

The 'victims' of Covid-19 in residential settings in Israel – implementing policy and practice changes

Volume 7 Issue 4 - 2022

Emerita Ariela Lowenstein

Center for Research & Study of Aging, The University of Haifa, Israel

Correspondence: Emerita Ariela Lowenstein, Head Social Gerontology, Center for Research & Study of Aging, The University of Haifa, Israel, Email ariel@research.haifa.ac.il**Received:** May 13, 2022 | **Published:** December 12, 2022

Introduction

In Israel, at the beginning of Covid-19, there was an emphasis on how older people, especially those 70+ are the most vulnerable to becoming Corona victims. Needless to emphasize that such an attitude reflects ageism and discrimination. However, maybe we should adopt what the economist John Keynes said at the time: "In the long run we are all dead, meanwhile we prefer to get older".

Besides the above situation there was not much reference to the "Hidden Victims" – the residents of 300 sheltered housing and old age nursing home facilities.

The main issue during this difficult time, when we had to cope with the Covid pandemic, was to decide on an appropriate policy and its implications for the older population. Also what were the most promising methods to cope with this 'burning' issue.

Most institutions continued to operate properly, work teams usually arrived, and protective measures were kept, as much as possible. However, the policy of full lockdowns and isolation, regardless of differences in health and functioning of residents, caused full and some fatal isolation. The implications were that a large number of older residents, who even during normal times many of them feel handicapped and isolated, suffer now so much more – Isn't this violation of rights and infringement of quality of life, especially for these residents?

Thus, the Government developed a National Program: "**Protecting Mothers and Fathers**" headed by a professional who is accounted in this field. He is in charge of the various institutions and helps them when needed. Also, through him family members can contact their loved ones, when possible.

It is a solution, but still more issues have to be considered, especially how families can be in contact, where not all residents have technological devices. In addition, he is involved in helping with other issues which are taken into consideration, like working that more and more residents will get vaccinated as well as people in the community.

The following case descriptions may illustrate the circumstances that may impact the frailer residents.

Daniel, aged 88, a widower, suffers from advanced dementia, but is physically functional. His children asked that he should receive assistance from a foreign paid caregiver because of his problematic functioning. Over the course of the usual daily routine, the caregiver takes care of most of his basic needs, including taking him for a walk in the nearby park. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the caregiver and care recipient has not been allowed to leave the apartment. They have to comply with the 24/7 lockdown restrictions. Daniel started showing signs of restlessness and aggressive behavior towards the caregiver. He refuses to bathe, pushes the caregiver, and shouts at him. As a result of one such event, the caregiver tried to restrain r. Daniel uses force. Daniel stopped eating, lost interest in his surroundings and withdrew inside himself. The caregiver, who

understood that the situation was deteriorating, became frightened, lost control, and started calling for help...However, not much could be done.

Older adults residing in assisted living and long-term care facilities are a group that requires special attention. As part of the new life routine during COVID-19, a lockdown was imposed in order to protect them. The required social distancing from families and friends had a strong influence on their general well-being. Moreover, residents' dependency, lack of enough manpower in many institutions, and social isolation may be risk factors for mistreatment and neglect. During such a difficult time some children who experienced financial problems tried to get money from their parents who lived in different old age homes, knowing that they had a steady income. This may lead to potential exploitation, as financial dependency was found to be a risk factor for financial exploitation.

The following example unfortunately, describes the reality of many families:

Josef aged 80, suffers from advanced dementia and functional disability. He lives with his wife Bella aged 78 in a residential facility. As a result of COVID-19 crisis Moses- their son aged 51, who had been divorced and unemployed, he cannot pay alimony to his ex-wife and children. He is in debt to a lot of people. He expects that his parents will take care of all his needs, and they will also give him money for his ex-wife and children. His demands are accompanied with threats and shouts. The atmosphere whenever he came to visit became tense and un-bearable. A close neighbor of his parents in the facility heard him shouting and screaming at his parents. She called the manager and social worker of the facility In order to help his parents and solve the situation. The arrangement was that they will help him this time, but he is not allowed to come again with such demands.

The situation was brought to the Person in charge of "**Protecting Mothers and Fathers**" program who met with the son, helped him to get some financial assistance but asked him to stay away, at least

for a while from his parents. The social worker at the facility was also involved and kept track, and was in constant relations with the parents.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare they have no conflicts of interest that are directly or indirectly related to the research.

Funding

None.