The coronavirus pandemic and its impact for individuals aged 50-70

Areas of Research Interest

About this document

The Centre for Ageing Better is a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, and a member of the What Works Network. We create change in policy and practice, informed by evidence, and work with partners across England to improve employment, housing, health and communities. We focus in particular on people approaching later life.

This Areas of Research Interest document sets out some of the main evidence questions we have that relate to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic (and the related economic and social restrictions introduced by the government) for people aged 50-70. It focuses on questions directly related to **individuals' experiences**, rather than the wider experiences of businesses, charities or public services.

These questions cover areas that we know from other evidence will matter greatly to people's chances of a good later life. They link to our existing priorities as an organisation, and so for those not already aware of the focus of our work, it is important to be clear that they relate not to the direct impact of the COVID-19 disease and its impact on mortality and morbidity, but rather to the **wider health and wellbeing, social and economic outcomes and prospects for people aged 50-70 as a result of the wider effects of the coronavirus pandemic and policies introduced to manage it**.

We are keen to ensure that high-quality research is conducted that will help us to answer these questions. To do this, we expect to:
- **Make extensive use of the outputs** from the range of research studies and data collections already underway
- **Commission and fund new research ourselves** (such as primary research, evaluation and secondary data analysis)
- **Collaborate with other research funders** to design funding calls and/or co-fund research
- **Collaborate with research teams applying for funding** for new studies, for example as a named impact partner.

We are therefore keen to hear from researchers, research institutions and research funders who are interested in working with us in any of these ways, on any of the areas outlined below. We can be contacted at director.evidence@ageing-better.org.uk.

Overarching questions

1. What is the **short-term and longer-term impact** of the pandemic on **people aged 50-70** in terms of their **health, financial security, social connections and wellbeing**, taking into account known risk and protective factors, such as their social connections, income, employment and engagement in meaningful activities, and health conditions?

2. In particular, what **inequalities** are there in the impact of the pandemic, including but not limited to gender, ethnicity, wealth and income, employment status, carer status, health and disability status, geographic variations, people who are socially isolated, and/or those who are digitally excluded?

3. How can any **positive impact** for people best be sustained, and any **negative impact** best be minimised and counteracted?

4. What **forms of support and intervention** (hyper-local, local and national, formal and informal, received and given) **have helped or hindered** people aged 50-70 to both mitigate the negative impact and maximise any positive impact of the pandemic; when and in what contexts?

5. What are the **implications of this for policy makers, public service providers, employers, different sectors of industry, and formal and informal community-based initiatives post-pandemic**?

Specific topics

These cover: fulfilling work; safe and accessible homes; healthy ageing; connected communities; and ageism.

Fulfilling work

Employment status

- How has the pandemic affected people's employment status in the short term, and their longer-term employment outcomes?

- What expectations do people have for employment after the pandemic, and are these expectations realised?

Unemployment

- In what ways has the pandemic changed people's attitudes, plans and prospects for seeking employment?

- Do people want or need anything different from employment support services given the changes to the labour market and job opportunities?

Furloughing

- How are people who have been furloughed thinking and feeling about returning to work or seeking new employment?

Money worries and financial insecurity

- How has people's financial situation changed as a result of the pandemic, in both the short and longer term, and what impact does is this having on them and their financial plans for later life?

Working practices

- For those remaining in employment, how have jobs changed during the pandemic, and afterwards (e.g. flexible working, use of technology, changing hours, working from home, changing job roles, type and quality of work), and what impact has this had for people?

- What hopes and expectations do people have for how working practices will change after the pandemic, and are these expectations realised?

- Are people's employers' indicating that they will be open to things like greater job flexibility in the future, as a result of the experience of the pandemic?

Skills and training

- What skills or training opportunities do people feel would help them increase their employment and career opportunities after the pandemic?

Work, health and disability

- What are the particular experiences of working practices and employment outcomes during and after the pandemic for people with long-term health conditions or disabilities?

- How have employers supported people with long-term conditions or disabilities to work during the pandemic (e.g through adjustments, providing equipment etc)? How does this compare to prior to the pandemic?

- Has the ability to work for people with long-term conditions or disabilities been affected by difficulties accessing health and care services during the pandemic?

- How do people with long-term conditions or disabilities feel the experience of the pandemic will affect their employment and work plans in the long term?

- For people who are shielding, what impact is this having on their employment, what expectations do they have for employment after the pandemic, and what are their long-term employment outcomes?

Key workers

- How have older key workers experienced working during lockdown in different sectors?

Experience of age discrimination

- Have people experienced, and do they fear experiencing in the future, age discrimination from their employer or prospective employers, during and after the pandemic?

Retirement

- What have been the experiences of people approaching retirement (e.g. unplanned retirement as a result of the pandemic, deciding to delay retirement for financial reasons, or positive experiences of retiring around the time of the pandemic)?

Future plans

- How have people's future work plans changed as a result of the pandemic (e.g. changing jobs, retraining, increased flexible working)?

- How have people's retirement plans changed as a result of the pandemic?

Unpaid caring

- How have caring responsibilities affected people's ability to work in paid employment?

Safe and accessible homes

Poor quality or unsuitable homes

- What are people's experiences of living in a poor quality or unsuitable home during this period of lockdown, across tenure types? (including those with health conditions exacerbated by poor housing; those shielding or vulnerable but who need internal house repairs during lockdown; those in overcrowded homes; those discharged from hospital back into poor housing; those who have had falls at home during isolation.)

Health, wellbeing and housing

- What aspects of people's homes have they appreciated or found challenging during the pandemic (e.g. size of property, access to outside space, disrepair, hazards, heating)? What impact have these had on people's health and wellbeing?

- Having experienced lockdown, what changes, repairs and improvements to their homes do they feel would improve their physical and mental health both in the short term and in the long term?

Household bills

- Are household bills increasing for people and does this result in a rise in fuel poverty and poverty in general? Are people aware of and taking up schemes offered by utilities, phone and other companies to help people manage bills in this period?

Long-term housing effects

- What are the longer-term effects of the pandemic on people's housing (e.g. house moves, investment in repairs etc)?

Healthy ageing

Physical activity

- How is the pandemic changing people's levels and types of physical activity, in the short and longer-term, both inside and outside the home?

- How do people anticipate their levels and types of activity changing after the pandemic?

- For people who have deconditioned during this period, what support do they need and want to increase their levels of physical activity during lockdown, and develop and maintain a physically active lifestyle following the pandemic?

Active travel

- For those that have undertaken essential travel during the pandemic, have people adopted more active modes of transport (e.g. walking or cycling)? Why, and are these changes sustained after the pandemic?

Disability and functional ability

- For those that have health conditions or disabilities which limit their ability to carry out daily activities, how have they been affected by lockdown? Have they experienced treatment delays, chosen to not access treatment or services, or had different treatment due to the pandemic, and what is the impact of this?

Access to health services
- Are there people who have needed to access health or care services but been unable to do so (either due to personal concern or the service being closed)? What is the impact on their health now and in the future?

Connected communities

Experiences and attitudes towards people's local community

- How have people experienced new community activity during the pandemic (e.g neighbourly support, mutual aid groups, both giving and receiving support)? What impact does this have on people attitudes, feelings and longer-term actions and behaviours in their communities (e.g. their sense of belonging, willingness to engage in volunteering, willingness to receive support etc)?

- How have people spent time differently in their community during the pandemic (e.g. accessing green space and shared outdoor spaces, outdoor physical activity etc) and do these changes sustain in the long term?

Social connections

- What were people's experiences of social connections prior to the lockdown, and how has this changed? Are they connecting with same people online? Or new/ different people, and in what ways?

Social distancing, self-isolation and shielding

- How have people experienced the social distancing measures, self-isolation and shielding, and what impact does this have on their health and wellbeing?

- How have people interpreted and felt about the advice, guidance and rules on social distancing and self-isolation, including how this has differed for different groups (e.g. age categories such as the over 70s)? What are people's views on the clarity, acceptability and feasibility of the rules?

Family relationships

- What is the impact of the pandemic on family relationships (e.g. as a result of children at home, distance caring responsibilities etc) in the short and long term?

Digital exclusion

- For those that have newly started to use online technologies during the pandemic, what helped them to do this (e.g. motivation, access to information etc)?

- If people needed information and advice about accessing online technologies during the pandemic, where did they get if from and how helpful was it?

- How have people experienced using online technologies during the pandemic (e.g. to contact friends and family, to access products and services, to organise and deliver community activity, as care givers and care receivers)? What expectations do people have for how their use of online technologies might be after the pandemic, and are these expectations realised?

- Who remains digitally excluded? What has been the impact of the pandemic for them? If people required printed information at this time, did they receive it and who provided it for them?

Outdoor spaces

- Have people made use of local outdoor spaces differently during the pandemic, and if so how (e.g. more time spent walking, more visits to local green spaces)?

- What have people appreciated about their local outdoor environment (e.g. walkability, access to green space) and what have they found challenging?

- Do people intend to use outdoor space differently in future, as a result of their experiences of the pandemic, and does this lead to any sustained behaviour change in the long term?

Ageism

- How have people felt about how older people have been portrayed in public discourse, media coverage, and in policy and professional practice related to the pandemic?

- Have people experienced direct ageism related to the pandemic? If so, how, and what impact does this have?

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