

# **” We have become prisoners of our own age”: From a continuing care retirement community to a total institution**

**Liat Ayalon, Ph.D.**  
**Bar Ilan University, Israel**  
**Sharon Avidor, Ph.D.**  
**Rupin College, Israel**



**STEREOTYPES**

**PREJUDICE**

**DISCRIMINATION**



# AGEISM DURING COVID-19:

- This is an ageist virus!
- Older adults have been portrayed as weak and vulnerable
- Older adults as a burden to society
- Generations pitting against each other
- Disregard instructions- “this is not my disease”
- Disregard the impact on younger populations



# WHY AGEISM IS SO PREVALENT?

Terror management theory-  
death anxiety  
(Greenberg, Schimel, & Mertens, 2004)

Competition over scarce resources -  
Consumption and Succession  
(North & Fiske, 2012, 2015)



**The Physical Impossibility of  
Death in the Mind of Someone  
Living. *Damien Hirst***



# Age in COVID-19 policy measures

- Lockdown
- Exit
- Triage
- Long term care
- Vaccines





# Long term care settings

- Residents locked for months
- Residents abandoned
- Bodies hidden for days
- Limited workforce and PPE



# RESIDENTS IN CONTINUING CARE RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES (CCRCs)

(Ayalon & Avidor,  
under revision, Age and Ageing)

- CCRCs-independent upon entering, preserve/foster a higher level of autonomy
- Confined to their units for months

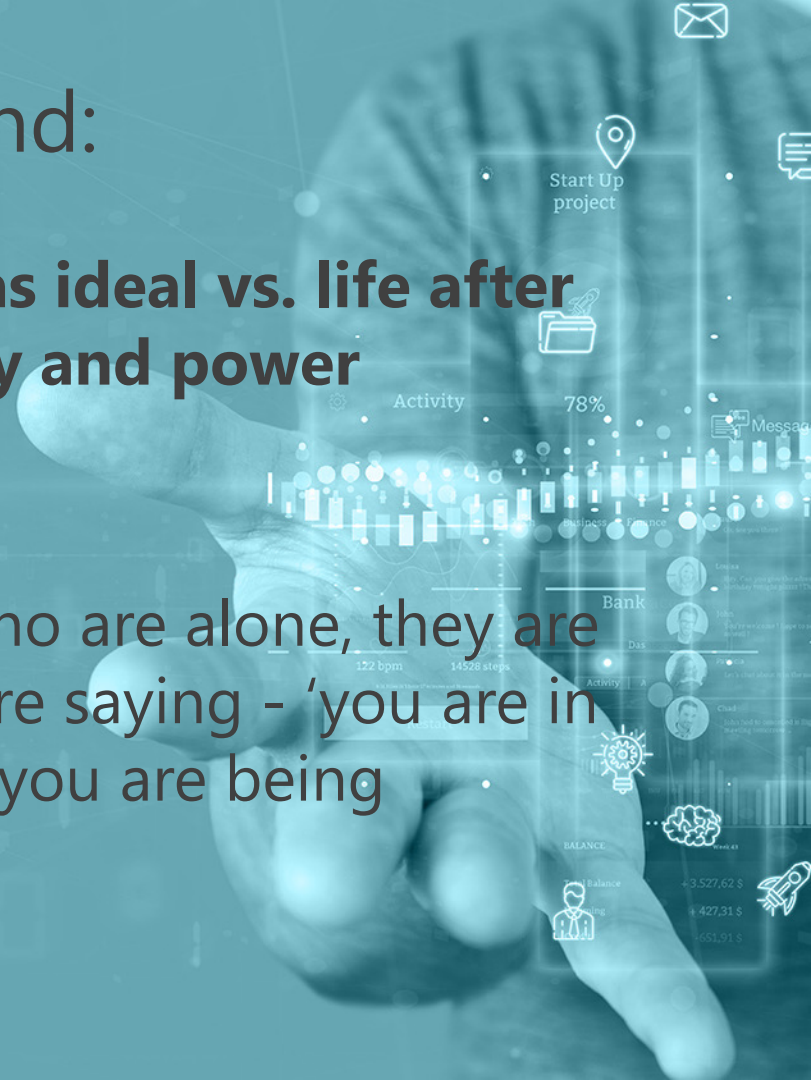


# What we found:

**A rupture- life before described as ideal vs. life after COVID- autonomy was taken away and power imbalance**

## **Use of downward comparisons:**

"Those who are alone, my friends who are alone, they are simply jealous of us, because they are saying - 'you are in a cage, but a cage of gold, because you are being spoiled.'"





" Initially, no one spoke (about the effects of the outbreak in the CCRC). They (staff) knew that one died. But, no information in order not to...No information on the notification system, nothing. But, by a coincident, my room is here, right above the balcony and all staff meetings were underneath..."



**Power  
imbalance**

## Past-present trauma:

- "From that period, when I was 7-8 years old, all alone, among strangers, in a threatening world. I have learnt how to block my feelings when I needed to. So - that girl has become my counselor during lockdown. Even now, the girl is saying: 'I am getting over this. I am not thinking about this, I am shutting this out.' I reorganize things."
- "We have become prisoners of our own age"







## Conclusions:

- CCRCs were successful in physically protecting older adults at the price of compromising their wellbeing.
- CCRC residents' defense mechanisms were successful to some extent, but as time went by and the rest of the country returned to a new routine, these mechanisms collapsed, and older residents experienced high levels of stress, anxiety, depression, despair and anger.

# Based on family caregivers

(Avidor & Ayalon, 2021)

## Older adults in long term care:

- Functional decline
- Symptoms of depression and anxiety

## Family caregivers:

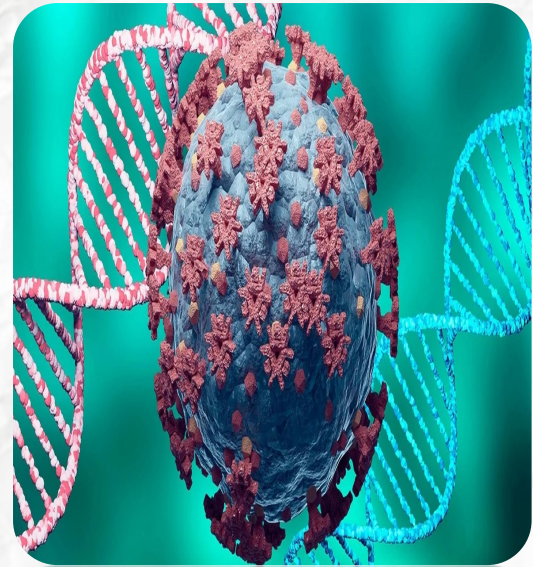
- Worries
- Guilt
- Sense of relief





"It was very difficult for my mother – very difficult! This isolation, without being able to visit her and not letting her out. She couldn't quite understand it. She started saying it was Hitler who sent this virus. She started hallucinating and seeing things." (-M.)

*"There's no end in sight. Do I know if she'll live another year? I think the place is dealing with it just fine. At least that's how it was described to me over the phone. But of course I don't have any...I don't really see what's happening inside there. If I could I would pull her out of there, but I don't have the option. You know what? I really don't know what to think. I'm a bit confused by this whole thing."* (-M.)



A photograph of an elderly couple smiling and embracing each other outdoors. The man is on the left, wearing a red and white checkered shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing a light blue shirt. They are both looking towards the camera with warm expressions. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting a park or garden setting.

## Recommendations:

- Management and staff play a major role which can be used for the better or worse
- Greater flexibility and maintenance of physical and emotional routines are essential
- The more transparent the measures, the more satisfied are the residents



# Recommendations:

- We are all in this together.
- Susceptibility does not equal vulnerability
- There are multiple incidents of intergenerational solidarity that must be acknowledged
- A pandemic is not a reason for human rights violations
- We should not throw away the baby with the water







# W.H.O. CAMPAIGN TO COMBAT AGEISM



## VISION

A world for all ages



## GOALS

Change the way we feel,  
think and act towards age  
and ageing.

# Thank you

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**Bar Ilan University, Israel**

