a prevalence of light levels (80 %). The degree of perceived social support that predominated was high (80 %), with the family standing out as the main source of support (emotional, affective and material) for this group.

**Conclusions:** the population under study showed medium levels of anxiety and depression and an adequate perception of social support in the face of the impact of COVID-19, only showing high levels of anxiety and depression in 20 % of the population that expressed a low level of social support.

**Keywords:** Emotional Manifestations; Perceived Social Support; Elderly; Covid-19.

#### RESUMEN

**Introducción:** el enfrentamiento a la pandemia ha provocado cambios en los estilos de vida de todas las personas, para cumplir con el estricto aislamiento social, y los adultos mayores, grupo vulnerable ante la covid-19, han tenido que modificar sus rutinas para una mejor adaptación a la situación actual.

**Objetivo:** determinar las manifestaciones emocionales y el apoyo social percibido en las personas de la tercera edad ante la pandemia covid-19, que pertenecen al consultorio 24, Puerto Esperanza, municipio Viñales en el año 2021.

**Métodos:** se realizó un estudio con carácter descriptivo, con base en el método no experimental y transversal, trabajando con una muestra no probabilística de 30 adultos mayores, entre 60 y 75 años de edad. Se utilizaron

métodos teóricos, empíricos como las técnicas aplicadas: Entrevista semiestructurada, IDARE, Cuestionario MOS de Apoyo Social y Prueba de Depresión Geriátrica de Yesavage y de la estadística descriptiva.

**Resultados:** hubo un predominio del sexo femenino, estado civil casados, sin vínculo laboral y la estructura familiar se caracterizó por la presencia de núcleos de familias pequeñas y bigeneracionales. Atendiendo al plano emocional, hay un predominio de niveles medios de ansiedad como estado (86 %) y como rasgo (76 %) y con respecto a la depresión hay prevalencia de niveles ligeros (80 %). El grado de apoyo social percibido que predominó fue alto (80 %), destacándose la familia como principal fuente generadora de apoyo (emocional, afectivo y material) para este grupo.

**Conclusiones:** la población objeto de estudio manifiesta niveles medios de ansiedad y depresión y una adecuada percepción de apoyo social ante el impacto de la COVID-19, sólo evidenciándose niveles altos de ansiedad y depresión en el 20 % de la población que expresó un nivel bajo de apoyo social.

**Palabras clave:** Manifestaciones Emocionales; Apoyo Social Percibido; Adulto Mayor; COVID-19.

## INTRODUCTION

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic, reporting that there were 4 291 deaths and 118 000 cases in 114 countries.<sup>(1)</sup>

It is known for being an infectious disease caused by a recently discovered and highly contagious coronavirus, responsible for countless deaths in the world. Until June 13, 2021, the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases worldwide was approximately 177 million.<sup>(1)</sup>

In our country, a COVID-19 Response Plan was approved on January 28, 2020, outlining the main priorities for action.

As a result, when the Cuban government reported the first three confirmed cases on March 11, 2020 (involving three Italian tourists), the necessary measures to contain the virus were already in place. According to official figures from the Cuban Ministry of Health, since the beginning of the pandemic until late June 18, there had been 166,368 diagnosed cases of COVID-19 and approximately 1 123 reported deaths.<sup>(2)</sup>

The response to COVID-19 has had a broad impact on all of us, but in our country, as researchers have pointed out in various publications, one of the most affected segments of the population has been older adults. These findings are consistent with data from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), which shows that the majority of COVID-19-related deaths occur in people aged 70 and older, followed closely by those in the 60-69 age group (older adults). These individuals are considered highly vulnerable because they typically have weakened immune systems and often suffer from one or more chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). As a result, their ability to fight infections is often compromised.<sup>(1)</sup>

According to Enrique Vega, Unit Chief, Healthy Life Course (PAHO), the impact of COVID-19 on each older adult is closely linked to their overall physical and mental well-being. This pandemic has revealed the vulnerability not only of older people, but also of the environments and systems around them.<sup>(2)</sup>

In the province of Pinar del Río, there is no relief from a pandemic that is spreading throughout the world. Until June 3 in the current year, our province has recorded a total of 6,981 positive cases and 31 deaths. In response to this situation, we have implemented new measures such as social distancing, quarantine and isolation.<sup>(3)</sup>

The current situation can lead to mental health problems, including anxiety and depression. These problems can be particularly pronounced among older adults, who are recognized as a high-risk group. Those identified as primary support networks, whether family members or friends, play a critical role in alleviating these emotional conditions.<sup>(4)</sup>

Social support plays a critical role in the overall life satisfaction of older adults. It promotes well-being, helps prevent emotional problems such as depression, and reduces the risk of physical conditions such as chronic diseases. Ultimately, social support leads to an improved quality of life.<sup>(4)</sup>

It's important to note that 46 % of Cuban households have at least one elderly member. As a result, 20,4 % of the Cuban population is 60 years of age or older, according to the Population Aging Survey.<sup>(5)</sup>

In the Municipality of Viñales, there is a lack of research on COVID-19 and its effects on different age groups. As a result, emotional manifestations and perceived social support among older adults in the current pandemic have not been thoroughly studied as topics of analysis. This emphasizes the need to study this situation at the request of the Mental Health Center. This initiative stems from existing concerns regarding the emotional and psychological well-being that generally affects the elderly population, a group that has been identified as highly vulnerable.

The social importance of this study lies in the fact that it examines a current problem that has received

limited attention in the Municipality of Viñales. At present, it has a negative impact on the health of older adults population.

The practical implications of this study are aimed at facilitating future intervention strategies. By considering the current circumstances and the potential of the study participants (older people), it aims to enhance their ability to cope with the pandemic. This includes incorporating relevant theoretical elements to improve understanding. The purpose of this study is to examine the emotional manifestations and perceived social support of older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2021. Specifically, it focused on those who belong the Medical Office 24, Puerto Esperanza, Municipality of Viñales.

## METHODS

A descriptive, non-experimental, and cross-sectional study was conducted. It was non-experimental because there was no manipulation of variables; instead, measurements and analyses were conducted. Pre-existing situations were observed. It was a cross-sectional study because the data were collected at a single time point.

The study universe consisted of 45 older adults living in the designated health area. A non-probability, subject-type design was used. The sample consisted of 30 older adults who met the following inclusion criteria: they were between 60 and 75 years old and belonged to the Medical Office 24, Puerto Esperanza, Municipality of Viñales, in 2021.

These older adults were willing to participate in the research and had the mental capacity to provide the information needed for the study through the techniques used.

The access to the sample was possible by the family physician and nurse at the Family Medical Office. They supplied all the necessary information for the conduct of this study.

### *Instruments used*

We used the following instruments to gather all the essential information needed to achieve our goals:

- Semi-structured interview: This technique, based on human interactions, offers an extensive examination of individuals, enabling the collection of personal data and other pertinent aspects related to the issue at hand.
- State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI): It examines two somewhat independent types of depression: depression as a state (a temporary emotional condition) and depression as a trait (a tendency to experience depressive states as a relatively stable personality trait).
- Medical outcomes study social support survey (MOS-SSS): It measures multiple levels of perceived support among older adults, including emotional support, material assistance, leisure and social connections, and affective support.
- Yesavage's Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS): This is a widely used instrument for assessing depression (normal, mild and severe) that has been translated and validated in several languages, including Spanish.

### *Statistical analysis*

The data obtained were processed in a database. Descriptive statistics procedures were used for each variable through simple percentage analysis. The data were organized and presented in frequency distribution tables.

### *Ethical considerations*

The study adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the Code of Ethics of the Cuban Society of Psychologists. The research was conducted with the consent of the sample members, prioritizing their personal integrity and ensuring the confidentiality of the data for strictly scientific purposes.

## RESULTS

Sex	No.	%
Female	19	63
Male	11	37
Total	30	100

In the distribution of older adults by age and sex, the majority (67 %) were in the 60-69 age group, and the female sex exhibited a prevalence in the study sample (63 %) (table 1).

**Table 2. Marital status of older adults**

Marital status	No.	%
Married	24	80
Single	5	17
Widow/er	1	3
Total	30	100

In table 2, the results regarding the marital status of older adults show that 80 % of the sample is married. In another aspect related to occupation, there was a predominance of retirees, comprising 93,3 % of the group.

**Table 3. Classification of families of older adults based on their ontogenesis**

Ages	No.	%
60-69 years old	20	67
70-75 years old	10	33,3
Total	30	100

Concerning the household's population, there is a notable prevalence of older adults living in nuclear families (table 3).

**Table 4. Emotional manifestations of older adults in coping with the effects of COVID-19**

		No.	%
Anxiety (state)	High	3	10
	Moderate	26	86
	Low	1	4
	Total	30	100
Anxiety (trait)	High	2	7
	Moderate	23	76
	Low	5	17
	Total	30	100
Depression	Normal	4	13
	Mild	24	80
	High	2	7
	Total	30	100

The emotional manifestations (anxiety and depression) in older adults are illustrated in table 4, with a predominant presence of moderate levels of anxiety as a state (86 %) and as a trait (76 %). Concerning depression, there is a prevalence of mild levels (80 %).

**Table 5. Perceived social support among older adults in coping with the effects of COVID-19**

Perceived social support	Nro.	%
High	24	80
Medium	0	0
Low	6	20
Total	30	100

Source: Medical outcomes study social support survey (MOS-SSS)

The degree of perceived social support among older adults in coping with the effects of COVID-19 was high (80 %). (table 5)

## DISCUSSION

Among older adults, the dominant sociodemographic contextual variables were as follows: the majority fell between the ages of 60 and 69, with a higher representation of women, most were married, not currently employed, and characterized by small nuclear family structures.

Regarding the emotional aspect, moderate anxiety levels prevail, both as a state and as a trait. When it comes to depression, there is a prevalence of mild levels.

The degree of perceived social support that prevailed was high, highlighting the family as the main source of support (emotional, affective and material) for this group under study.

In the study population, high levels of anxiety and depression were observed in only 20 % of those who reported low levels of social support.

In terms of marital status, the results of this study are consistent with those observed in a study of older adults in Spain. In both cases, a significant percentage of older adults have a partner and are unemployed.<sup>(6)</sup>

Older adults being studied predominantly live in nuclear families, often composed of two or three members. These families sometimes consist of two older adults, or older adults with one child, reflecting the characteristics of small families. These results are in line with a similar study conducted in Spain.<sup>(6)</sup>

According to data from the PAHO, 25 % of individuals aged over 60 experience some kind of psychiatric disorder, with anxiety and depression being the most prevalent conditions.<sup>(7)</sup>

When analyzing emotional manifestations, it's important to note that the primary concerns of this age group center on the high rates of infection and death, the limited understanding of the disease, as well as their age and age-related health conditions, which are considered risk factors in dealing with the pandemic.

Consistent with the findings of this study, similar results were found in an online survey conducted in China on the psychological impact of the pandemic on the elderly. This survey reported that 53 % of respondents had moderate symptoms of anxiety and depression.<sup>(8)</sup>

Given the unfortunate situation we are facing due to the current pandemic, appropriate social support plays a crucial role in safeguarding the health of the elderly. It helps to mitigate potential negative effects and promotes their well-being and life satisfaction. Therefore, it is important to assess levels of perceived social support reported by study participants.

The family stands out as the main source of support (emotional, affective and material) for this group, only showing high levels of anxiety and depression in 20 % of the population who expressed a low level of social support.

A study conducted in Mexico City yielded similar findings to this research. It reported that 62,9 % of the subjects (older adults) perceived high levels of social support, with a strong emphasis on the role of family and friends as their primary social networks.<sup>(9,10)</sup>

It is concluded that perceived social support among older adults, a vulnerable group, has a significant impact on their emotional states. Social relationships provide resources for meeting needs, fostering a sense of worth, and building self-esteem. Having robust family and social networks improves the health and personal well-being of this group in coping with the effects of COVID-19.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, perceived social support among older adults, who are considered a vulnerable group, has an impact on their emotional states. Social relationships provide the means for fulfilling needs, nurturing a sense of worth, and boosting self-esteem. Having robust family and social networks improves the health and personal well-being of this group in response to the effects of COVID-19.

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#### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

There is no conflict of interest.

#### **FINANCING**

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#### **AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION**

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