

# Facing the COVID-19 pandemic:

## A mixed-method analysis of asylum seekers' experiences and worries in the Canton of Vaud, Switzerland

Projects COVIDAR  
& SociocoViD

Morisod, K. \*, Martin, T. \* Rawlinson, C., Grazioli, V.S, Von Plessen, C., Durand, M., Selby, K., Le Pogam, M.-A., Sanchis Zozaya, J., Bochud, M., \*Bühler, N. & \*Bodenmann, P.

### Introduction

Social determinants of health played an important role in the burden of the COVID-19 pandemic, deepening social and health inequities between groups of the population, such as asylum seekers.<sup>1,2</sup> High population density, belonging to a minority ethnic group, or social deprivation are all risk factors for contracting the virus.<sup>3,4,5</sup> We aim to understand better the pandemic experiences and sources of worries of asylum seekers living in community centres in the Canton of Vaud.

### Mixed method

- At the time of data collection (during fall 2020 & spring-summer 2021): mask were mandatory within community centres and protective measures were recommended (hand hygiene, social distance and limiting contact)
- Community centres (10 in the Canton of Vaud) mostly have 9m<sup>2</sup> rooms with shared kitchens and bathrooms on each floor

#### Quantitative

- Self-administrated cross-sectional survey
- Questions about socio-demographic characteristics, health literacy & COVID-19-related measures
- 203 asylum seekers
- Descriptive analysis & logistic regression

#### Qualitative

- Semi-directed interviews (face-to-face in one of the centre)
- Exploring how experiences of the pandemic (*risk and protection measures*) were impacted by living conditions
- 15 asylum seekers
- Inductive thematic analysis

➤ 2/3 men, median of 30 years old

### Results

#### Quantitative:

60% of the participants were globally worried about the COVID-19 pandemic. (Fig. 1)  
Participants living in centers had more sleep troubles due to COVID-19 (aOR 2.21, p=0.023, 95% CI [1.12-4.39]) . (Fig.2)  
The COVID-19 restrictions increased considerably anxiety and loneliness among asylum seekers. (Fig.3)

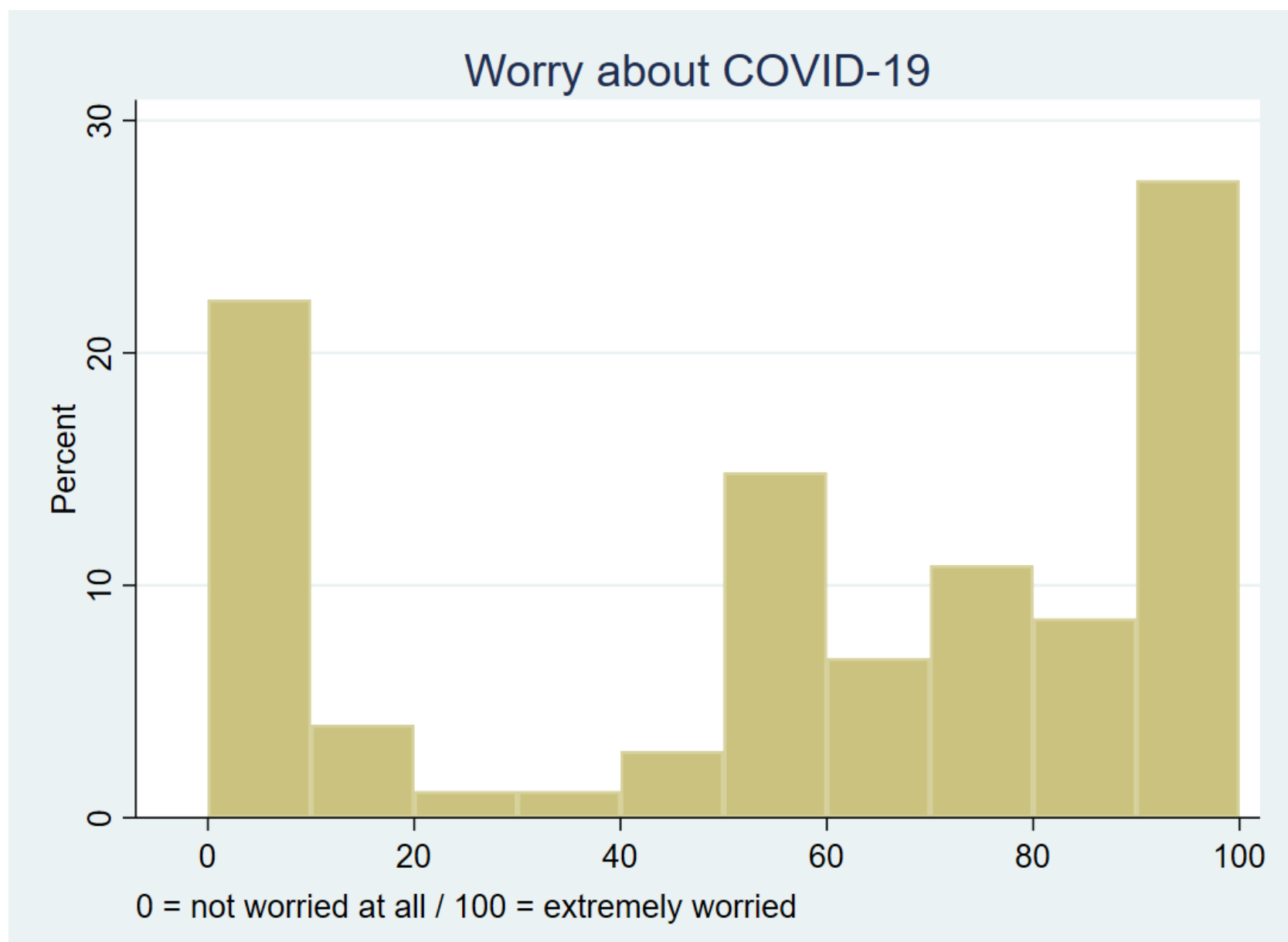


Fig 1. Global worry about COVID-19

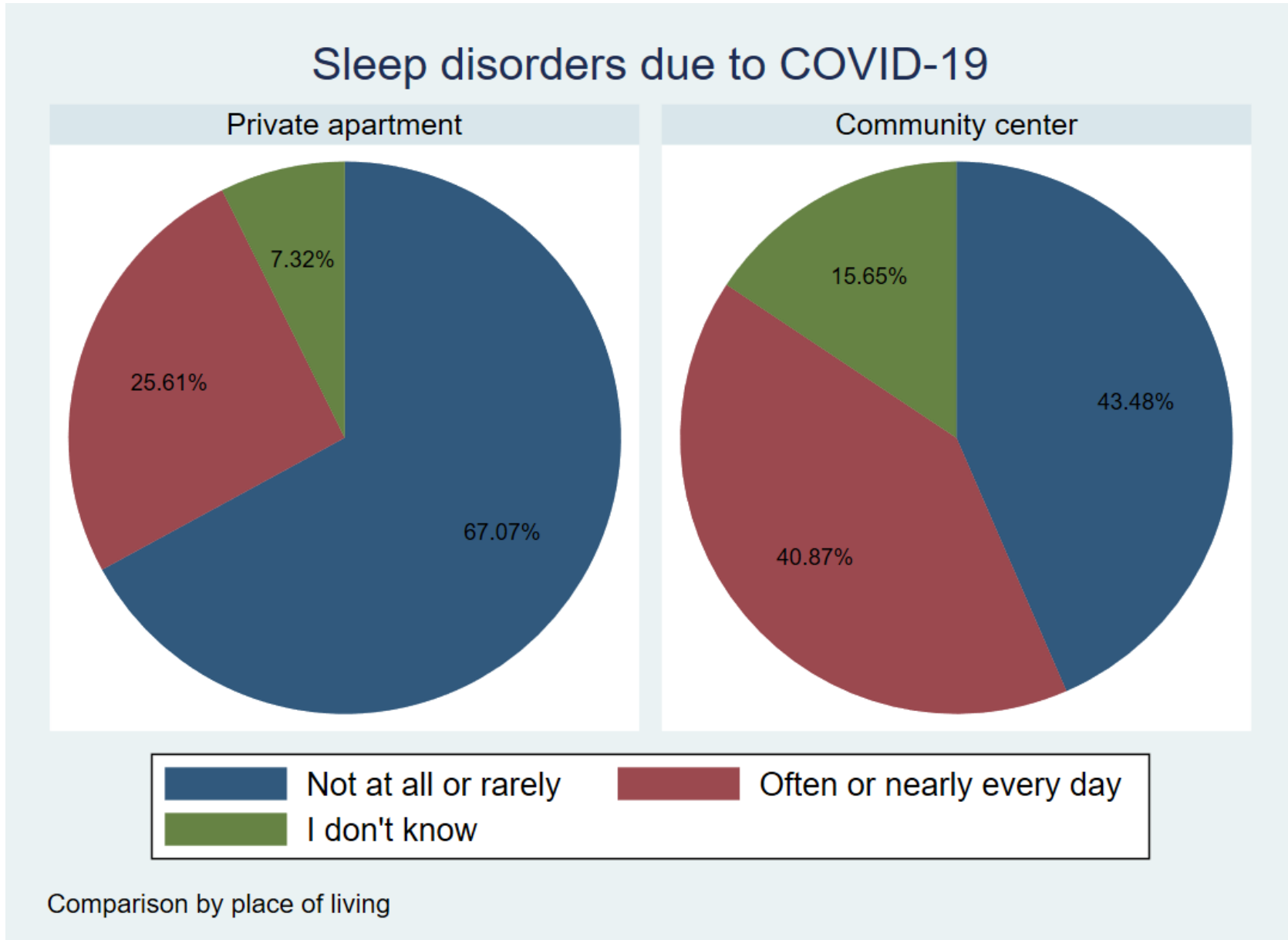


Fig 2. Sleep disorders due to COVID-19

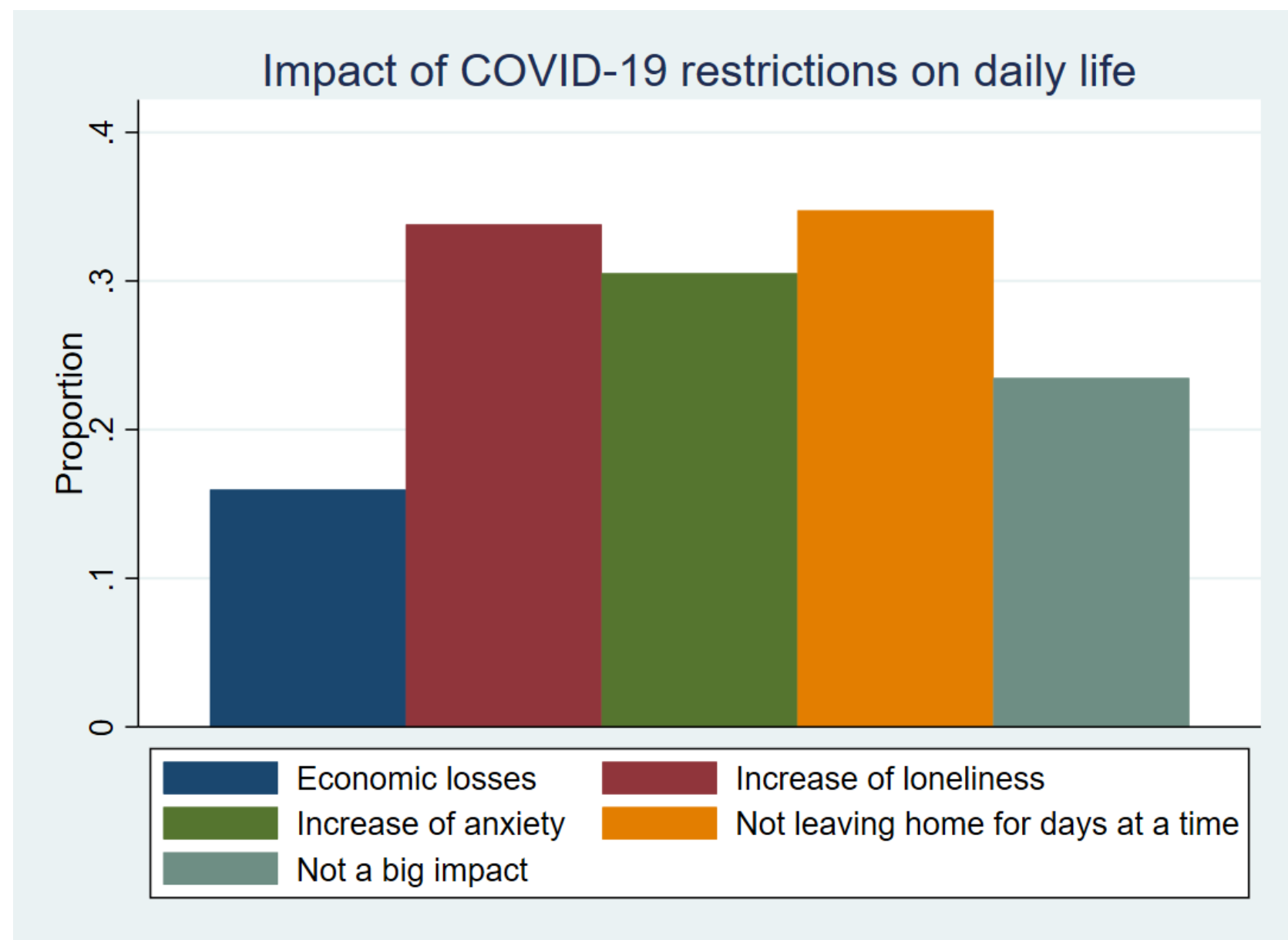


Fig 3. Impact of COVID-19 restrictions on daily life

#### Qualitative:

#### Multiple reasons of worries

#### Shared spaces

**Negotiating risks in collective spaces:** “[About feeling safe when using other spaces than the room] Really I don’t go (laughs) I go only to stairs...” (Georgian woman, 37 years old)

**Others’ behavior as a source of worries:** “[About the feeling that people are not respectful of the rules] I mean, to some extent it’s not possible” (Unknown origin, 36 years old)

#### Isolated from social and political space

**When everything stopped:** “When COVID came, I was in my room, with no job, and no French classes” (Afghan man, 34 years old)

**Loss of social contacts:** “In terms of mental health, I see the place as a prison” (Albanian man, 28 years old)

**Being separated from the family:** “I was really isolated, and in my exile, I was cut off from my family” (Unknown origin, 46 years old)

Table 1. Categories in the sources of worries

### Discussion

Both analysis highlighted that asylum seekers’ worries were high and that their perceptions of COVID-19 public health measures were ambivalent (seen as both protective and source of worries).

➔ Living in a centre = factor of **clinical, psychological and social vulnerability**

### Conclusion & recommendations

➤ Importance of better understanding asylum seekers’ experiences to propose public health measures adapted to their needs and living conditions

*E.g.: Avoiding high-density facilities and encouraging transfer; ensuring the applicability of measures; adapting the communication; creating spaces for emotional support*

unisanté

Centre universitaire de médecine générale  
et santé publique • Lausanne

**References :** (1) Jaljaa A, Caminada S, Tosti ME, D’Angelo F, Angelozzi A, Isonne C, et al. Risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection in migrants and ethnic minorities compared with the general population in the European WHO region during the first year of the pandemic: a systematic review. BMC Public Health. déc 2022;22(1):143. (2) Mengesha Z, Alloun E, Weber D, Smith M, Harris P. “Lived the Pandemic Twice”: A Scoping Review of the Unequal Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Asylum Seekers and Undocumented Migrants. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 29 mai 2022;19(11):6624. (3) Ali M, Gasca V, Schrier R, Pensa M, Brockman A, Olson DP, et al. Social Determinants and COVID-19 in a Community Health Center Cohort. J Immigr Minor Health. févr 2022;24(1):10-7. (4) de Lusignan S, Dorward J, Correa A, Jones N, Akinyemi O, Amirthalingam G, et al. Risk factors for SARS-CoV-2 among patients in the Oxford Royal College of General Practitioners Research and Surveillance Centre primary care network: a cross-sectional study. Lancet Infect Dis. sept 2020;20(9):1034-42. (5) Morisod K, Grazioli V, Schlüter V, Bochud M, Gonseth Nusslé S, D’Acremont V, et al. Prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 and associated risk factors among asylum seekers living in centres. Eur J Public Health. 20 oct 2021;31(Supplement\_3):ckab164.250.