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Social Participation in times of COVID-19: Effects on depression in the elderly

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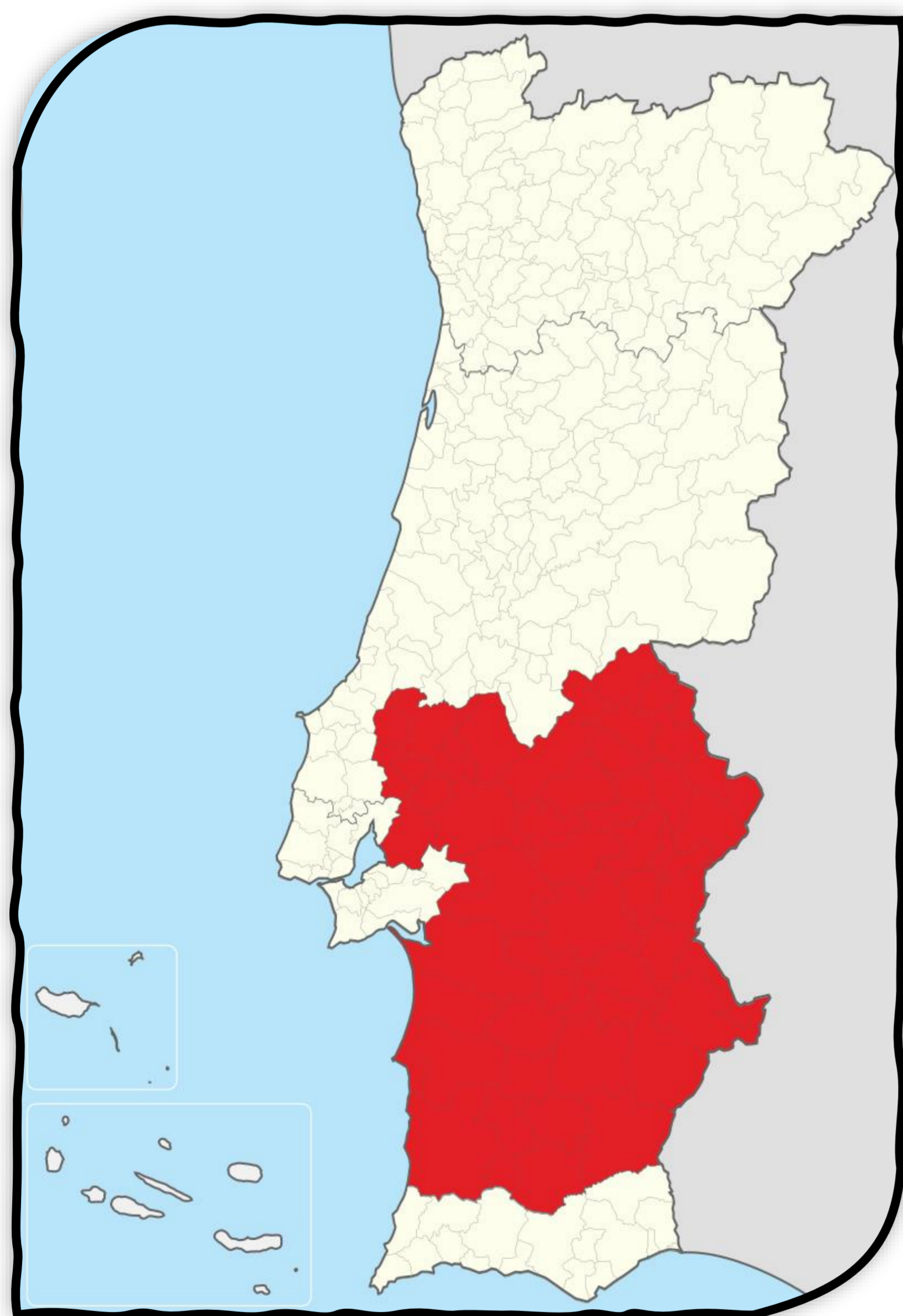
Introduction

The social restrictions in place during the COVID-19 pandemic had negative impacts in the livelihoods of individuals and communities, particularly those typically most vulnerable, such as the elderly (García-González & Montero, 2021).

For example, lower frequency of relationships and interactions with other persons, participation on recreational and social activities, and available instrumental and emotional support, were identified as predictors of higher physical and mental health deterioration during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among the elderly population (Kasar & Karaman, 2021; Robb et al., 2020).

Here we aim to better understand and contextualize the relation between lower social participation during the COVID-19 pandemic critical moments and the risk of depression, focusing on a sample of elderly participants residing in a vulnerable region of Portugal.

Method



Sample: 324 elderly participants ($M_{age} = 75.11$; $SD = 6.89$; range 65-92), residing in the Portuguese region of Alentejo, were surveyed with the help of an interviewer.

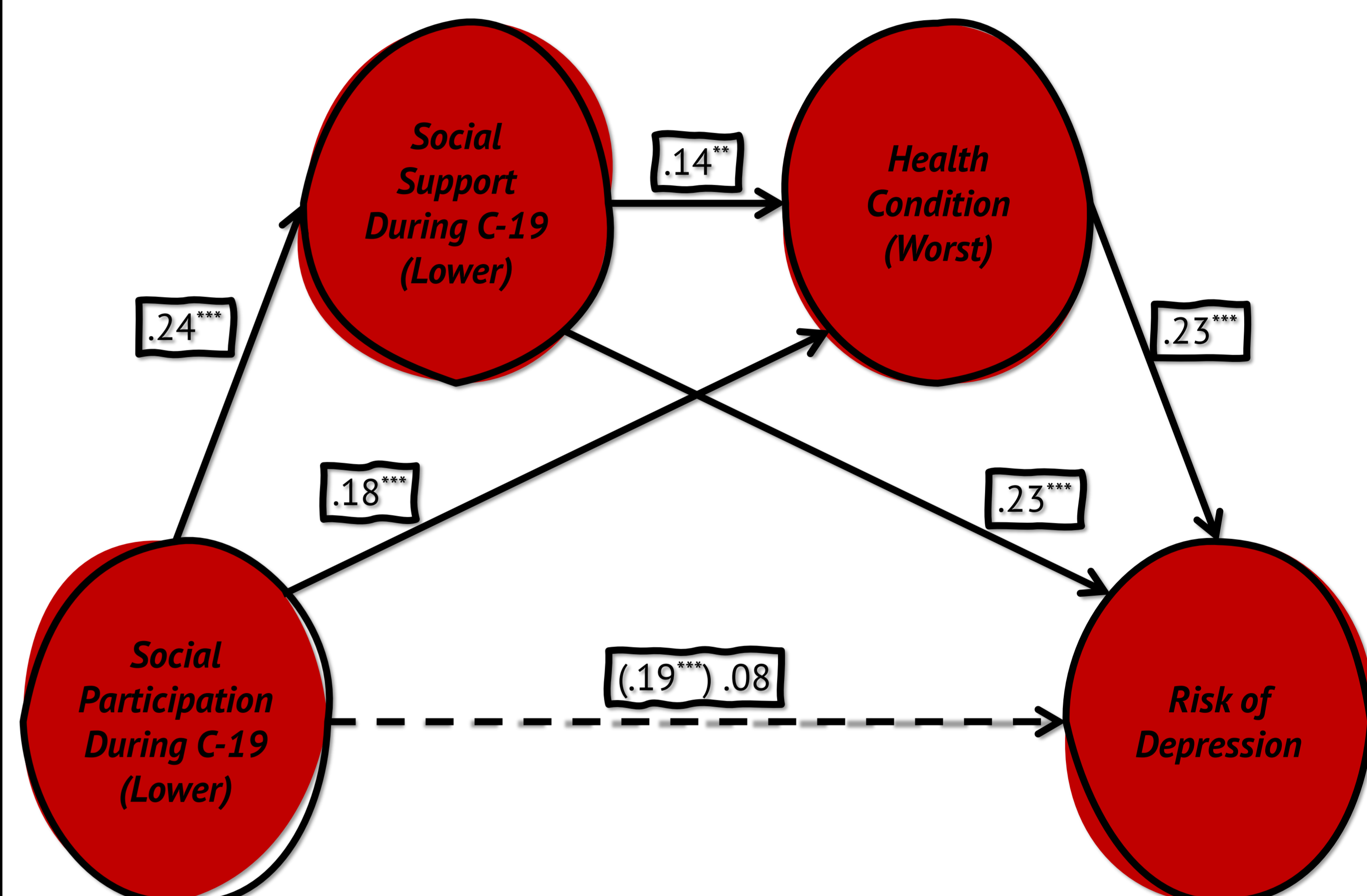
Self-Reported Measures:

- Social Participation during COVID-19 critical moments (ACPQ-15)
- Social Support since the beginning of the pandemic (MSPSS)
- Risk of Depression (DASS-21 Depression Subscale)
- Health Condition (How do you evaluate your health)
- Sociodemographic Variables (e.g., age; sex; economic status; etc.)

Results

Regression analysis suggest that lower self-reported social participation during COVID-19 pandemic critical moments increased the likelihood of depression.

Serial mediation analysis further suggested that this relationship was statistically explained by lower self-reported social support since the beginning of the pandemic, and worst self-reported health condition ($F(11,306) = 12.492$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = .31$).



Note. Covariates included in the model: age; sex; education level; economic status; living alone (yes vs. no); area of residence (urban vs. rural); chronic disease (yes vs. no); having had COVID-19 (yes vs. no).
** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Conclusion

- Lower social participation during COVID-19 pandemic critical moments may have protected participants from infection and other negative health outcomes.
- However, lower social participation during COVID-19 pandemic critical moments may also have increased the risk of depression.
- This effect was statistically explained by lower self-reported social support since the beginning of the pandemic and worst health condition arising from such social deprivation.
- Findings strengthen the importance of creating the conditions and means to foster social participation and support in a post-pandemic scenario, particularly amongst elderly communities.

References:

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