



Newsletter of the Section of Old Age Psychiatry

April 2020

Dear Colleagues

Here is some news concerning Old Age Psychiatry (SOAP) during March 2020.

1. **COVID-19, Mental Health and Old Age**

Some of my thoughts about the COVID-19 crisis

The present epidemic has completely changed our lives. Who could imagine last December 2019 that we will have at middle of April 2020 more than 2.000.000 persons infected in the world by the COVI-19 and more than 135.000 deaths because of it? And it is not finished! This is one of the most important human crisis of the beginning of this XXIst century.

The measures to control this epidemic are without precedent for at least more than 100 years. Borders are closed, people are lockdown at their homes and economy is in recession. All countries are affected: but differently according to their own resources. Chittaranjan (1) published an excellent analysis where he mentions the consequences of the lockdown in India, including topics such the humanitarian crisis, the effects on the food supply chain, the health care crisis, financial and other effects in a third world country.

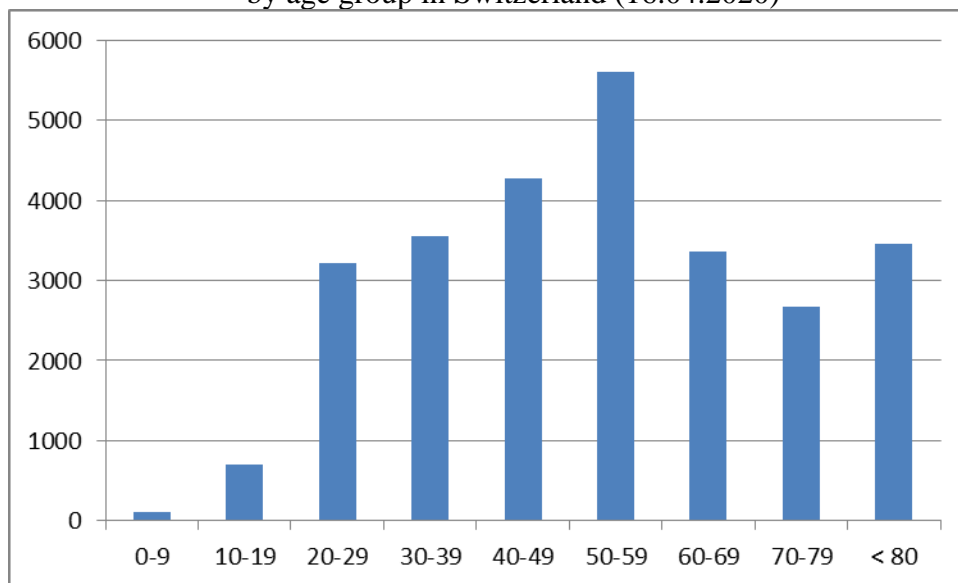
Non-communicable diseases have progressively replaced these last decades Othe microbial epidemics as main cause of deaths, mainly at the more developed countries. The COVID-19 came to remember that this can be quickly changed. But some characteristics of our modern societies my contribute to negatively affect the present crisis: the changes at the family structure, the already existing tendency to social isolation, the loss of communication and interaction skills, the excessive investment on electronic social media as common way to interact with others have contributed for loneliness and isolation with severe consequences for the population mental health (2).

In the context of this crisis, persons with mental disorders are at a high risk: the risk to be forgotten. As usual, they continue to have no voice, to be excluded and to be discriminated. The media have been publishing every day examples on how these attitudes are contributing to increase the number of persons with the infection and even the increase of the number of deaths. Investments are being made to control the epidemics without taking into account the consequences for mental health. The fear of contamination and the lockdown may have a high impact on people with mental disorders. The mental health professionals are facing to a significant increase of the demand for mental health support and care, without the necessary means to answer properly to that. The statistics are still absent but at my own private clinical

activity and that one of my close colleagues, the number of suicide attempts have sharply increased.

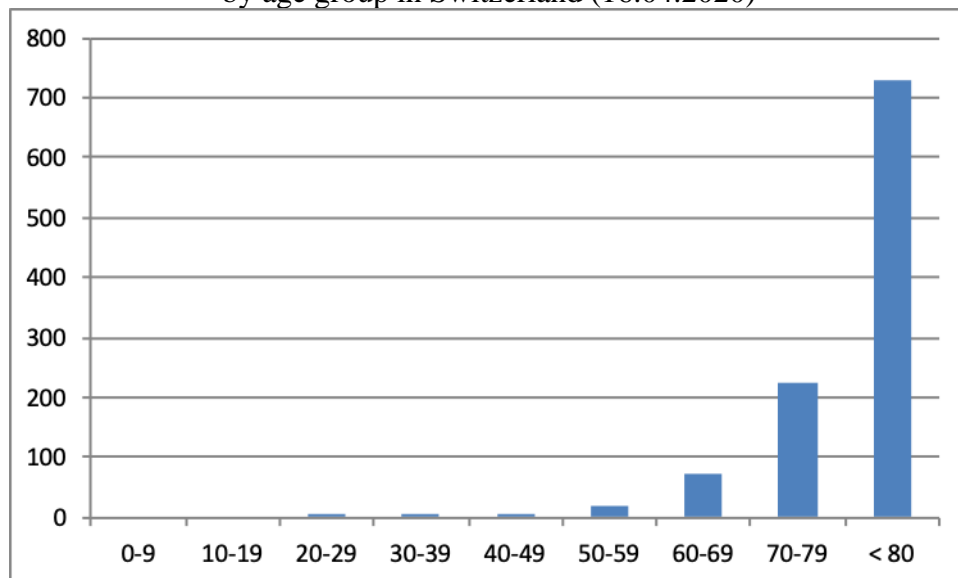
Older adults are also at high risk. For them, the lockdown is a necessary tragedy. Clinically, they are at high risk of health complications because of the virus infection. In Switzerland, the number of confirmed cases is 26.913 (Males 46%, Females 54%) today, 16.04.2020: 35% of them have more than 60 years. Figure 1 shows the distribution of number of confirmed cases by age group. The number of deaths at the same date is 1.057 (Males 60%, Females 40%): **97% have more than 60 years!**

Fig. 1: Distribution of number of confirmed cases by age group in Switzerland (16.04.2020)



(OFSP. <https://covid-19-schweiz.bagapps.ch/fr-1.html>)

Fig. 2: Distribution of number of deaths by age group in Switzerland (16.04.2020)



(OFSP. <https://covid-19-schweiz.bagapps.ch/fr-1.html>)

This high rate of older adults' deaths is used as main argument in favor of specific protective policies for this group of age. The majority of them are more restrictive lockdown measures and more impacting distancing rules, increasing their isolation: at home and at nursing homes. Family visits are forbidden in the majority of nursing homes, increasing the feeling of abandon and loneliness. Beside these restrictions, the number of cases is increasing very fast in these facilities, as well the number of deaths: in Portugal, France and Switzerland 30% of all deaths are occurring at nursing homes. A particular onus is being placed on health workers: as at nursing homes the virus can now only come from them, the challenge is to make them feel responsible without making them guilty. Some professionals even prefer to stay and live for a while at the nursing homes at the prejudice of their own families. The burn-out all professionals concerned is also very high now, without the necessary offer of support to them, with negative consequence for their own mental health.

Nursing home residents are among those most likely to die from the coronavirus, given their advanced age and the prevalence of other health conditions. But the countries do not keep a formal tally of the number of coronavirus deaths in nursing homes or the number of facilities with infections. Meanwhile, the virus has continued to rage through nursing homes across the countries, many of which lack adequate equipment to protect their residents and staff.

The lockdown at home also have severe consequences for older adults, mainly for those living alone. Independent and autonomous until the beginning of the epidemic, suddenly they are locked at home, in complete dependence of external support to satisfy their everyday needs. Armin von Gunten recently mentioned the paradox for persons with dementia: by one hand it is suitable to stimulate them to continue to accomplish their daily living tasks such shopping, go out for some exercise, collect the mail at the mail box (routine activities are an important component of the care to prevent functional deterioration in case of progressive dementia) but by the other hand it is asked now to patients to stay at home to avoid contamination, at risk to increase their mental deterioration rate.

Intergenerational fracture is happening in developed countries such Switzerland. Older adults are being criticized by younger adults by their behavior during the lockdown period, particularly when some of them are seen at the public space for some time of outside activities. But older adults may also be intolerant against younger adults because some of them may also have a disrespectful behavior to the lockdown rules. The intergenerational fracture is even promoted by some authorities: some of them clearly are stating that it is necessary to separate the generations while others say at the media that if it is necessary to choose between a young person or an older one to give the breathing support to sustain life, the choice will clearly be in favor of the younger person.

This is an ageist approach of the problem. The value of each person is the same in all ages, independently of his/her health status and cognitive level. Age never should be an exclusion factor to health care, in any situation. Older adults have the same responsibilities and rights than younger adults. The UN Declaration on Human rights clearly states:

Art. 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Art. 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country

or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Art. 3: *Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.*

At these difficult times it is necessary to return to these principles. We need them now more than ever.

Alzheimer Europe (<https://www.alzheimer-europe.org/Living-with-dementia/COVID-19>)

Alzheimer Europe informed us of two recent actions:

- **Governmental Experts on Dementia meet online to discuss COVID-19 and dementia**

On 24 March, following the suggestion of the Scottish Government, Alzheimer Europe organised and hosted an online meeting of the European Group of Governmental Experts on Dementia to discuss the responses of countries to COVID-19. In particular, the meeting focused on how governments were ensuring that people with dementia continued to be supported during the extenuating circumstances. A total of 20 people were present on the call, with representatives from Austria, Belgium – Flanders, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom – Scotland, all participating in the online meeting. Additionally, observers from Alzheimer Europe, the European Commission (both DG RTD and DG Sante), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Health Organization (WHO) were present. Countries exchanged information and resources about from their respective countries, including information on the current context of the country and good practice examples for people with dementia or other vulnerable populations (e.g. easy read communications). Other topics of conversation included how to ensure persons with dementia and their carers did not become isolated in countries where lockdown measures had been implemented. Alzheimer Europe collected the links and resources exchanged by members on an online platform to allow members of the group to have a single reference point for resources and actions taking place in other countries. Members will be able to share and upload resources on an ongoing basis on this platform.

- **To support people with dementia and carers during the COVID-19 pandemic, Alzheimer Europe launches a website section with key resources**

With the coronavirus spread across European countries, various restrictions have been put in place ranging from the closure of important services such as day care or respite care to the prohibition of visits to nursing and old people's homes. This situation and some of these restrictions also adversely affect people with dementia and their carers. To support carers and associations providing support and help for people with dementia in these difficult times, Alzheimer Europe has collected a number of resources which we hope will prove helpful and useful. The long list of resources that have been gathered bears testament to the important and invaluable work provided by national Alzheimer's associations and government agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have broken down these resources into the following categories and hope to update these pages on a regular basis:

- Information for people with dementia
- Advice for caregivers and family members
- COVID-19 and mental health
- COVID-19 in numbers: epidemiology
- Global resources
- EU resources

- National country resources
- Scientific resources.

The International Psychogeriatric Association list of resources

IPA has published at its website (<https://www.ipa-online.org/news-and-issues/covid-19-resources>) a very useful and up-to-date list of information, data, publications and resources according to the following subjects:

- International Resources
- IPA Members Publications
- National Organizations
- Research
- Published papers

All these items have links to access the material.

2. Teaching and training in old age psychiatry: a general survey of the World Psychiatric Association member societies – II

We have received the answers from 34 countries. Prof. Schulze invited us to contact Prof. Roger Man Kin Ng, WPA's Secretary for Education, to explore opportunities for harmonizing WPA's survey activities with the ones of the Section.

3. World Congress of Psychiatry – Bangkok

Prof. Thomas Schulze informed during the last Zoom meeting that at present the preparations for the WCP 2020 in Bangkok were not on hold but that the EC and the organizers, of course, were carefully monitoring the situation and considering all possible scenarios. To be prepared, the EC suggests adding the possibility of online voting for the General Assembly and is currently asking the member societies to vote on this change to the bylaws.

4. WPA 2020: Thematic Congress on Intersectional Collaboration. Psychological trauma: Global burden on mental and physical health. (11-13 December 2020. Athens, Greece)

This meeting will be WPA's first Thematic Congress during 2020-23 term. It will be a first in three major aspects: Firstly, it aims at bringing together both the psychiatric and the somatic medicine community. Secondly, it will be conceptualized as an intersectional meeting as WPA's scientific Sections will jointly work towards a truly interdisciplinary program cutting across diagnostic entities, methodological approaches, and treatment strategies. Thirdly, it will not only be a meeting of professionals but also a forum bringing true dialogue to the center stage as we will make this meeting a forum where the voices of patients, of highly traumatized fellow human beings and their families will be heard.

With the theme Psychological trauma: Global burden on mental and physical health, this meeting will build on the experiences of WPA's 2017- 2020 Action Plan and will be at the forefront of science as psychological traumas are now clearly established by several worldwide studies as the single avoidable group of contributors to the occurrence of mental health disorders.

Sections are encouraged to submit intersectional proposals. The committees will soon start their work in putting together an attractive program, the collaboration of each and every Section being paramount for the success of the meeting

Important dates:

- Deadline for Intersectional Symposia Proposals. May 30th, 2020
- Notification of Proposed Intersectional Symposia acceptance : June 30th, 2020
- Deadline for early bird fee : August 31st, 2020
- Deadline for abstracts submission: August 31st, 2020
- Notification of abstracts acceptance : September 30th, 2020

5. WPA and the British Journal of Psychiatry

Prof. Thomas Schulze informed about the successful outcome of the first collaborative publication project between WPA and BJPsych (special issue on disasters and trauma). Another special issue is in preparation, this time with BJPsych Advances, led by Uriel Halbreich (WPA Interdisciplinary Collaboration) for the WPA side, the focus being on stress and stress-related disorders (see next bullet point).

Uriel Halbreich suggested that now it is the right time to start preparedness for the next wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic which, according to some epidemiologist may be expected as early as September October 2020. It will also serve for future epidemics (since 2003 we are now experiencing the 5th world-wide Epidemic and it is reasonable to predict more to come). Halbreich requested suggestions from other sections, particularly for their own Countries. He considered an article for the August issue.

Those from the WPA-SOAP who are interested to collaborate with Uriel and to put Old Age Psychiatry in the agenda of this next issue, please let me know and contact him within the coming month at: uhalbreich@gmail.com.

6. UN Convention on Rights of Older Persons

The project of collaboration with UN was discussed with Prof. Schulze who promised to present it to the WPA EC.

7. Obituaries

Our dear colleague, Julio Arboleda-Florez, former Chair of the Forensic Psychiatry Section passed away on March 29th in Kingston, Canada, where he was Professor Emeritus and Past Chair of the Dept. of Psychiatry at Queen's University. He was Director of Queen's/PAHO/WHO Regional Unit for Research and Training in Psychiatric Epidemiology. He was past-President of the International Academy of Law and Mental Health and World Association for Social Psychiatry. He had served WPA in a number of positions, most notably as Chair of the WPA Forensic Psychiatry Section. WPA will soon announce further plans to acknowledge and celebrate the extraordinary contribution of Prof Arboleda-Florez to world psychiatry.

Our dear colleague, Anshuman Pant, Secretary of the Rural Mental Health Section, passed away on April 5th in Brisbane, QE, Australia.

8. Announcement of next conferences interesting professionals working in Old Age Psychiatry

- 19th Congress of the WPA Epidemiology and Public Health Section Postpone. Marrakech, Morocco. <https://www.erasmus.gr/microsites/1175/welcome-letter>.
- Alzheimer's Association International Conference

24-30 July 2020. Amsterdam, The Netherlands. <https://alz.org/aaic/overview.asp>.

- 20th Associazione Italiana di Psicogeriatría National Congress
17-19 September 2020. Florence, Italy. <https://www.congressoaiip.it/>.
- IIIrd Congrès de la Société Francophone de Psychogériatrie et de Psychiatrie de la Personne Âgée. 17-18 September 2020. Brest, France. www.sf3pa-congres.com
- 2020 IPA International Congress
2-5 October 2020. Lisbon, Portugal. <https://www.ipa-online.org>
- Canadian Academy of Geriatric Psychiatry Annual Scientific Meeting.
16-17 October 2020. Montreal, Canada. <http://www.cagp.ca/Future-Conferences>.
- XXXth Alzheimer Europe Conference
20-22 October 2020. Bucharest, Romania. <https://www.alzheimer-europe.org/Conferences/Bucharest-2020/>
- WPA 2020: Thematic Congress on Intersectional Collaboration: Psychological trauma: Global burden on mental and physical health.
11-13 December 2020. Athens, Greece. <http://www.wpathematic.org/>
- 2nd International Summit on Aging & Gerontology
8-9 March 2021. London, UK. <https://www.agingcongress.com/>.

Yours,

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