
Older adults shielding at home

Dr Mark Ward and Professor Rose Anne Kenny
The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA)

December 2020

Copyright © The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing 2020

The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing
Trinity College Dublin
Dublin 2

Tel: +353 1 896 2509

Email: tilda@tcd.ie

Website: www.tilda.ie

<https://www.doi.org/10.38018/TildaRb.2020-04>



An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health

HR^B Health
Research
Board

The
ATLANTIC
Philanthropies



Irish Life

Introduction

At various times during the COVID-19 pandemic, people over the age of 70 and individuals with medical conditions that put them at an increased risk of severe COVID-19 infection have been asked to stay at home and to limit face-to-face interactions. These measures are referred to as ‘cocooning’ in Ireland and ‘shielding’ in the United Kingdom. Given the somewhat negative connotations of the word cocooning, we have chosen here to describe these measures as shielding as we believe that this better captures the active measures that many older adults have had to take over the last number of months in order to protect themselves and others.

Self-isolating at home for extended periods has severely curtailed interactions with family and friends, as well as impacting every aspect of the lives of older people (including food shopping, physical activity, self-care and social connections). We suspect that the ramifications of these upheavals will be wide-ranging and long-lasting. It is therefore critical that these consequences are identified as quickly as possible so that any damaging repercussions can be mitigated, and the wellbeing of older adults fully restored and maintained.

In this brief report, we describe the levels of agreement among older adults with this policy of shielding, and also show how this is related to the level of concern about COVID-19 as well as the ease which older adults understand Government guidance on the pandemic.

Method

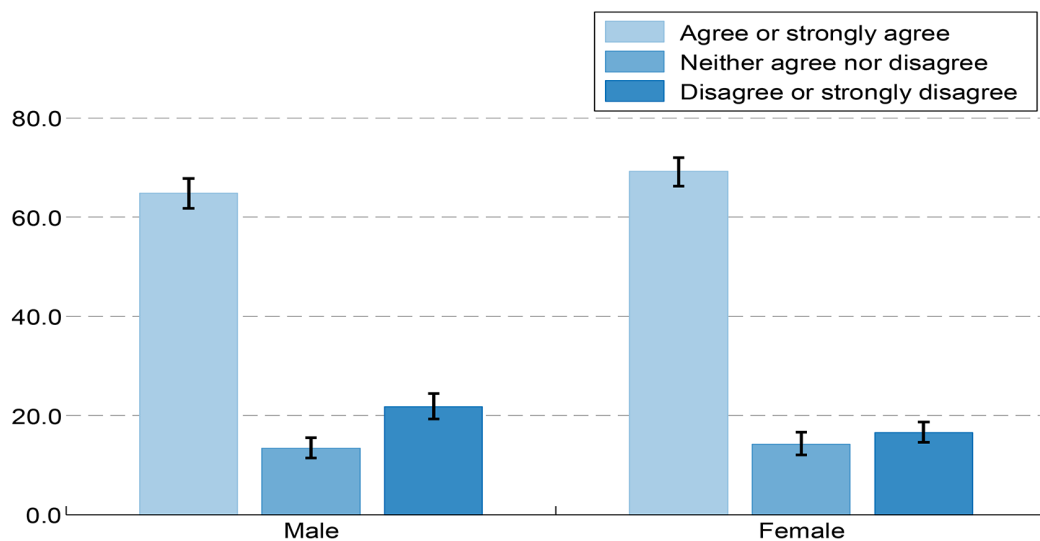
This research brief is based on 3,614 Self-Completion Questionnaires completed by participants of The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA). This study population consists of community-dwelling adults aged 60 years and older. Data were collected between June and October 2020.

We asked participants the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the Government’s decision to ask all adults aged 70 years and older to self-isolate in their home, commonly referred to as ‘cocooning’.

Results

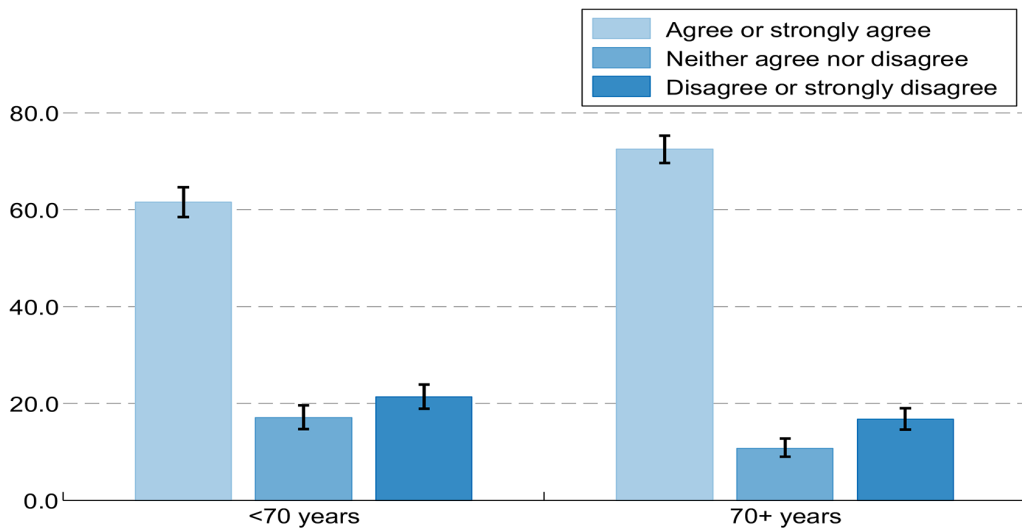
Overall, there was wide support for this policy with 67% of adults aged 60 and older agreeing or strongly agreeing with it. As shown in Figure 1, a similar proportion of men and women agreed with the policy, however, men were more likely than women to disagree or disagree strongly with it.

Figure 1. Percentage of men and women who agreed or disagreed with Government decision to ask everyone aged 70 and older to self-isolate in their home



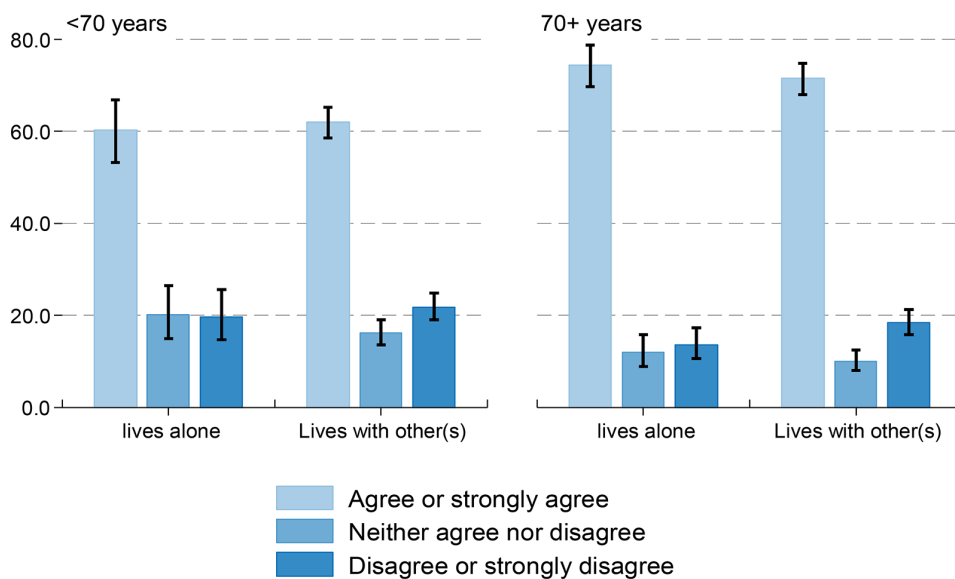
As this policy was targeted at adults aged 70 and older, it is important to ascertain if this group differed from younger participants in their level of agreement or otherwise with the policy. Somewhat surprisingly, a higher percentage of the over 70s agreed or strongly agreed, while a greater proportion of the under 70s disagreed or disagreed strongly with it (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Percentage of adults aged under and over 70 years who agreed or disagreed with Government decision to ask everyone aged 70 and older to self-isolate in their home



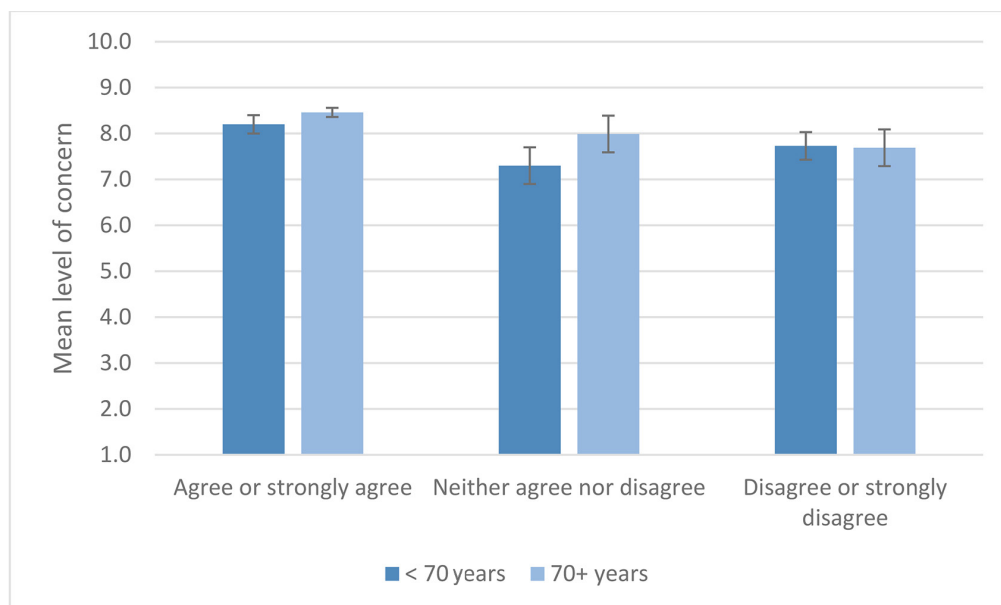
It is reasonable to suspect that the direction to limit contacts while staying at home would be viewed differently by people who lived alone than those who lived with others. As shown in Figure 3, we did not observe any differences between those who lived alone and those who did not. Among participants aged 70 years and older, 74% of those who live alone agreed or agreed strongly with the policy, compared to 72% of those who live with others.

Figure 3. Percentage of adults who lived alone or with others who agreed or disagreed with Government decision to ask everyone aged 70 and older to self-isolate in their home



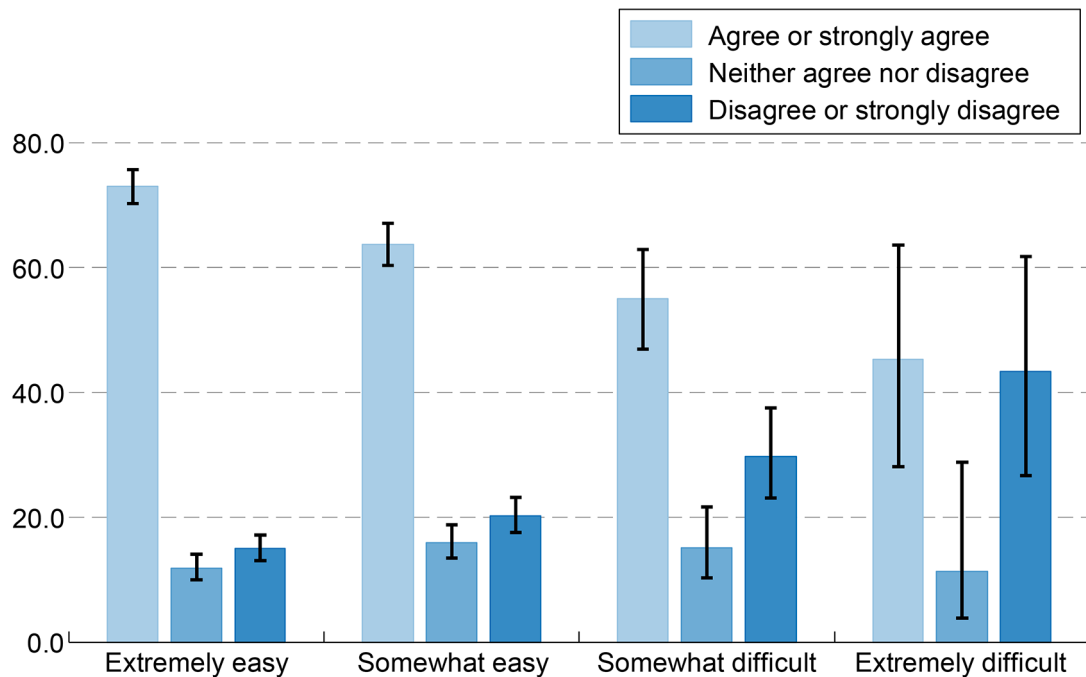
Participants were asked to rate their level of concern about COVID-19 on a scale ranging from 1 (least concerned) to 10 (most concerned). The levels of concern were high overall with an average score of 8.1 out of 10 among all older adults. Figure 4 shows the association between participants' level of concern and the extent to which they agreed or strongly agreed with the policy for people aged 70 and older to self-isolate at home. While the level of concern was high, irrespective of the extent of agreement with the policy, we did find that among both the under and over 70s, higher concern about COVID-19 was associated with stronger agreement with the policy.

Figure 4. Percentage of adults who agreed or disagreed with Government decision to ask everyone aged 70 and older to self-isolate in their home, by level of concern with the COVID-19 pandemic



Participants reported on how easy they found it to understand official Government guidance on the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, 51% found it extremely easy to understand, and 38% somewhat easy to understand, while the remaining 11% found Government guidance somewhat or extremely difficult to understand. Figure 5 shows the association between the level of agreement with the Government decision to ask everyone aged 70 and older to self-isolate in their home, and the ease with which they understood Government guidance on the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a clear association between the two, with those who found it extremely easy to understand guidelines significantly more likely to agree with the decision to ask the over 70s to isolate at home. Conversely, older adults who said they found it somewhat difficult to understand the Government guidance were more likely to disagree with the policy to isolate at home

Figure 5. Percentage of adults who agreed or disagreed with Government decision to ask everyone aged 70 and older to self-isolate in their home, by ease by which they understood Government guidance



Conclusion

Two thirds of adults aged 60 and older agreed or strongly agreed with shielding. Interestingly, a higher percentage of those most affected by policy, the over 70s, agreed with it. Whether people lived alone or with others does not appear to influence their level of agreement with shielding. On average, those who agreed or agreed strongly with shielding were more concerned about the virus. These findings suggest widespread support for the governments' decision to ask the over 70s to remain at home and limit their interactions for long periods of time. The level of agreement with shielding was also related to the ease with which older adults understood government guidance on the pandemic. This clearly illustrates the importance of clear communication of these policies and suggests that older adults are willing to adhere to guidelines when they understand the reasoning behind them. Future TILDA research will enable to ascertain whether this agreement was consistent during the entire period the restrictions were in place or if they changes over the course of the pandemic.