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Beyond Virology: Psychosocial Aspects of Aging in the Corona Pandemic"

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Contribution to:

4EU+ Academic Year 2020/21

“Smart Cities for Ageing Societies – Multidisciplinary
Webinar”

Session Date: November 18, 2020

Outline



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1. The COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges and risks for those in the second half of life
2. Findings on the psychosocial adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic: Older adults also as a “psychological risk group”?
3. Smart technology: A promising aid for older adults to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic
4. Conclusions and input for discussion



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The COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges and risks for those in the second half of life

Older Adults as Risk Group



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- Experience of direct life threat as “risk group” (generally increased mortality; survival after medical treatment, such as ventilator treatment, significantly lower for older adults (→ Casagrande et al. 2020, Sleep Med; González-Sanguino et al., 2020, Brain Behav Immun).
- Old age and shortage in intensive care beds; becoming the target of triage decision-making (→ Ehni & Wahl, 2020, Journal of Aging & Social Policy).
- Specific vulnerability of those in institutionalized long-term care: Contributed 50% to mortality during first COVID-19 wave (→ Wolf-Ostermann and Rothgang, 2020, German research report on website).

Older Adults as Risk Group



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- Adverse secondary consequences of protection measures: Social isolation, loneliness, and loss of social participation.
- These outcomes may come with increased mortality, loss in functioning, and further increase in disengagement and apathy.
- Becoming the victim of ageism and negative age stereotyping (→ Ayalon, Chasteen, Diehl, Levy, Neupert, Rothermund, Tesch-Römer, & Wahl, 2020, Journal of Gerontology; Ehni & Wahl, 2020, Journal of Aging & Social Policy)
- Ageism und negative stereotyping related to adverse outcomes such as impaired health, cognitive impairment, and mortality (→ Levy et al., 2020, The Gerontologist; Westerhof, Miche, Brothers, Barrett, Diehl, Montepare, Wahl, & Wurm, 2014, Psychology and Aging).

Additional Observations During the Covid-19 Crisis

- Statements made in various media all over the world → Table 1 (next overhead)
- What could be seen – in Italy – in France – in Spain...
- Italy was particularly important for the collective imprinting of excess mortality (mostly older adults).



Evening on Wednesday, March 18, 2020, City of Bergamo, North Italy

Photograph made by Emanuele di Terlizzi (via EPA).

<https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/corona-krise-das-bild-das-um-die-welt-gegangen-ist-ld.1558320>

Table 1

Illustrations of Older Adults' Portrayal as Helpless, Frail, and Unable to Contribute to Society During the Covid-19 Crisis



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Source	URL	Main message	Country in focus
Google	https://verfassungsblog.de/grenzen-der-solidaritaet/	Professor in law science says: Every life has equal value, but that civil society should invest the same energy (...) to provide additional months or years to a 95-year old (...) is much of an imposition for common sense.	Germany
Euronews	https://www.euronews.com/2020/03/11/spain-warns-elderly-to-keep-away-from-grandchildren-as-covid-19-cases-soar	Spain warns elderly to keep away from grandchildren as COVID-19 cases soar	Spain
USA Today	https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/03/24/covid-19-texas-official-suggests-elderly-willing-die-economy/2905990001/	Texas' lieutenant governor suggests grandparents are willing to die for US economy	U.S.
Metro	https://metro.co.uk/2020/03/25/dj-says-elderly-people-sacrifice-coronavirus-save-economy-12454758/	DJ says elderly people should sacrifice themselves to coronavirus to save the economy	U.S.

Taken from Ayalon et al. (2020, p. 2, modified).

Conceptual Considerations



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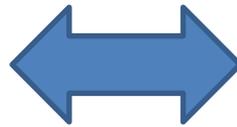


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Older adults:

- As “risk group“
- As victims of ageism and negative stereotyping

Prediction:
Psychosocial adaptation
(e.g., life satisfaction)
MORE impaired than in
younger individuals.



Older adults:

- As psychologically resilient
- Rich in life knowledge
- Able and in a better position than younger individuals to flexibly adjust their goals

Prediction:
Psychosocial adaptation
(e.g., life satisfaction)
LESS impaired than in
younger individuals.

→ Let the data speak, but keep all kinds of limitations in mind!



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Findings on the psychosocial
adaptation to the COVID-19
pandemic:

Older adults also as a
“psychological risk group”?

Own “Corona“ Study 1 (Wahl & Schlomann, unpublished data)



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- N = 540 individuals aged 50 years and older.
- Data collection (only cross-sectional) between July and September 2020.
- Online study using sources of the NAR and co-operating institutions
- 73% older than 65 years.
- Range: 50 to 94 years.
- 57% women.
- 63% higher education (“Abitur“).
- 50% in urban regions above 100,000 inhabitants.

Threat by the Corona Pandemic

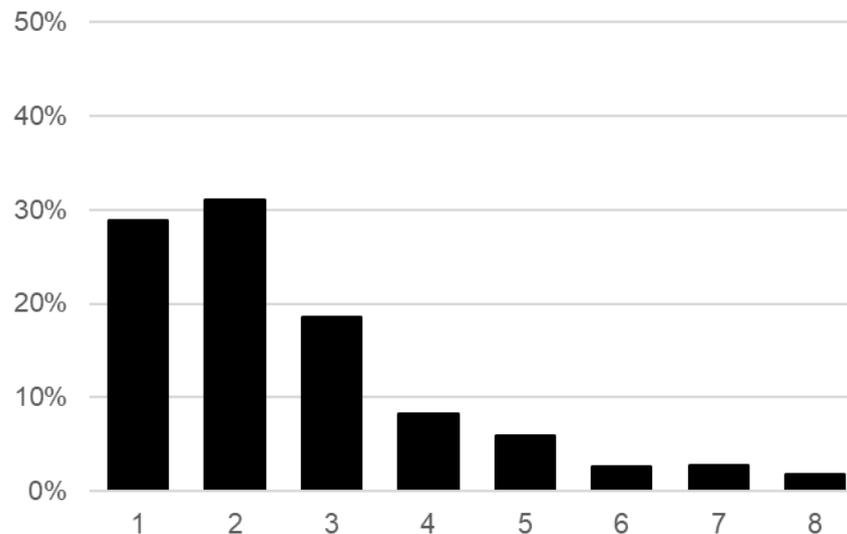


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Older Adults...		
...are threatened in their health by the Corona pandemic	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	...are not threatened in their health by the Corona pandemic
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	



MW = 2,60 (SD = 1,67), $r_{Alter} = ,14^{**}$

Worried About the Corona Pandemic

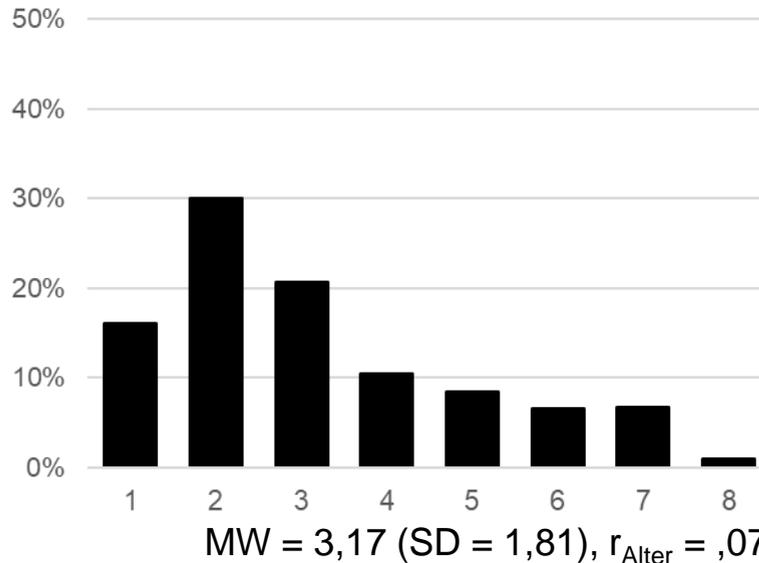


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Older Adults...		
...are worried about their health due to the Corona pandemic	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	... are not worried about their health due to the Corona pandemic
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	



Stereotyping of Older Adults

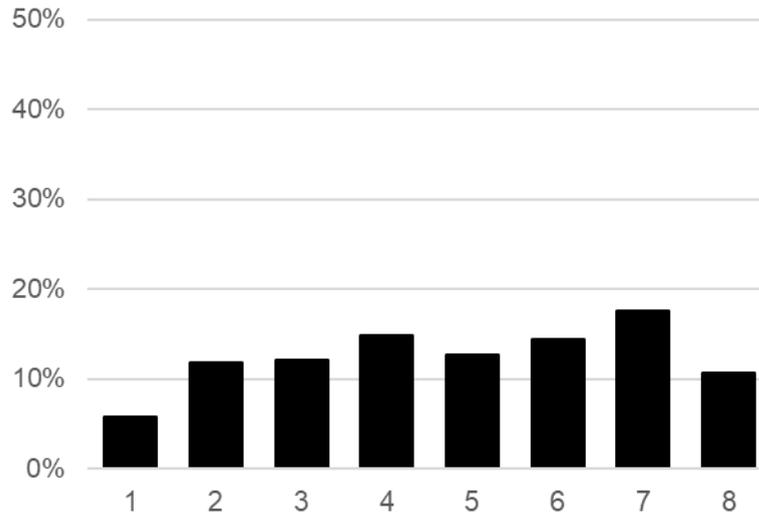


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Older Adults...		
... are discriminated during the Corona pandemic	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	... are not discriminated during the Corona pandemic
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	



MW = 4,84 (SD = 2,10), $r_{Alter} = ,03$

Worries in Various Areas

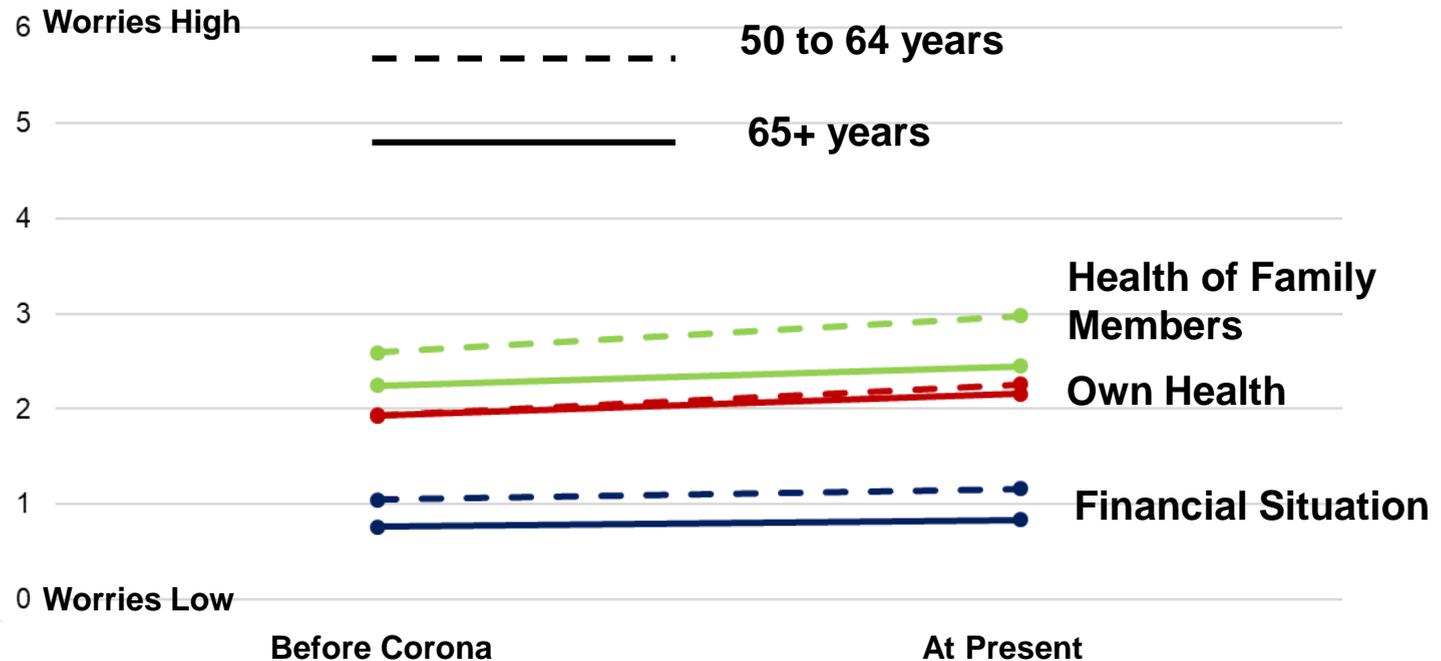


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Individuals in midlife are worried more than those above 65 years of age.



Own “Corona“ Study 2 (Schlomann, Bünning, Hipp, & Wahl, submitted)



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- N = 3,215 participants between 40 and 79 years.
- Three measurement occasions: Lock-down in Germany mid-March 2020 / 4 weeks later / July/August + Retrospective rating at baseline.
- Online study (longitudinal) of **Berlin Social Science Center**. **WZB** Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung
- 13% (N = 422) were aged between 65 and 79 years.
- 72% women.
- 77% higher education (university degree).
- 68% in urban regions above 50,000 inhabitants.
- 85% in workforce.

Psychosocial Adaptation across Time

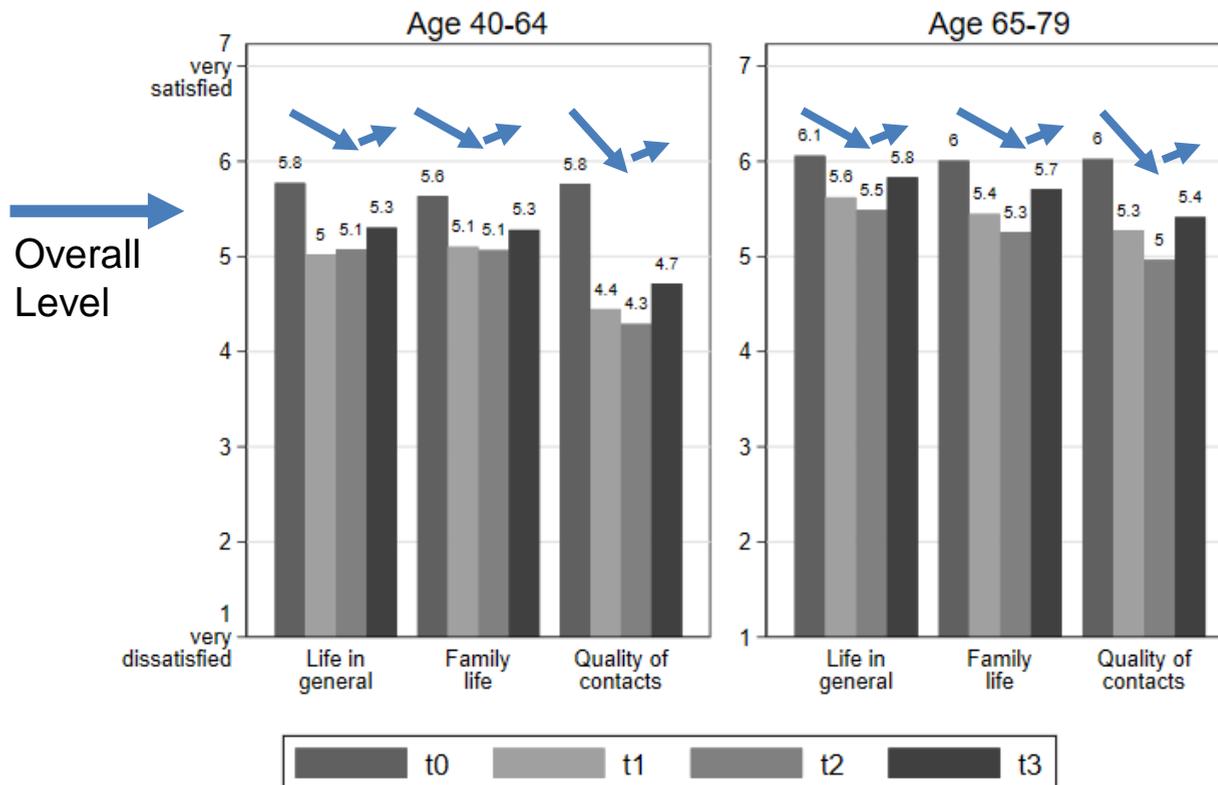


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**Average life satisfaction / perceived quality of life in 3 domains:
Life in general, family life, quality of social contacts**



Findings (Based on Statistical Testing*)



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- Both mid-aged and older participants experienced the greatest decreases in satisfaction in the social domain.
- More pronounced decreases seen in mid-aged than in older participants.
- Partial recovery effect in all measures at T3; more pronounced in older adults.

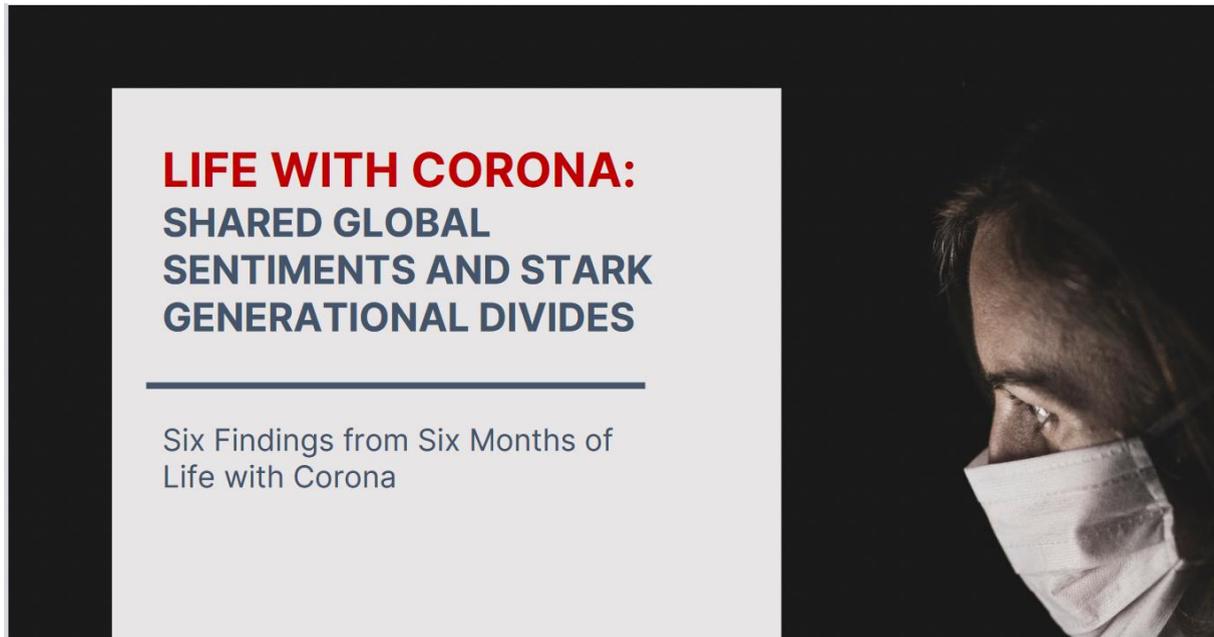
*OLS regressions with clustered, robust standard errors using four time points: t0 (retrospective assessment) to t3).



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LIFE WITH CORONA: SHARED GLOBAL SENTIMENTS AND STARK GENERATIONAL DIVIDES

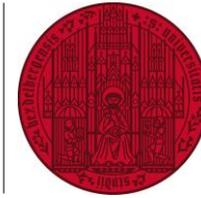
Six Findings from Six Months of
Life with Corona

Life with Corona Network (2020), Research Report: Shared Global Sentiments and Stark Generational Divides, ISDC, Berlin, 1 October

Technical comments: This data was collected in the “Life with Corona” online survey (<https://lifewithcorona.org>). The data used in the analysis was collected in **the period 23 March to 15 September 2020**. The number of observations is 11,657, recorded from **137 countries** around the globe.



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Overall stress level by age group

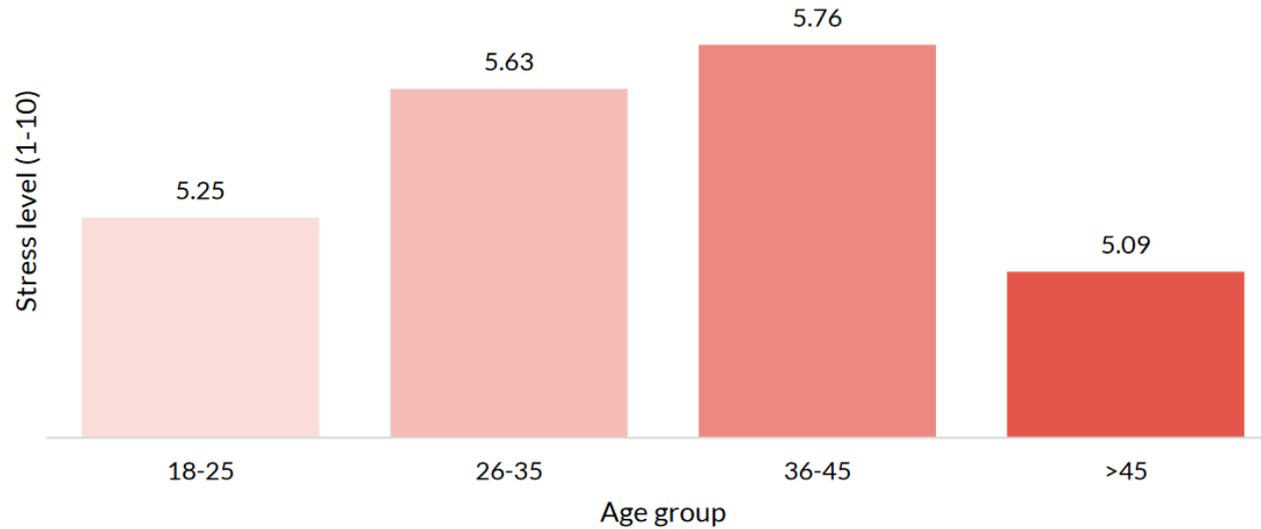


Figure 7: Overall stress level by age group. Survey question: "How would you rate your overall stress level at the moment?" Scale from 1 (I am not stressed at all) to 10 (I am extremely stressed)



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Smart technology: **A promising aid for older adults to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Imagination: Nursing Home



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- Service robots may organize entry control in nursing homes (e.g., rooms, main entrance, dining room) and execute basic hygiene measures.
- Robots may help residents getting in and out of bed, execute basic support such as meal service or accompany to toilet (particularly during the night).
- Robots may serve as companions for social-emotional interaction including robot pets; robots helping to connect residents to their families.
- Robots may help to conduct leisure activities such as going for a stroll, doing gaming, dancing.
- Robots may offer and supervise physical activity and falls preventive training.

Imagination: Community-Dwelling Older Adults



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- Robots may play a role in providing continuously updated advice and reminders for taking protective Corona measures.
- Robots may support basic actions such as getting in and out of bed or meal service.
- Robots may provide social intimacy and bodily nearness, which might no longer be possible by professionals or relatives.
- Robots may offer a variety of services (e.g., going out for a stroll, doing some in-house fitness training).

Back to Earth Again



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- Tablets or smart phones may help to connect with social partners.
- Apps may help to stay connected, to game, or to educate.
- (Partially) Automatized training units (“exergame platforms”) may help doing physical training and rehab.
- Robots may help in highly circumscribed actions in cooperation with care personal (e.g., robotic arm helping staff to get a resident out or in bed).
- Robots may offer some circumscribed socio-haptic stimulation (like pet robot PARO).

Perspective of Those Older Than 50 Years (“Corona Study 1“)



In case of need I would like to be supported by a robot / assistive system in...



...household activities.



...medication management.



...bodily care..





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Conclusions and **input for discussion**

Conclusions and Input for Discussion



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- Older adults get along with the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences quite well.
 - Although stereotyping has taken place, resilience against such stigmatization seems to work in a large portion of older adults.
 - Smart technologies have great potential during times of pandemic and beyond.
 - A huge gap between what is desirable and what is available is existing.
- **Are there major linkages between the smart city movement and Corona?**
- **Could Corona become a driver for the smart city and aging with technology issue?**



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Thank *you*