

## Peer Review Report

# Review Report on Examining risk factors for mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic – focusing on older adults in South Korea

Original Article, Int J Public Health

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### EVALUATION

#### **Q 1** Please summarize the main findings of the study.

This clearly written and neat analysis examines the factors associated with a worsening in three aspects of mental health in older people living in Korea. It shows that good public health education may have a role to play in mitigating against anxiety and distress, as well as the risk associated with poor physical health and with fear of infection.

#### **Q 2** Please highlight the limitations and strengths.

The dataset is excellent. The survey must have been one of very few globally to have undertaken face to face in-home data collection during the pandemic. Given this is a rare strength, it could be worth highlighting more, perhaps mention in the abstract or introduction. This is a particular strength given most surveys during this time have been online, with particular exclusions for older people and those without internet access due to low income.

The analysis is neat and clear, with good checks on collinearity (appropriately leading to some indicators being excluded from the analysis).

#### **Q 3** Please provide your detailed review report to the authors. The editors prefer to receive your review structured in major and minor comments. Please consider in your review the methods (statistical methods valid and correctly applied (e.g. sample size, choice of test), is the study replicable based on the method description?), results, data interpretation and references. If there are any objective errors, or if the conclusions are not supported, you should detail your concerns.

A few minor amendments and clarifications would help:

Outcome variables:

- Rather than use the term 'sleep disorder', which implies a screen or clinical indicator, the term 'sleep problems' may be more appropriate, given identification was based on a item asking if they've been 'sleeping poorly' (which would not necessarily constitute a 'sleep disorder').
- About 10% of the sample report a worsening in their mental health. Could Table 1 also present the proportion who self-reported that their mental health had improved?
- In any year (pandemic or not) some people will experience deterioration and some will experience improvement. The limitations should acknowledge that it should not be assumed that all change in mental health can be attributed to the pandemic.
- I wonder if the title is quite right, given the paper's strength is more about identifying what factors were associated with deterioration, rather than in quantifying that deterioration (given this is retrospectively self-reported, without a prepandemic baseline measure)?

Predictor variables:

- Being infected with Covid has been identified as a risk factor for subsequent poor mental health (e.g. Pierce et al. 2021 Lancet Psychiatry.) If Covid infection was collected, could it be included in the model? If it was not collected perhaps just mention in the limitations that it's not.
- Marital status: text describes division between married or divorced/widowed/separated - were none in the sample single?
- The word 'unemployed' is applied to all those not in work. Under the international ILO definition unemployed has a very specific meaning relating to actively searching for work. I think many in this sample may be retired or disabled. Just a matter of amending the terminology to include 'economically inactive'.

**PLEASE COMMENT**

**Q 4** Is the title appropriate, concise, attractive?

The title could be improved to better reflect what the paper is about. The strength of the paper is more about what factors are associated with mental health deterioration, rather than in quantifying the impacts (given there is no pre-pandemic baseline data to compare with).

**Q 5** Are the keywords appropriate?

Yes

**Q 6** Is the English language of sufficient quality?

Generally this is very well written. However, it might benefit from a light language edit. In a few places the terminology could be problematic. For example, it refers to people 'of similar interest and social value'. I think the authors mean people who share similar values, but with current phrasing this could be read to mean some people have greater 'social value' than others. There are a few instances like this - just would need a light language review.

**Q 7** Is the quality of the figures and tables satisfactory?

Yes.

**Q 8** Does the reference list cover the relevant literature adequately and in an unbiased manner?

Yes

**QUALITY ASSESSMENT**

<b>Q 9</b> Originality	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Q 10</b> Rigor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Q 11</b> Significance to the field	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Q 12</b> Interest to a general audience	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Q 13</b> Quality of the writing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Q 14</b> Overall scientific quality of the study	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**REVISION LEVEL**

**Q 15** Please make a recommendation based on your comments:

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Minor revisions.