

Editorial

Rosette Farrugia-Bonello¹ and Christian Vella²

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the way we live. It has taken the world to a new different dimension, to a world very different to what we had all were accustomed to. The pandemic has impacted our lifestyles and plans and we all had to adhere to lockdowns, curfews and measures. It brought countries to a standstill and has taken away precious lives - leaving distraught families and loved-ones behind, without opportunities to say appropriate good byes. COVID-19 is causing an unprecedented public health crisis impacting healthcare systems, healthcare workers, and communities. Frontline workers are exhausted, mentally and physically. The social and economic systems worldwide have never been this challenged. The tragedy brought about by this virus cannot be put into words and the years ahead are not going to be easy. The outbreak of COVID-19 will have a long-term and profound impact on all of us, but most especially on older persons' health and wellbeing.

In almost every country battling with the COVID-19 outbreak, older people are being told to self-isolate and shut themselves off from other people who might risk infecting them. While these restrictions are legitimate during a time of crisis, these restrictions may have a significant negative impact on older adults' mental health status, such as experiencing social isolation. Older people are a heterogeneous group and efforts to protect them should not overlook the many variables within this category.

Unfortunately, ageism has never been so evident. The covid-19 pandemic had operated as a magnifier of already existing vulnerabilities and discriminations amongst older persons. Once again, the full diversity of people within the older persons category during this journey has been ignored. Their incredible resilience, positivity and multiple roles, including caregiving and volunteering, were never acknowledged. There is a need to look at older persons as a diverse group. Moreover, it should be ensured that older persons worldwide will have their voice heard by getting the platform, space and time that they rightly deserve.

¹ Deputy Director, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations – Malta (INIA).
(rosette.bonello@inia.org.mt)

² Research and Programme Officer, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations – Malta (INIA).
(christian.vella@inia.org.mt)

This volume of the *International Journal on Ageing in Developing Countries* (IJAD) is a special issue dedicated to 'Ageing and COVID-19'. It brings together original entries discussing the realities of COVID-19 and its impact on older persons, while putting forward recommendations for the future. Included also is a supplementary paper from Nepal which focuses on pensions. Besides, in this issue one also finds two book reviews-namely, 'Intelligent Assistive Technologies for Dementia: Clinical, Ethical, Social, and Regulatory Implications' (Jotterand, F., Ienca, M., Elger, B., & Wangmo, T. (Eds.). (2019) reviewed by Anthony Scerri and 'International Handbook of Elder Abuse and Mistreatment', Kapur Shankardass, M. (Ed.). (2020) reviewed by Lawrence Adebusoye.

The first contribution, by Marvin Formosa is titled 'COVID-19 and older persons: Reflections on human rights, ageism, isolation, dementia care, and gender'. In this paper, Formosa takes us on a journey from the moment COVID-19 hits home in Malta to reflecting on how older persons were impacted by this pandemic worldwide. Their human rights were jeopardised, ageism amplified and the negative impacts on social isolation and loneliness especially amongst those living with dementia and their caregivers. Moreover, the author speaks on how during this pandemic older people were treated as a homogeneous group, devoid of gendered trends. The paper ends by suggesting the following four key priorities that governments should engage in. The first is to ensure that difficult health-care decisions affecting older people are guided by a commitment to dignity and the right to health; secondly to strengthen social inclusion and solidarity during physical distancing; thirdly to integrate a focus on older persons into the socio-economic and humanitarian response to COVID-19; and the last but not the least to expand participation by older persons, share good practices and harness knowledge and data.

The second contribution, by Alexandre Sidorenko is titled 'Active ageing in the time of COVID-19 with references to European and post-Soviet countries'. In this article, the author discusses the aspects of active ageing policies in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sidorenko starts the paper by giving a brief overview of the evolution of the concepts and content of the active ageing policy. Then, features of the approach to active ageing in the post-Soviet countries are outlined. The author continues by giving a a brief overview of the situation of older people during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the concluding part, Sidorenko introduces proposals for adapting the policy of active ageing to the new realities of the (post)pandemic world, starting with the restoring pre-pandemic level of human rights of older persons through the rebuilding and adjusting measures to support independent living and autonomy for older persons. Also emphasized is the point of including target groups in the collection of data. The paper concludes by suggesting the need for a comprehensive renewed policy on active ageing that should be consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Motto, that of 'No one should be left behind'.

The third article in this issue is a paper from Africa. It is a study which had been carried out in Nigeria and titled 'Older people's perception about COVID-19 directives and their impacts on family care and support for older people in Ile-Ife of south-western Nigeria'. In this paper, the author, Eboiyehi Friday Asiazobor provides us with a qualitative study carried out

through telephone interviews amongst older persons living in Ife-Ife of South Western Nigeria. The author explored the level of awareness and knowledge of COVID-19 transmission among older persons and evaluated their perception of government's COVID-19 directives. Moreover, he also identified the peculiar problems older people faced with COVID-19 directives and investigated coping strategies employed by older persons to be able to sustain themselves. Findings revealed that though a high percentage were not exposed to media, a good majority were aware of and knowledgeable about COVID-19 through information delivered by their next of kin. A number of problems faced by older persons during COVID-19 were also outlined, together with coping mechanisms. The paper concludes by suggesting a number of policy recommendations, one of which that the government should ensure that older persons and their caregivers be included in the palliative measures put in place for the vulnerable groups in society.

'Overview of challenges and lessons learnt during COVID-19 among Sri Lankan older persons' is the fourth contribution which is researched and submitted by Shiromi Maduwage, Neluka Gunathilaka, Nishani Fonseka, Nadeeshani Walpita and Hirushi Mallawatantri. Sri Lanka is considered as one of the fastest ageing countries in the world. The paper describes the several initiatives for older persons that the government and non-government organisations are embarking on. Like every country in the World, COVID-19 pandemic has also disrupted the routine in Sri Lanka. In this regard, this paper sought to take an in-dept look at the physical, psychological, and economical effects that COVID-19 has brought upon the older Sri Lankan population. Future challenges are also addressed. In conclusion, the authors provided a number of recommendations to care and provide services for older persons so as to maintain sustainability of COVID-19 preventive measures and hence promoting healthy ageing.

This article, which is the fifth paper in this issue reviews 'Older people and the COVID-19: An opportunity for Latin America'. This paper, which has been written and submitted by Isabel Lovrinkevich, attempts to discuss the opportunities and challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic regarding the current situation and impending needs of older adults in Latin America. The author made use of several examples from around the world to illustrate the ways in which societies and public authorities dealt with specific issues related to the wellbeing and health of older adults. Finally, the author put forward possible solutions to the persistent issues.

The last paper in this issue, written by Sarah Speck is a supplementary paper and discusses the 'Obstacles to social pensions in rural Nepal'. This case study sought to examine the obstacles that beneficiaries from five Nepalese mountain villages encounter when accessing a social pension. Research was carried out through qualitative in-depth interviews, participant observation, group discussions and expert interviews. Findings revealed that barriers involve poor health, illiteracy, lack of awareness, lack of familial support, poor infrastructure, recent changes in disbursement, and geographic remoteness. This article concludes that non-contributory social pensions have proven effective for supporting older people to maintain a

livelihood. The author provides possible recommendations for improvement and implementation of social pensions for older people.

As a conclusion, all six papers making up this issue are all a welcome addition to research in the field of ageing. Without doubt, findings presented in each paper showed how the COVID-19 pandemic has caused much concern, much tragedy and has had a major multidimensional negative impact on all, but most especially on older persons. Let's this be a lesson learned and look at the future by developing appropriate interventions and policies that addresses needs and provide us with the right tools to eliminate ageism, inequities and include all, so as not to leave anyone behind. In the meantime, we do hope that you find this journal's content instructive and inspirational.