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Living Alone: Cognitive Aging In Tennessee

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Living Alone: Cognitive Aging In Tennessee

Abstract

Living alone in old age is increasingly common. In the United States, the percentage of older adults living alone has more than quadrupled since the 1900s. “In 2014, 26% of older adults lived alone, representing 12.5 million people” (Portacolone et al., 2018). Those who live alone experience different aspects of aging, whether that be socially, cognitively, or physically. The data we used was gathered by mySidewalk, which offered over 600 points of data, aggregated at the zip code level, from across the entire state of Tennessee. The variables we examined more closely included "Seniors in Family Households of 2 or More", "Seniors Living Alone, and "Seniors in Non-Family Households of Two or More", and “Poor Mental Health in Adults (2021)”. We examined whether living alone would have a negative effect on various aspects of health, specifically mental health. This study offers a more in-depth look of how there is a rising population of women living alone due to divorce and being widowed. Additionally, living alone doesn't indicate positive mental health. There are still cognitive and even physical risks from isolated living that efforts should be made to mitigate. Also, previous literature indicates more women live alone, but studies show more data on elderly men. Lastly, mental health awareness movements emphasize teenagers and young adults, but the emotional health of adults has less attention as their ages increase. Our results indicate a notable negative effect on emotional and mental health regarding isolated living, indicating that additional attention should be provided to any older adults who are currently living alone. Further research in this area could investigate specific facets of emotional satisfaction seen in older adults with these circumstances to better understand the specific degree of cognitive decline caused by the lack of regular social interaction.

Keywords: cognitive aging, solo living, elderly, abnormal aging