

# Strengthening networks on Mental Health in the Mediterranean area

APRIL 22, 2022 - time CET/ROME



APRIL 22-23, 2022  
MEDITERRANEAN  
SOCIETY ON MENTAL  
HEALTH



## ACTIVE AGEING AGAINST SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

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# Summary

## Research group, partners and aims

- Multidisciplinary «Active Aging Study Group»
- General purposes and aims

## Exploration tracks

- RCT Randomized Control Trial (bio-psyco-social analysis)
- Moderate exercise (cognitive function)
- Impact of Chronic Pain
- Exercise improves long-term SBR....(Resilience during lockdown)
- Resilience against loneliness and depression
- “Physical distancing” and social proximity whith elderly in pandemic lockdown



# Research group and partners



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## UNIVERSITY OF FERRARA – Department of Translational Medicine (ITALY)

•Giovanni Zuliani, Federica Cazzato

## UNIVERSITY OF CALABRIA – Department of Social and Politic Science (ITALY)

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## SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROMA - Department of Public Health and Infectious Disease (ITALY)

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## UNIVERSITY OF NAPLES FEDERICO II - Department of Psychiatry (ITALY)

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## FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF RIO DE JANEIRO – Faculty of Medicine, psychiatry institute (BRASIL)

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•Sergio Machado

## CENTER FOR PUBLIC MENTAL HEALTH, GOSIM (AUSTRIA)

•Matthias Angermeyer



# Research group and partners

## Active Aging Study Group

570 elderly people  
58 researchers  
15 university departments  
51 university students  
15 university tutors  
4 italian region  
8 local partners  
5 scientific journal



Prof. Mauro Giovanni Carta



# General purposes



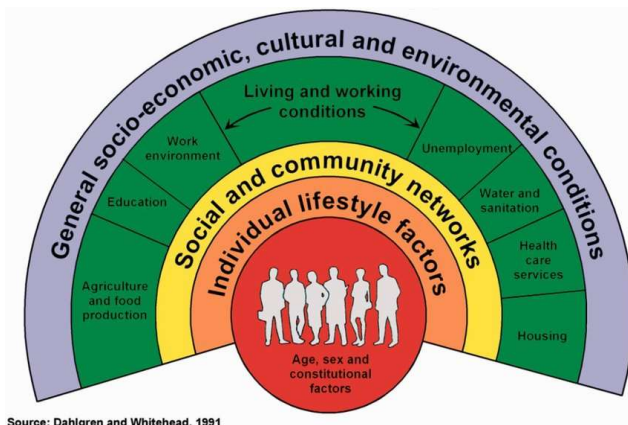
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# Aims



- APPLY WHO'S GUIDELINES on **HEALTH PROMOTION** and on **U.N.DECADE OF HEALTHY AGEING 2021–2030**
  - “HP is the process of enabling people to increase **control over**, and to improve, their health” (WHO Ottawa Chart, 1986)
  - “Deliver person-centred, integrated care” (WHO 2020, p.6)
- ENCOURAGING THE **INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH** (BIO-PSYCHO-SOCIAL) TO PREVENTION, CARE AND REHABILITATION ACTIONS (in a Translational Research area)
- INCREASE THE EFFECTIVENESS AND THE IMPACT OF **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY** PROPOSALS FOR THE **ELDERLY PEOPLE**
- DECREASE **SOCIAL EXCLUSION** IN THE ELDERLY

- To investigate if a **moderate/vigorous physical activity** can be effective in older people
- To research the mutual **influence of the different variables** involved through complex multidisciplinary perspectives
- To measure—through a randomized controlled trial—if an intervention based on moderate PA can improve quality of life (QoL) and motor skills of the elderly living in the community (primary outcomes of trial).
- Secondary objectives of trial are to measure whether physical activity improves
  - (1) cognitive performance,
  - (2) perception of pain,
  - (3) biological rhythms and immune response linked to metabolic control,
  - (4) community assets (settings, mobility safety, social cohesion), and
  - (5) growth factors and neurotransmitters in the periphery similarly to outcomes in animal studies.
- The study will also allow investigating the correlation between psychological/motor improvement and the biological markers.
- to investigate whether and to what extent can PA prevent disability and depressive disorders (follow-up after 48-week)



Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead, 1991

STUDY PROTOCOL

Open Access

# Active elderly and health—can moderate exercise improve health and wellbeing in older adults? Protocol for a randomized controlled trial



## Misures

### Physiological testing

#### Standard anthropometric misures

- Height, weight, waist circumference

#### Biomechanical variables/mobility

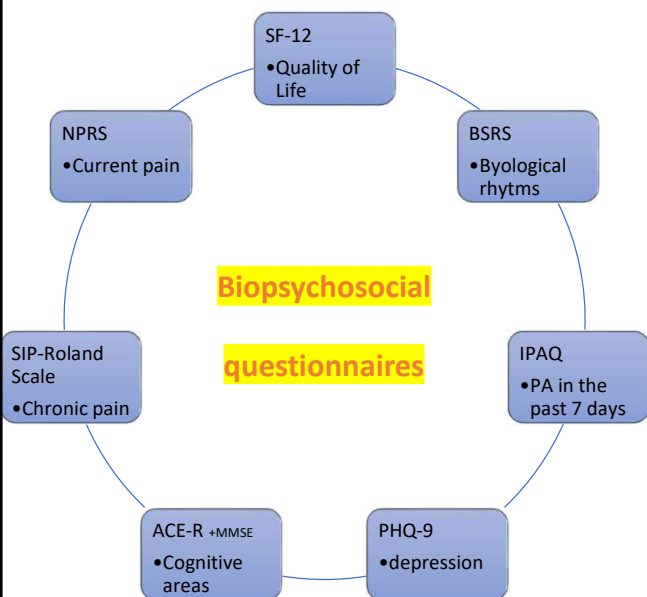
- Gait analysis
- Baropodometry
- stabilometry
- sit-to-stand (STS)
- Walking, equilibrium, coordination and strength of the lower limbs, Time-Up-and-Go Test

#### Laboratory Tests

- Glycaemia,
- total cholesterol,
- high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol,
- triglycerides,
- melatonin
- insulin-like growth factor-1 (IGF-1) blood levels;
- complete blood count, erythrocyte sedimentation rate (ESR);
- C-reactive protein (CRP) levels.
- immunoglobulin (Ig) G, A, and M (IgG, IgA, IgM);
- thymus (T) cells response to mitogens such as phytohemagglutinin (PHA) and cytometric analysis of the T-helper (Th) subsets, such as Th1, Th2, and Th17 subsets.

### Biopsychosocial

### questionnaires



RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Moderate Exercise Improves Cognitive Function in Healthy Elderly People: Results of a Randomized Controlled Trial

Mauro Giovanni Carta<sup>1\*</sup>, Giulia Cossu<sup>1</sup>, Elisa Pintus<sup>1</sup>, Rosanna Zaccheddu<sup>1</sup>, Omar Callia<sup>1</sup>, Giuliana Conti<sup>2</sup>, Mirra Pintus<sup>1</sup>, Cesar Ivan Aviles Gonzalez<sup>1</sup>, Maria Valeria Massidda, Gioia Mura<sup>1</sup>, Claudia Sardu<sup>1</sup>, Paolo Contu<sup>1</sup>, Luigi Minerba<sup>2</sup>, Roberto Demontis<sup>1</sup>, Massimiliano Pau<sup>3</sup>, Gabriele Finco<sup>1</sup>, Eleonora Cocco<sup>1</sup>, Maria Pietronilla Penna<sup>4</sup>, Germano Orr<sup>5</sup>, Goce Kalcev<sup>6</sup>, Federico Cabras<sup>1</sup>, Stefano Lorrai<sup>1</sup>, Andrea Loviselli<sup>1</sup>, Fernanda Velluzzi<sup>1</sup>, Marco Monticone<sup>1</sup>, Enrico Cacace<sup>1</sup>, Mario Musu<sup>1</sup>, Franco Rongioletti<sup>1</sup>, Alberto Cauli<sup>1</sup>, Valeria Ruggiero<sup>1</sup>, Alessandra Scano<sup>1</sup>, Antonio Crisafulli<sup>1</sup>, Sofia Cosentino<sup>1</sup>, Laura Atzori<sup>1</sup>, Elena Massa<sup>1</sup>, Quirico Mela<sup>2</sup>, Dario Fortin<sup>5</sup>, Gianmario Migliaccio<sup>6</sup>, Sergio Machado<sup>7,8</sup>, Ferdinando Romano<sup>9</sup> and Antonio Preti<sup>10</sup>

**Keywords:** Aging, Physical activity, Quality of life, RCT, Cognition, Dementia.

**Background:** Physical activity in the elderly is recommended by international guidelines to protect against cognitive decline and functional impairment.

**Objective:** This Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) was set up to verify whether **medium-intensity** physical activity in elderly people living in the community is effective in improving cognitive performance.

**Design:** **RCT** with parallel and balanced large groups.

**Setting:** Academic university hospital and Olympic gyms.

**Subjects:** People aged 65 years old and older of both genders **living at home** holding a medical certificate for suitability in non-competitive physical activity.

**Methods:** Participants were randomized to a 12-week, 3 sessions per week moderate physical activity program or to a control condition focused on cultural and recreational activities in groups of the same size and timing as the active intervention group. The active phase integrated a mixture of aerobic and anaerobic exercises, including drills of “life movements”, strength and balance. The primary outcome was: any change in **Addenbrooke’s Cognitive Examination Revised (ACE-R)** and its subscales.

**Results:** At the end of the trial, 52 people completed the active intervention, and 53 people completed the control condition. People in the active intervention improved on the ACE-R (ANOVA: F(1;102)=4.32, p=0.040), and also showed better performances on the memory (F(1;102)=5.40 p=0.022) and visual-space skills subscales of the ACE-R (F(1;102)=4.09 p=0.046).

**Conclusion:** A moderate-intensity exercise administered for a relatively short period of 12 weeks is capable of improving cognitive performance in a sample of elderly people who live **independently in their homes.**

Clinical Trials Registration No: NCT03858114



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Exercise Improves the Impact of Chronic Pain in Older Adults: Results of an RCT

Mauro Giovanni Carta<sup>1</sup>, Fernanda Velluzzi<sup>2\*</sup>, Marco Monticone<sup>2</sup>, Cesar Iva<sup>3</sup>, Massimiliano Pau<sup>5</sup>, Mario Musu<sup>4</sup>, Laura Atzori<sup>4</sup>, Caterina Ferreli<sup>4</sup>, Alberto Cauli<sup>6</sup>, Fortin<sup>8</sup>, Ferdinando Romano<sup>9</sup>, Maria Pietronilla Penna<sup>10</sup>, Antonio Preti<sup>11</sup> and Giul

SIP-Roland scale (IT-vers.):

-SIP: Sickness Impact Profile (functional problems of health)



Mario Fortin & Giulia Cossu

#### Abstract:

##### Background:

Chronic Pain (CP) is a crucial determinant for disability in older adults. CP amplifies the impact of other common age-related diseases and increases cardiovascular risk. Physical exercise can improve CP. Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) with high-intensity exercise in older adults excluded people with Moderate Chronic Illness (MCI) and CP.

##### Objective:

This study aimed at evaluating in an RCT whether moderate exercise training can improve chronic pain in a sample of older adults, including people with MCI, and if any modification persists over time.

##### Methods:

A sample of 120 older adults was randomly selected for a moderate-intensity exercise program or cultural activities (control group). Chronic pain was assessed at t0, at t12 (end of the trial), and t48 weeks, by means of the Italian version of the SIP-Roland Scale.

##### Results:

Seventy-nine participants completed the follow-up (age 72.3±4.7, women 55.3%). At the end of RCT, an improvement in the SIP scale score was found in the exercise group (p=0.035), showing a lower score than the control group; this difference was not maintained at 48 weeks (p=0.235).

##### Conclusion:

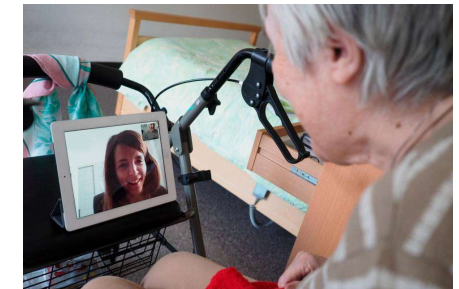
Our study highlighted that a moderate-intensity exercise intervention reduced chronic pain in older adults, but this effect disappeared at follow-up after 36 weeks from the end of the training program. These findings suggested that such kinds of programs, easily accessible to old people even with MCI, should be implemented and supported over time, thus promoting active aging and preventing CP of age-related diseases.

**Clinical Trial Registration:** ClinicalTrials.gov.NCT03858114

**Keywords:** Chronic pain, Moderate chronic illness, Survey, Randomized controlled trial, Cerebrovascular, Cardiac, Metabolic disorders.

# Exercise improves long-term social and behavioral rhythms in older adults: Did it play a role during the COVID-19 lockdown?

## 1st RESILIENCE FACTOR (SBRs)



The screenshot shows the journal's homepage with the article title and authors listed. The authors are Giulia Cossu, Cesar Ivan Aviles Gonzalez, Luigi Minerba, Roberto Demontis, Massimiliano Pau, Fernanda Velluzzi, Caterina Ferrelli, Laura Atzori, Sergio Machado, Dario Fortin, Ferdinando Romano, and Mauro Giovanni Carta. The article is published in 2021-08-05. The journal title is 'Journal of Public Health Research'.

BSRs (10 item scale)  
Regularity of:  
-sleeping  
-eating  
-social relationships

### Abstract

The study aimed to verify whether exercise training in older adults can improve **Social Behavioral Rhythms (SBRs)** and if any modification is maintained over time. Older adults (n=120) from a previous randomized controlled trial (RCT), were randomly allocated to either a moderate-intensity exercise group or a control group. SBR was evaluated at t0, t26, and t48 weeks (during the Covid-19 lockdown), using the brief social rhythms scale (BSRS).

**Seventy-nine participants completed the follow-up** (age 72.3±4.7, women 55.3%). **An improvement in the BSRS score was found in the exercise group at 26 weeks (p=0.035) when the exercise program was concluded, and it was still maintained at 48 weeks (p=0.013).** No improvements were observed in the control group. **To conclude, social behavioral rhythms (SBR), previously found as a resilience factor in older adults during Covid-19, appear to improve after a moderate 12 weeks exercise program, and the improvement persisted even after stopping exercise during the Covid-19 lockdown.**



## Article

## Previous functional social and behavioral rhythms affect resilience to COVID-19-related stress among old adults

Mauro Giovanni Carta,<sup>1</sup> Michele Fornaro,<sup>2</sup> Luigi Minerba,<sup>1</sup> Massimiliano Pau,<sup>3</sup> Fernanda Velluzzi,<sup>1</sup> Laura Atzori,<sup>1</sup> Cesar Ivan Aviles Gonzalez,<sup>4</sup> Ferdinando Romano,<sup>5</sup> Roberto Littera,<sup>6</sup> Luchino Chessa,<sup>1</sup> Davide Firinu,<sup>1</sup> Stefano Del Giacco,<sup>1</sup> Angelo Restivo,<sup>7</sup> Simona Deidda,<sup>7</sup> Germano Orrù,<sup>7</sup> Alessandra Scano,<sup>7</sup> Simona Onali,<sup>1</sup> Ferdinando Coghe,<sup>8</sup> Goce Kalcev,<sup>9</sup> Giulia Cossu<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

**Background:** Functioning of Social Behavioral Rhythms (SBRs) may affect resilience toward stressful events across different age groups. However, the impact of SBRs on the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) in elder people is yet to ascertain, representing the aim of the present report.

**Design and methods:** Follow-up of a peer-reviewed randomized controlled trial on exercise on old adults (≥65 years), concurrent to the onset of the pandemic-related lockdown. Post-RCT evaluations occurred after further 12 and 36 weeks since the beginning of the lockdown phase. People with Major Depressive Episode (MDE) at week-48 (follow-up endpoint) were deemed as cases, people without such condition were considered controls. MDE was ascertained using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9); SBRs functioning at week 12 onward, through the Brief Symptom Rating Scale (BSRS).

**Results:** Seventy-nine individuals (53.2%, females) entered the RCT-follow-up phase. The frequency of MDE did not significantly change before versus during lockdown (OR 2.60, CI95%=0.87-9.13). People with BSRS>1 standard deviation of the whole sample score at week-12 had an inflated risk of DE during lockdown (OR=5.6, 95%CI:1.5-21.4) compared to those with lower BSRS scores. Such odd hold after excluding individuals with MDD at week-12. The post-hoc analysis could be potentially affected by selection bias.

**Conclusions:** Overall, older adults were resilient during the first phase of the pandemic when functioning of pre-lockdown was still preserved, in contrast to the subsequent evaluations when the impairment of daily rhythms was associated with impaired resilience.

## SBRs:

- Sleeping (circadian rhythms)
- Eating
- Social relationships

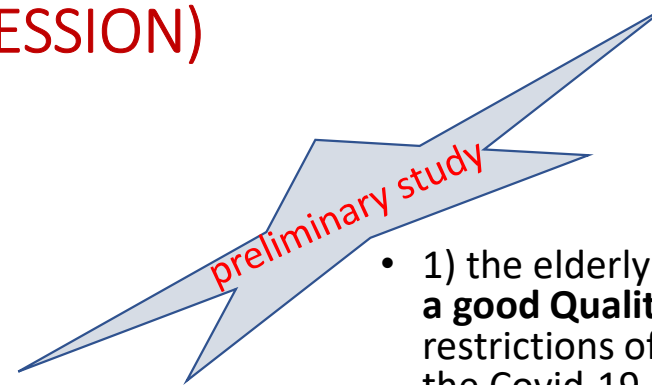
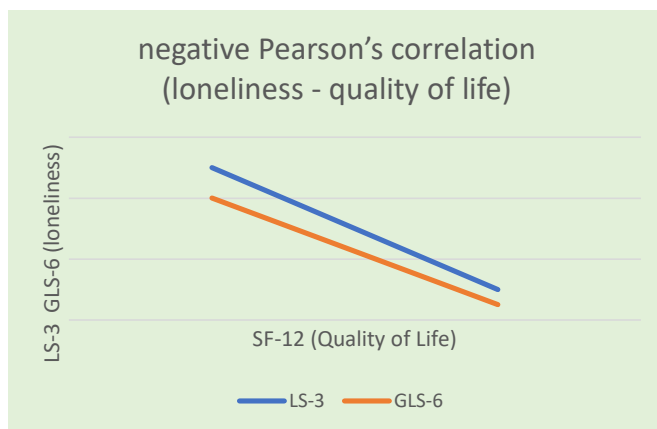
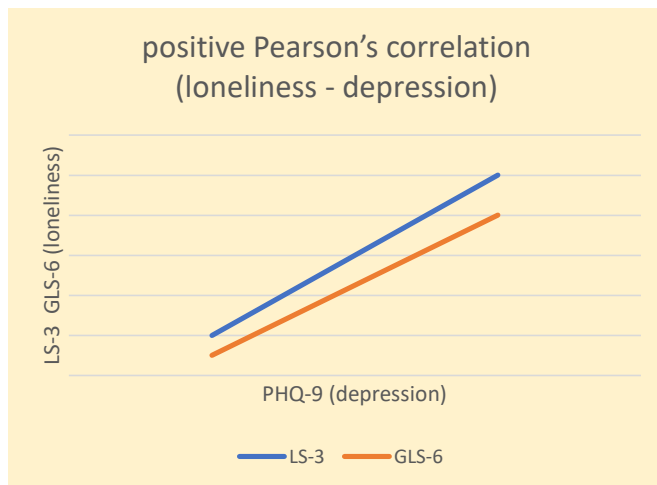
## PHQ-9:

9 Depression symptoms (DSM IV - V)  
«in the last two weeks»

## 2<sup>nd</sup> RESILIENCE FACTOR (against Major Depressive Episode)

- a good level of SBRs social and behavioral rhythms would seem to be a protective factor against the possibility of presenting mood fluctuations in a depressive sense (when a high PHQ-9 scoring occurs)
- on the contrary, a dysfunctional alteration of social rhythms can be associated with the possibility of presenting symptoms attributable to depression

# 3<sup>rd</sup> RESILIENCE FACTOR (against LONELINESS and DEPRESSION)



- **LS-3 (Three-Item Loneliness Scale)**
- **GLS-6 (Six-Item De Jong-Gierveld Loneliness Scale)**

Questionnaire on loneliness in 3 and 6 validated items taken from "UCLA Loneliness Scale" and from "De Jong-Gierveld Loneliness Scale" **to verify the unpleasant feeling of loneliness** which implies a feeling of discrepancy between the number and/or quality of realized and desired social relationships (Peplau LA, Perlman D. 1982)

- 1) the elderly of **Cagliari** and **Trento** showed a **good Quality of Life** despite the restrictions of "physical distancing" given by the Covid-19 pandemic
- 2) as the Quality of Life improves, there is a decreased presence of the sense of **loneliness** and **depressive** symptoms

(positive Pearson's association between depressive symptoms and perceived loneliness;  
negative Pearson's association between quality of life and perceived loneliness)

Dario Fortin (1), Federica Cazzato (2), Giovanni Zuliani (2), Paola N. Scarpa (1), Monica Broch (1), Antonia Banal (1), Alessandro Dellai (3), Antonio Samà (4), Giulia Cossu (5), Omar Callia (5), Rosanna Zaccheddu (5) e Mauro G. Carta (5)

# «PHISICAL DISTANCING» AND SOCIAL PROXIMITY WITH ELDERLY

The pandemic confinement period as an opportunity to experiment research skills in helping professions

## Introduction

**The Social Health Educator (SHE)** implements rehabilitation interventions without ever forgetting to place their professional identity in the broad biopsychosocial systemic reference framework for health promotion (WHO, 1986).

**The pandemic emergency** is further highlighting that *the helping relationship* in the social and health field, in order to have effective educational characteristics, requires constant capacity for reflection in action.

**The daily practice** of the helping professions, in order to avoid risks of stagnation, should have *more space for research in the situation*, capable of describing, evaluating and disseminating the results of the interventions.

## Aims

**Training experimentation for the research function**, in the field of social health education, referred to in the *core competence* of the SHE (Crisafulli et. Al. 2010; Fortin, 2020) carried out in the context of socio-relational limitations linked to *physical distancing* from a pandemic emergency .

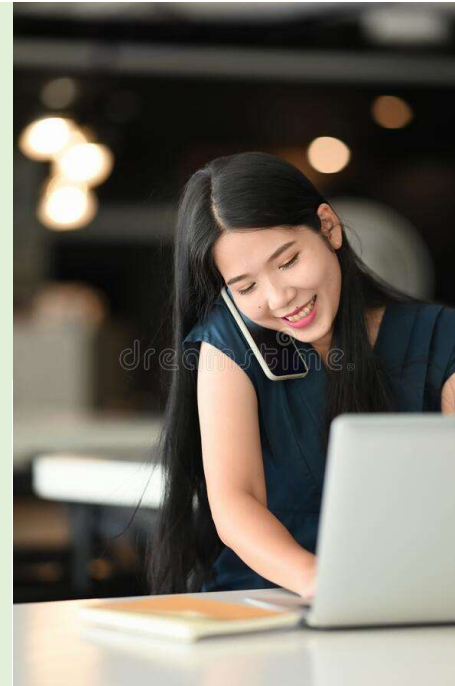
## Materials e methods

**The research object of the traineeship** with university students was the main tool that allowed this methodological experimentation on research skills, namely the support project for elderly people alone "Angermayer Study - *Assessment elderly people for German, Italy and Europe solidarity*" (Carta MG , Fortin D., Cossu G., Pintus E., Piras, M. and Moro MF) with the use of:

- Angermayer Study – ad Hoc Questionnaire
- SF-12 questionnaire (Short Form Health Survey)
- PHQ-9 questionnaire on depression (Patient Health Quality)
- LS-3 + GLS-6 questionnaire loneliness (from UCLA Loneliness Scale)
- Guidelines for students interviewers
- Self-evaluation questionnaire of interviewing students

It is a research project born and inserted in the pandemic context of Covid19. It is focused on the stressful factors to which the elderly (people belonging to the over 65 age group) have been subjected to observe the relative consequences of psychopathological impact and then being able to implement, if necessary, adequate response measures.

Through **semi-structured telephone interviews** with the elderly, the research involved students social health educators and social workers, internship tutors and teachers from three Italian universities, professionals and volunteers working in public and third sector, in different areas of the country.

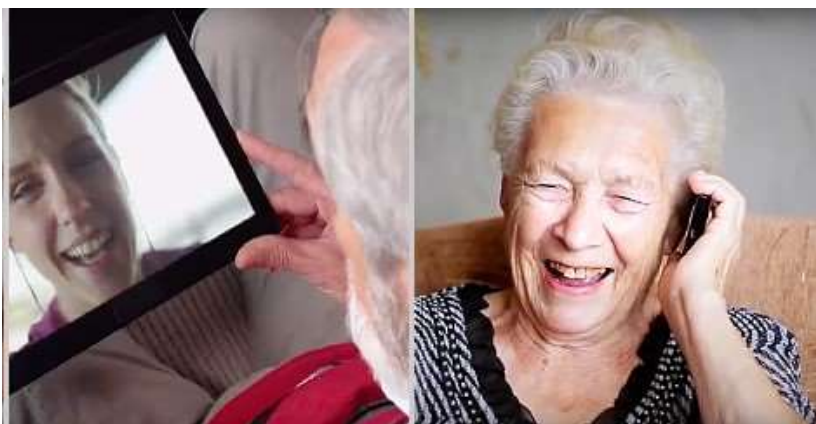


1. Dipartimento di psicologia e scienze cognitive (University of Trento);
2. Dipartimento di neuroscienze e riabilitazione (University of Ferrara);
3. Servizio Welfare e coesione sociale (Municipality of Trento);
4. Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Sociali (University of Calabria);
5. Dipartimento di Scienze mediche e sanità pubblica (University of Cagliari)



# «PHISICAL DISTANCING» AND SOCIAL PROXIMITY WITH ELDERLY

The pandemic confinement period as an opportunity to experiment research skills in helping professions



## Results



This training experimentation for the research function in the field of professional education has led - in times of pandemic - to results that affect two main dimensions:

**1) ORGANIZATIONAL DIMENSION:** strategies for the realization of the research function in the field of basic university training for the helping professions

- University structures with research professors directly involved in the students' learning processes, i.e. able to put the didactic function in synergy with the research function
- A didactic plan that, within the degree course, provides, also with reference to research methods and techniques, a mix of theoretical teachings, experiential training workshops and internships in local structures
- A network of public organizations (Municipalities, ASL ...) and of the third sector (Foundations, Social Cooperatives, Associations ...) affiliated with the Universities for the management of professional internships in the local area
- A staff of university tutors of the specific profession, able to individually manage the practical learning processes in internships, with the collaboration of experienced professionals within the local authorities (supervisors)
- A traineeship project with general university guidelines that provides for the construction of customized projects by each student in agreement with the internship institution
- An organizational structure for the management of training processes and products, which provides for the participation of students both in executive functions and in the coordination of some phases / research activities
- The possibility of building ad hoc application tools, adaptable from time to time to the specificities of the final recipients in difficulty, to the resources of the specific research group and to the theoretical / practical knowledge on the subject, such as:
- The construction of specific guidelines for interviewers, in particular to achieve greater clarity and confidence in carrying out the research activity.
- The construction of shared self-assessment tools, in order to support students to participate in the evaluation processes of learning

## 2) METHODOLOGIC DIMENSION:

research methods: they refer to theories and applications that the students were studying and starting to know thanks to the theoretical lessons, experiential laboratories and supervised traineeships, within their degree course:

- Experiential Learning** (Kolb, 1984; Carmagnani-Danieli-Denora, 2006)
- Action-Research** (Lewin, 1946; Denzin & Lincoln 2005)
- Person-Centered Approach** (Rogers, 1978; Mucchielli, 1987)
- Insider Research** (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002; Smyth & Holian, 2008; Unluer, 2012)
- Autoetnografia** (Anderson 2006; Barnao, 2017; Ellis & Gariglio, 2018; Ciampa, 2021)

# «PHISICAL DISTANCING» AND SOCIAL PROXIMITY WITH ELDERLY

The pandemic confinement period as an opportunity to experiment research skills in helping professions



## Conclusions

- 1) **The construction of the research function** in social health education can be started already during the basic university training, without upsetting the teaching plan, but enhancing the links between the theoretical, methodological and practical experiential dimensions of the research in the training path.
- 2) **The technological experiments of remote communication** can be a valid relational support in emergency situations such as the pandemic, without serious prejudice to the foundations of a helping relationship.
- 3) **The ethical importance of the research function** should be emphasized more, perhaps introducing it more clearly also in the SHE Code of Ethics.
- 4) The synergies between users, the local health and social services system, teaching and research must be strengthened, through forms of **recruiting researchers** with the same outgoing professionalism (SHE).

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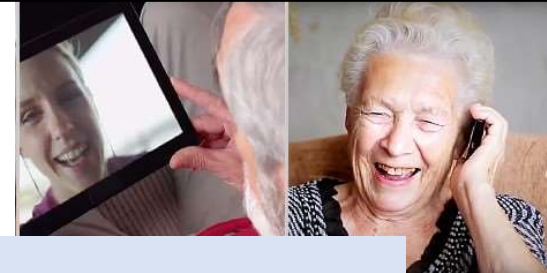
## Partners Angermayer Study



# CONCLUSION

**Strengthening  
networks on Mental  
Health in the  
Mediterranean area**

APRIL 22, 2022 - time CET/ROME



## ACTIVE AGEING AGAINST SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

### CONTENT (Physical moderate activity)

- Bio-Psycho-Social characteristics
- Better control of self; better coping and self-determination

### METHOD

- Setting of Translational medicine
- Multistakeholders Social Networking

### POLITICS

- Rights defense against social exclusion
- Improving service quality



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Thanks for your attention!!



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