

An application of networks and symbolic clustering

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Population ageing requires society to adjust by ensuring additional types of services and assistance for elderly people. These may be provided by both organized services and sources of informal social support. The latter is especially important since a lack of social support is associated with a lower level of psychological and physical well-being. During the Covid-19 pandemic, social support for the elderly has proven to be even more crucial, also due to physical distancing. Therefore, this study aims to identify and describe the various types of personal social support networks of the elderly population during the coronavirus pandemic. Egocentric networks measured personal networks. To this end, a survey of Slovenians older than 64 years was conducted from April 25 to May 4, 2020 on a probability Web-panel-based sample (n = 605). The ego-networks were clustered by a hierarchical clustering approach for symbolic data. Clustering was performed for different types of social support (socializing, instrumental support, emotional support) and different characteristics of the social support networks (i.e., type of relationship, number of contacts, geographical distance). The results show that most of the elderly population in Slovenia have a satisfactory social support network, while the share of those without any (accessible) source of social support is significant. The results are particularly valuable for sustainable care policy planning, crisis intervention planning as well as any future waves of the coronavirus.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e22gKPjjHz8&t=1s>