

Loneliness in later life: social problem, public health problem, or moral panic?

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Loneliness, isolation and pressure: the inner demons of elite swimming

It's requires a particular brand of mental constitution to thrive in a sport where
the world only sits up and takes notice once every four years



I would like to that the funders of
my work on loneliness and my
collaborators and colleagues for
their insightful contributions and
tolerance of my obsession with
this topic. This lecture represents
my own views and should not be
attributed to funders or
colleagues

Overview of presentation

Introduction: definitions,
terms & terminology

Loneliness as a problem of
old age?

Loneliness as a public health
problem?

Loneliness as a moral panic?

Probably in that order..!



Perspectives on loneliness

- *“...man is conscious of his lonely nature before he learns to express this in language...”*
(Mijuskovic, 1979)

The meaning can never convey all that is intended, and *“even if the other manages to visit for a moment, he can never stay”*
(Mijuskovic, 2012, p67).

“Language... has created the word "loneliness" to express the pain of being alone. And it has created the word "solitude" to express the glory of being alone.” - Paul Tillich

Loneliness: part of the human condition?

Widespread use of the term-is fairly recent.

In 1674, John Ray compiled a glossary of infrequently used words. He included “loneliness” in his list, defining it as a term used to describe places and people “far from neighbours.”

We use the term in many ways..

People: He is a lonely person;

Life stages: She had a lonely old age;

Temporal: He spent many lonely nights;

Places: It is a lonely stretch of road; big cities are such lonely places.



Loneliness-a universal experience

Think of a time when you felt lonely?

Was it a fleeting emotion or longer lasting?

Was there a particular trigger-a song on the radio, a specific time or place?



Transformation of loneliness

How, why and when did philosophical ideas about understanding the nature of the human condition become the nation's number one health problem?

Epidemic of Loneliness

Loneliness is far more than a social misfortune.

Posted May 03, 2009

Health

Tackling the silent epidemic of loneliness

The Epidemic of Loneliness—and How to Combat It



Loneliness: The cost of the 'last taboo'

Loneliness costs £6,000 per person in ill-health, says a study, with calls to end the "stigma".



OAP widower writes heart-breaking appeal to find new fishing buddy

ITV.COM

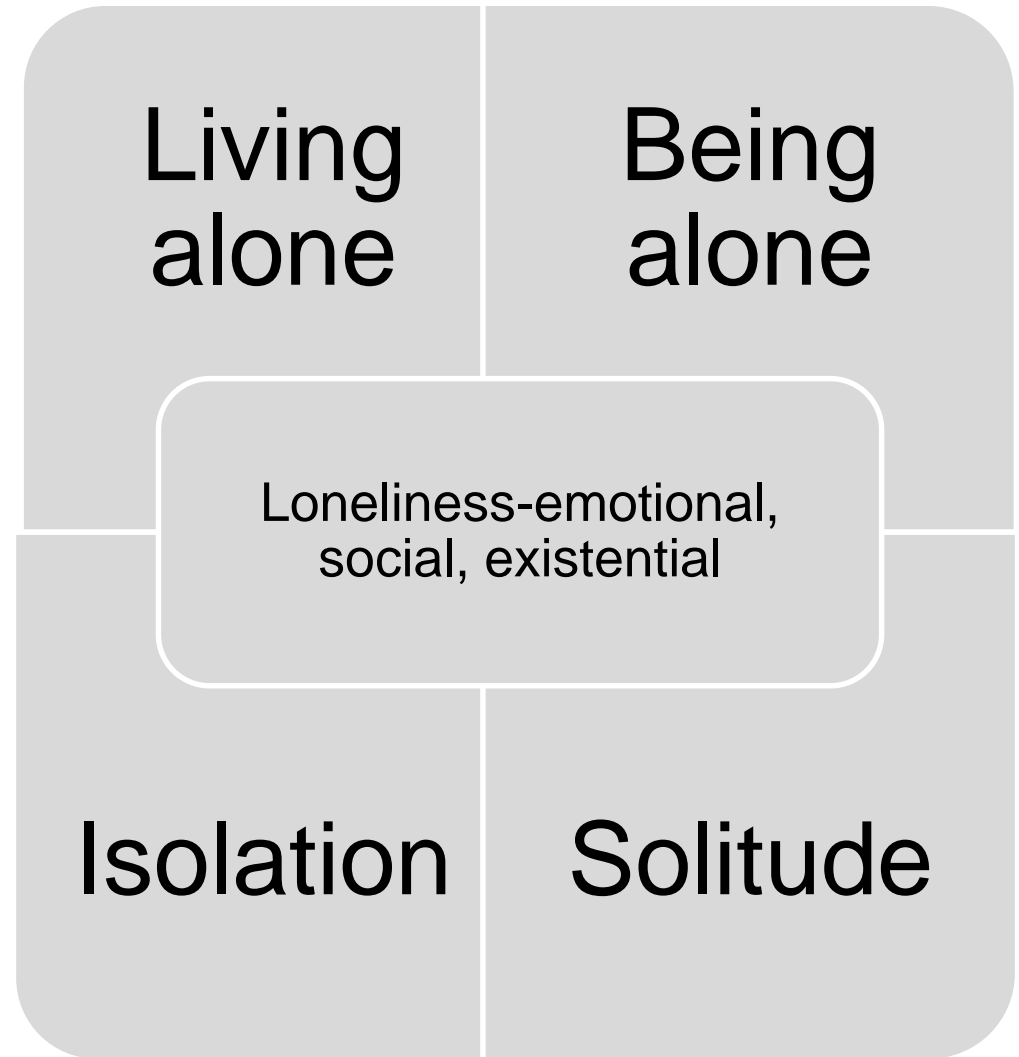


Jeremy Vine - Loneliness Week 2017 - BBC Radio 2

Jeremy Vine highlights Loneliness Awareness on Radio 2

What is loneliness and what isn't it?

Loneliness: the cognitive deficit theory: the difference between desired and actual social relations (Perlman & Pelau, 1981)-either in quantity or quality of relationships (or both) or in the mode of contact (On-line v in-person)



Victor et al 2009

How do (older) people understand loneliness?

Social estrangement: I think loneliness is because you don't get people to visit, you don't go out, you don't entertain or you don't go out and speak to people...

Bereavement: loneliness of the heart. And that's it. I mean everything I touch, everything I do she's there.

Someone to talk to: if I really felt lonely I'd take the dogs over to the common and I'd find someone to talk to very very quickly

Someone who cares: on your own, with on one to talk to, nobody to care, and nobody to care for.

Being busy: just busy all of the time and never have time to be lonely.

Sullivan et al 2015

How do older people talk about loneliness?

Loneliness described as both temporal & spatially experienced.

'I'm lonely of a night. "(Man 16)

"Such a lonely life ... Saturdays and Sundays are a bit dead for me..." (W 21)

"So long [Sunday] and so lonely."

"I never sat on my own as my husband was always there" (Woman 9)

"I was always sat in that chair there and whenever I looked up from here she was there. But when she'd gone she was not " (Man 8).

Bennett and Victor 2012

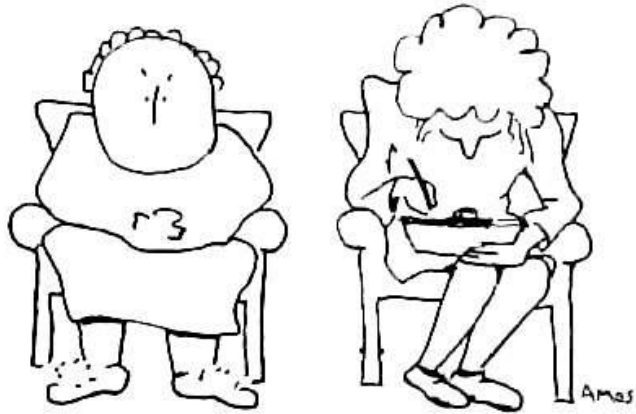
Measuring loneliness?

I think it's a very difficult thing to quantify...And I think perhaps it is something which you can't quantify because it is something which is within oneself perhaps, one's outlook on life. (F aged 67 married)

What would we like to measure (and what do we actually measure?)

- Intensity: how strong is the feeling?
- Duration: how long does it last?
- Frequency: how often does it occur?

How do we measure loneliness: main approaches



RIGHT, QUESTION 34, HOW OFTEN DO YOU
FEEL LONELY? ALL THE TIME ... ONLY
SOMETIMES... OR NEVER.

These mostly focus on frequency of
loneliness-not intensity/duration

Types of measures

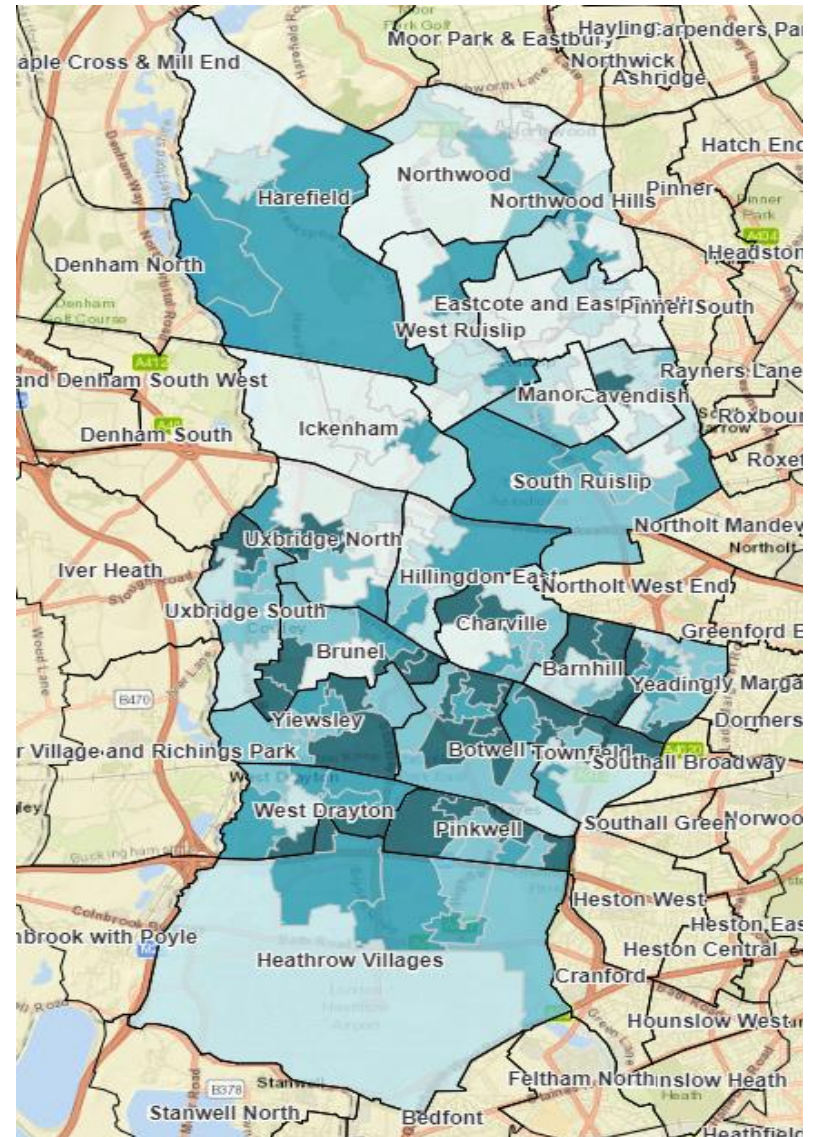
- Self-reported rating scale
- Single dimension scale (UCLA)
- Multi-dimensional scale (de Jong Gierveld scale)

Loneliness: what are we measuring?

Beware the use of proxy measures of loneliness and terminological inexactitude.....

marital status, age, reported health and household size used to generate loneliness maps are indirect/proxy measures for loneliness

'Loneliness maps' being used to find and help solitary people as research says being alone as harmful as 15 cigarettes a day



Loneliness: a problem of old age

Age UK
Sponsored ·  Like Page

Over 1.2 million older people are chronically lonely.



Help us to End Loneliness
Support befriending services

AGEUK.ORG.UK Learn More

no one should have no one at Christmas

Please help us provide companionship and support for local older people.



For more information
Call 01507 524242
www.ageuk.org.uk/lindsey



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ageUK
Love later life



Joan's life used to be filled with friendship and laughter.
Now she has no one.

Will you send a text and help show a lonely older person like Joan that someone cares?

No one should have no one – and yet there are one million older people in the UK who will go more than a month without speaking to a single friend, family member or neighbour.

Just £3 from you today could help pay for a weekly call from an Age UK befriender – providing an older person with the support and companionship they need.

TEXT FRIEND to 70007 to send £3 and help give an older person someone to talk to.



THE TIMES
Thursday November 29 2012 | thetimes.co.uk | No 70343 | May 9c, min 4c | £1

Christmas food special
Festive recipes | Alternative Christmas pudding by Michel Roux Jr | Luxury online food treats | Wine and music tasting with Simon Callow | *Times2*

250,000 elderly Britons alone and lonely at Christmas

Times Christmas Charity Appeal
News, pages 38, 17

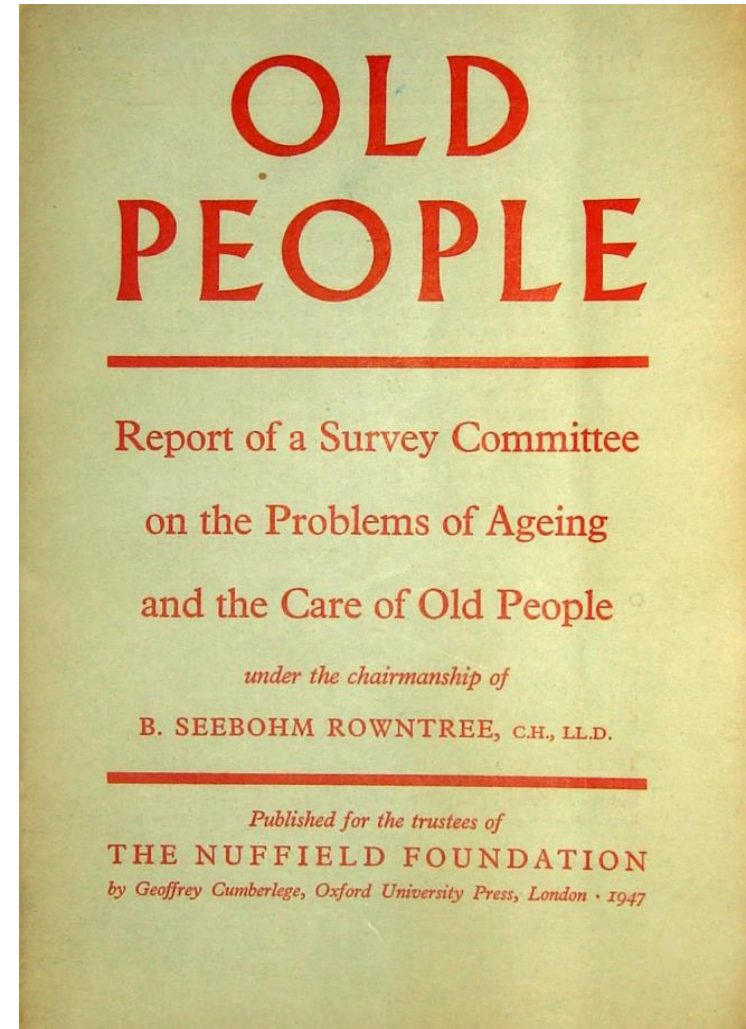


A NHS volunteer will be the only person Frederick Batchelor sees on Christmas Day at his home in Hereford when the charity delivers his lunch, as it does every day.

Loneliness in old age

'A distressing feature of old age is loneliness. All who have done welfare work among the old have found it the most common, if at the same time the most imponderable, of the ills from which the aged suffer, and its frequency was amply confirmed by our study'

(Rowntree, 1947,52)



Types of loneliness

Peer group (comparison with other older people)

Generation contrasted (comparison with younger people)

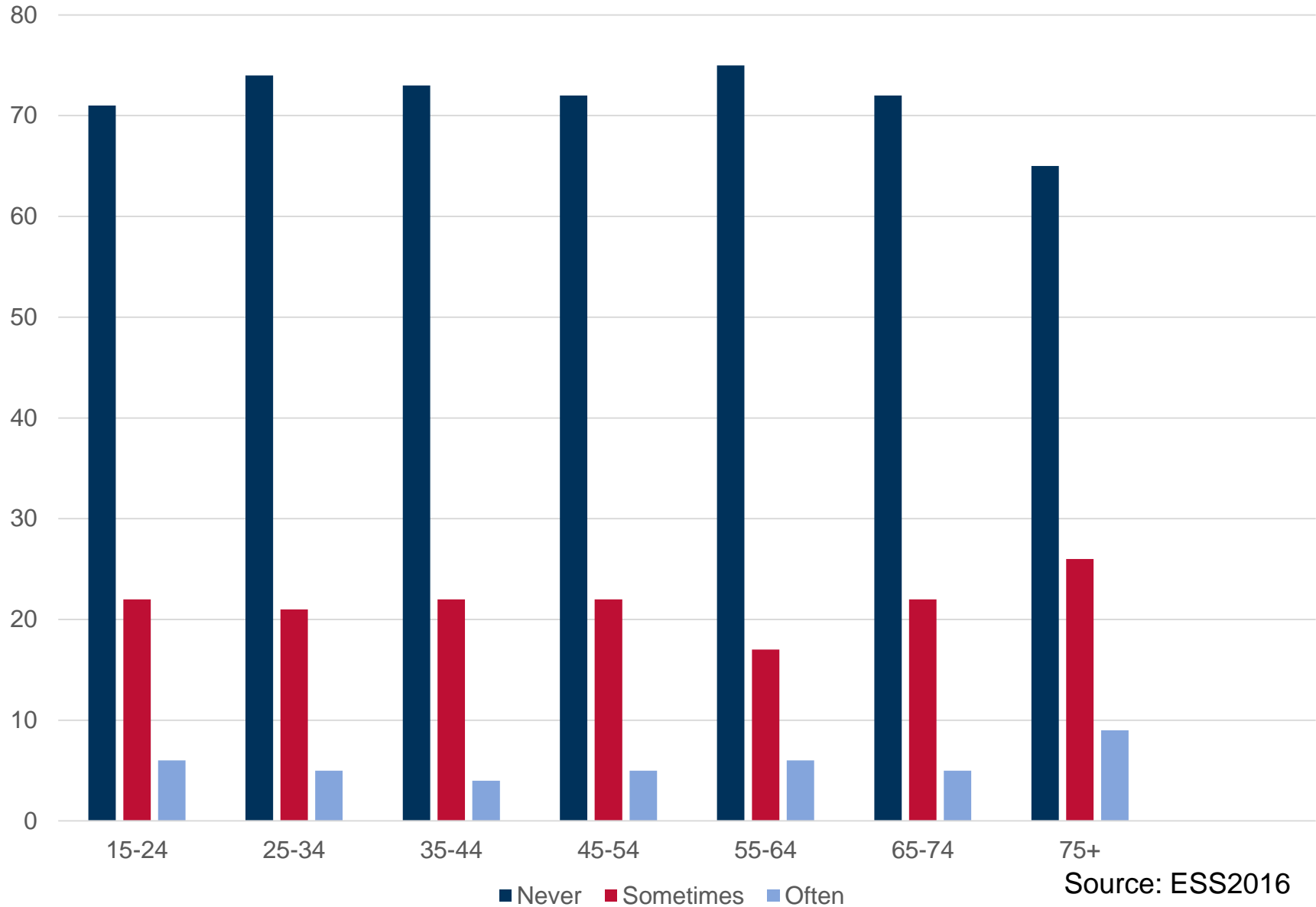
Age-related (comparison with younger selves)

Preceding cohort (comparison with previous cohorts of older people)

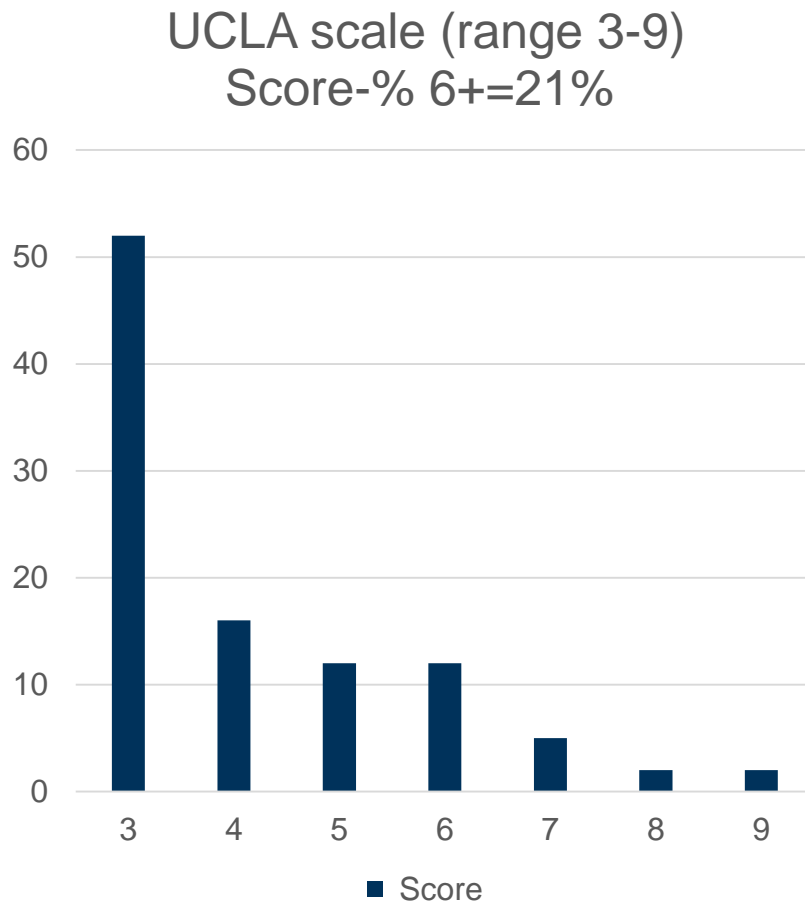
Other temporally situated types-chronic v transient

Source: Victor et al 2005

Loneliness: a problem of old age?



Different measures/questions give different answers?



Source: Own analysis of ELSA data

Have you felt lonely much of the time in last week	Yes	No
	12.6%	87.4

I often feel lonely living in this area (W3)	Agree	Disagree
	15.3%	76.7%

Instability underlying prevalence estimates

Loneliness trajectory	Changes over 10 years (%)-ELSA data	Changes over 1 year (%)-own survey
Never lonely	70	59
Always lonely	1	14
Out of loneliness	4	10
Into loneliness	5	10
Fluctuating	20	7

Source: Victor et al 2015

Age related loneliness: comparison with younger selves

	More	Less	Unchanged
Loneliness 10 years ago	6	22	71
Loneliness in 10 years time	10	23	67

Source: Victor et al 2009

Cohort related loneliness

	SHELDON 1948	TOWNSEND 1954	VICTOR 2005
Always/often	8	9	9
Sometimes	13	25	32
Never	79	66	61

Source: Victor et al 2009

Loneliness and isolation are two different things for older people

	lonely & isolated	lonely	isolated	None
T'end 1958	1	4	9	86
T'stall 1963	5	4	16	76
Victor et al 2009	2	5	10	83
Victor et al 2009	2	5	15	78

Source: Victor et al 2009

What is a public health problem?

- 1) Prevalence of the condition/exposure (and changes).
- 2) Impact of the condition on an individual level.
- 3) Impact on wider Society.
- 4) Condition is identifiable/preventable/treatable

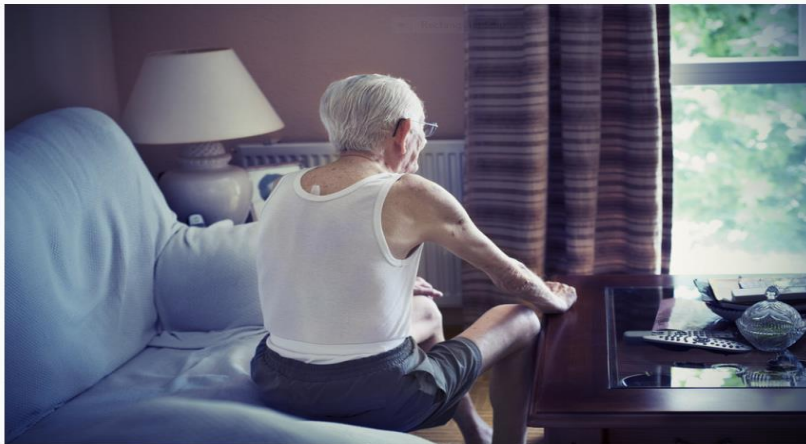
Loneliness is a public health issue

Alison While

*Emeritus Professor of Community Nursing, King's College London,
Florence Nightingale Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery and Fellow of the QNI*

How to Beat the Loneliness Epidemic

Over a year ago by LAURIE VAZQUEZ



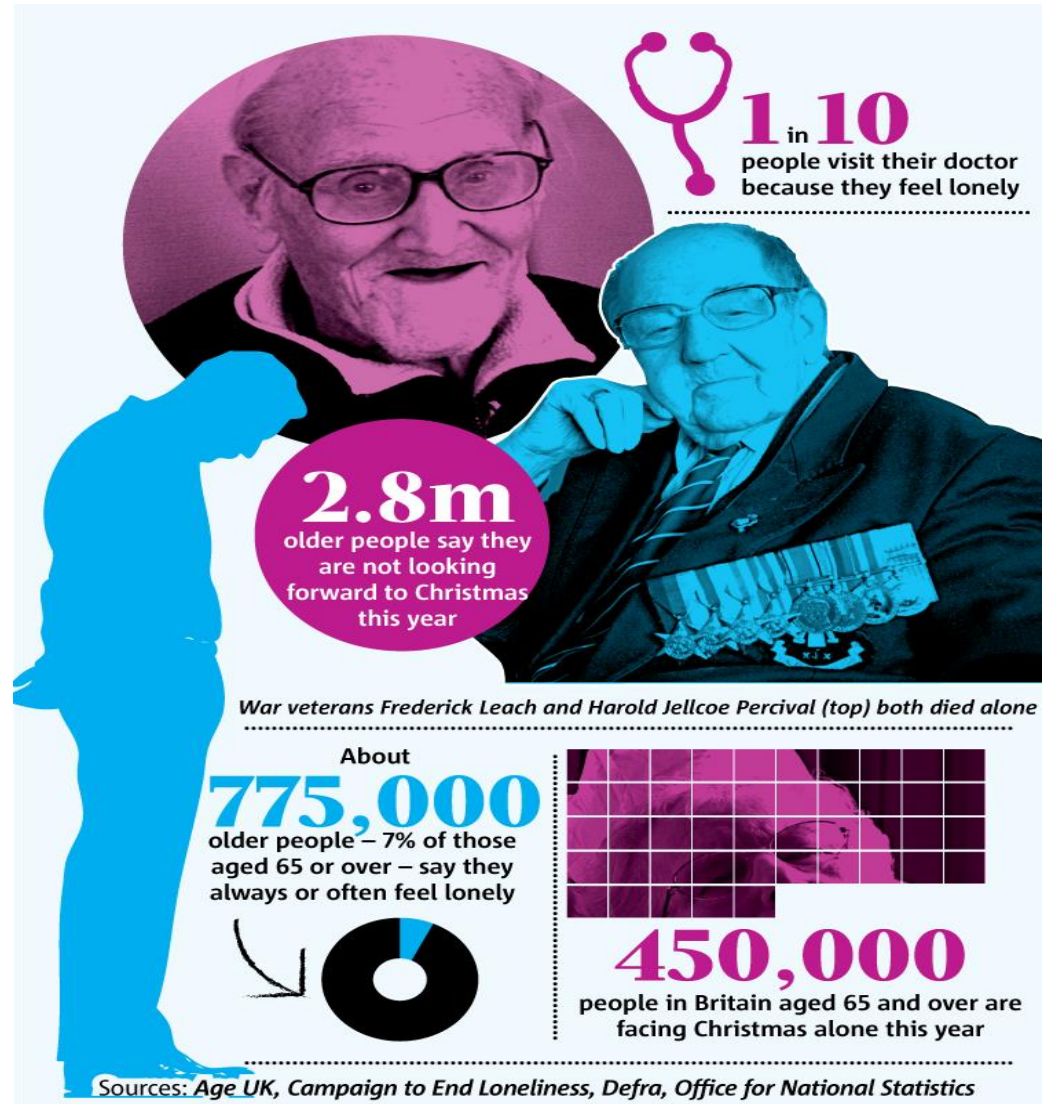
The loneliness epidemic among Britain's elderly



Is the prevalence of loneliness increasing?

No-prevalence for older people largely unchanged since 1948

BUT absolute numbers increase because increase in absolute and relative number of older people



“As our population profile changes, and we have a larger proportion of over 65s and over 85s, loneliness is becoming an increasingly important public health concern. The impact of loneliness can be devastating and costly with consequences comparable to smoking and obesity (Izzi Seccombe, Local Government Association spokeswoman for public health, Feb 2016)”

Loneliness as bad for health as long-term illness, says GPs' chief

GPs will be urged to make time to see lonely patients, who are 50% more likely to die prematurely than people with good social network



Why loneliness on its way to becoming Britain's most lethal condition



Loneliness and feeling unloved TWICE as likely to kill you as being fat... as scientists warn against elderly retiring to sunnier climes

- US researchers urge people to stay socially active in their old age
- Tracked health of 2,000 men and women aged 60-plus for six years
- Feeling cut off from others can push blood pressure up into danger zone
- Can also disrupt sleep, leaving people feeling lethargic the next day
- Lonely people are also more likely to rely on sleeping tablets

Loneliness and wellbeing

Measures Of Wellbeing	Lonely	Not lonely
CASP-19 (mean score)	33.1	43.1
LSS (mean score)	19.9	26.7



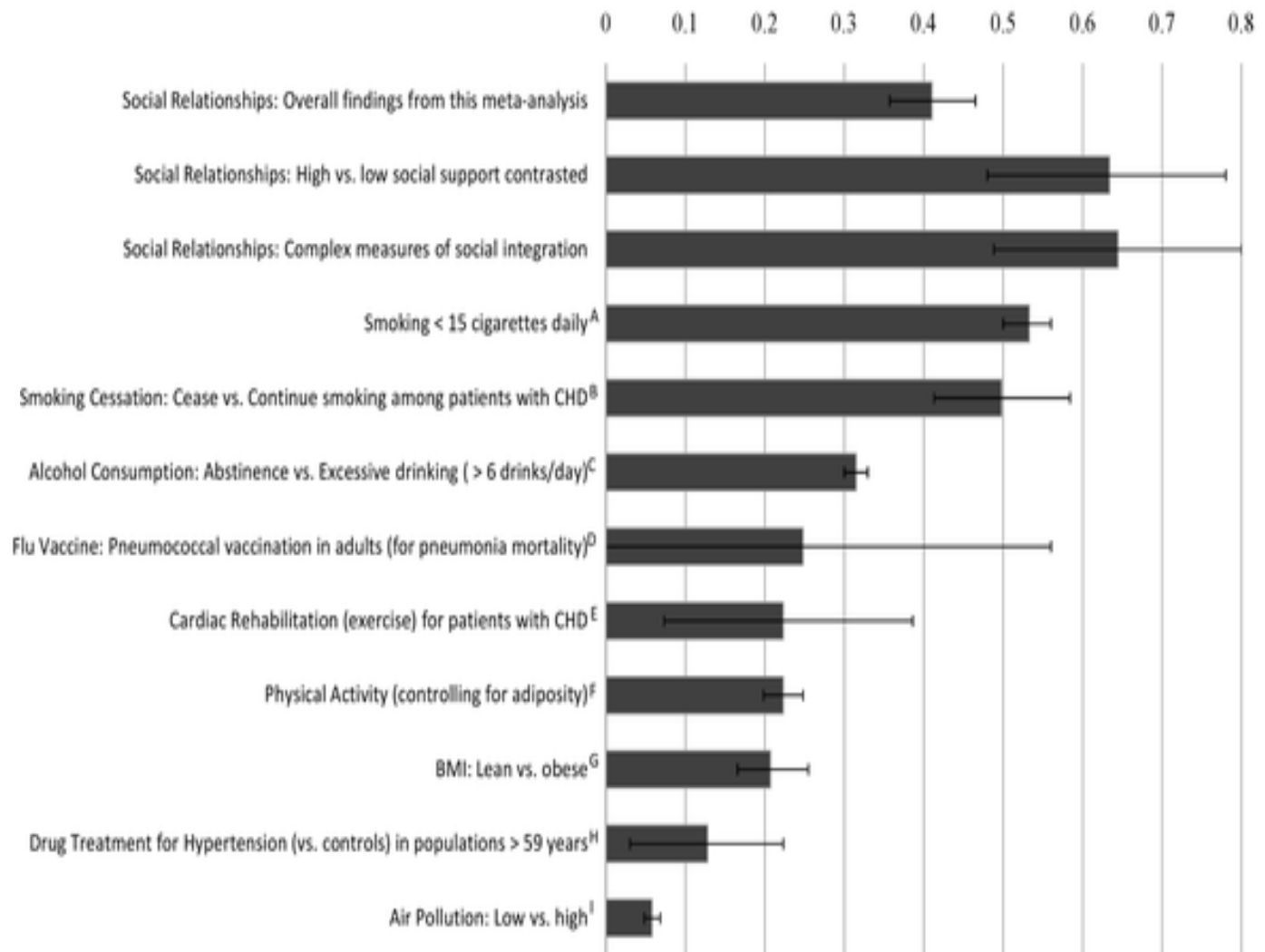
Own analysis of 2014 ELSA data

Figure 6. Comparison of odds (lnOR) of decreased mortality across several conditions associated with mortality.



Weak social connection is as harmful to health as smoking **15** cigarettes a day.

(Holt-Lunstad)



Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Layton JB (2010) **Social Relationships** and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review. PLOS Medicine 7(7): e1000316. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316>

FEELING LONELY INCREASES ALZHEIMER'S RISK

Is loneliness a cause of dementia?

Very limited evidence-only 1 study reported significantly increased risk of dementia onset amongst the lonely compared with the non lonely

Is loneliness a consequences of dementia?

Consistently higher rates of reported loneliness amongst those with dementia across a range of studies using varying study designs in a different countries

Withdrawal by people with dementia or exclusion by wider society?



Dementia linked to loneliness, study finds

Dutch research reveals that people with feelings of loneliness more likely to suffer from mental deterioration



The Dutch study found that people who said they felt lonely were 64% more likely to develop dementia. Photograph: Alamy



Loneliness is identifiable?..

Screening for loneliness

	Lonely- Yes	Lonely- No	Total
UCLA-not lonely	174	3505	3679
UCLA- lonely	412	540	952
Total	586	4045	4631

How well can we correctly identify lonely people? what % of those self reporting loneliness are correctly identified as + by UCLA=**70%**

How well can we correctly identify the not lonely?: what % of those self reporting as not lonely are correctly identified as - by UCLA=**87%**

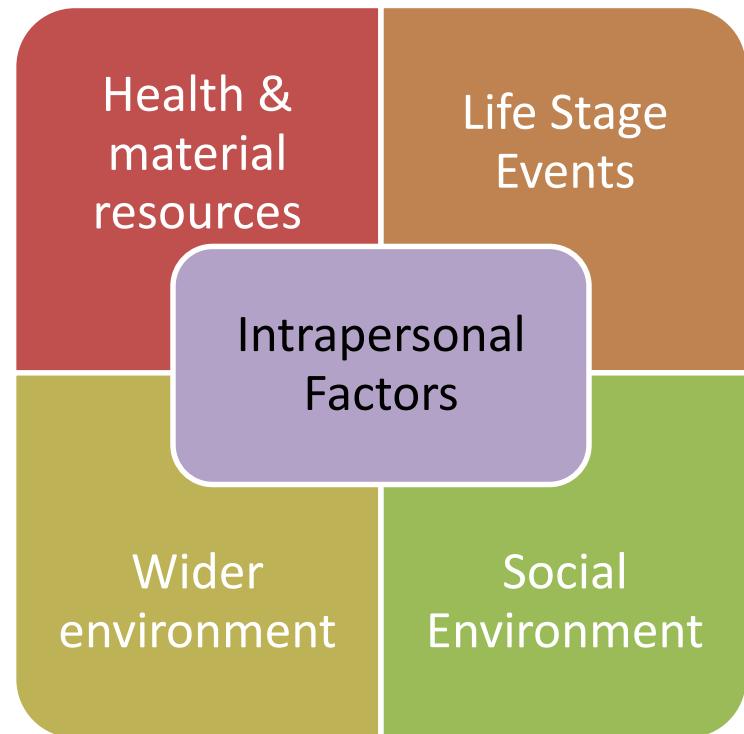
'Vulnerability factors' for loneliness-so are any of these 'preventable'?

Large number of risk factors for loneliness-focus on vulnerability
NOT protective factors

Vulnerability= widowhood, time alone, expectations of health in old age, psychological ill health, perceived health, perceived increase in loneliness

Protective=increased age, education

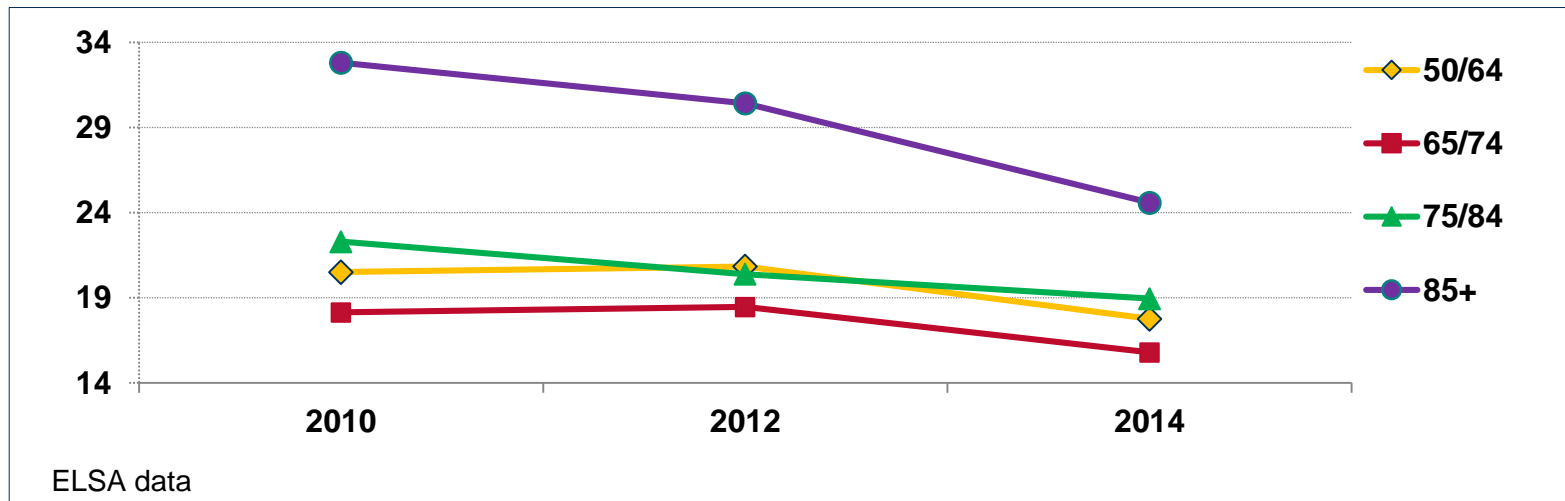
Note: these do not operate in a homogeneous manner-they tell us who but not how and why?



Condition is preventable?

Widowed between W1 & W2 & did not report marriage/ partnership in next waves

waves	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7
% lonely	50.0	40.0	32.3	32.3	20.4



Condition is treatable?.

How should we tackle the loneliness epidemic?



© 11 February 2018

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Minister for loneliness appointed to continue Jo Cox's work

© 17 January 2018

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Only the Lonely:

a randomized controlled trial of a volunteer visiting programme for older people experiencing loneliness

Campaign urges barbers to tackle loneliness by offering free haircuts to elderly men

'There's a taboo around loneliness': Meet the people tackling the epidemic

Volunteers and third sector managers discuss how they help alleviate loneliness in the older population



© 'A monthly tea party can be a real springboard for people in terms of their confidence.' Photograph: Alamy



Hen Power bids to tackle loneliness among the elderly

By Rick Faragher
BBC News NI

© 27 April 2017

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Loneliness in later life: a moral panic?

October 18th 2013 the Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt highlighted the **"problem of loneliness that in our busy lives we have utterly failed to confront as a society"** and stated variously that **"it is a source of "national shame" that as many as 800,000 people in England are "chronically lonely", ; "Some five million people say television is their main form of company," and concluding that "A forgotten million who live amongst us - ignored to our national shame."**

Invite lonely elderly strangers into your home, urges Jeremy Hunt

Health secretary says people should keep in closer touch with older relatives to reduce isolation, and take greater responsibility for their own health



▲ People are leading increasingly 'atomised lives' and becoming too distant from their elderly relatives, said health secretary Jeremy Hunt. Photograph: Dave and Les Jacobs/Blend Images/Corbis

Loneliness in later life: a moral panic?

The consequences (of loneliness and isolation among older people) are increasing, unrelenting demand on healthcare which will ultimately cripple the NHS.” (Keith Willets –Director of Acute Care-NHS England Feb 2016)

Loneliness 'forces older people into hospitals' and strains services, say senior doctors

Call for community support and recognition of the effects of isolation, which is becoming a 'major health concern'



Lonely elderly make 30million GP visits a year just for company

LONELY pensioners make 30 million visits a year to the doctor – just to have someone to talk to, an alarming survey has found.



Tackling loneliness epidemic could also cut GP waiting times, finds study

Socially isolated people use a third more GP appointments but this can be addressed by encouraging them to join a social group or exercise class

Loneliness 'forces older people into hospitals' and strains services, say senior doctors

Call for community support and recognition of the effects of isolation, which is becoming a 'major health concern'



Research shows a strong correlation between social isolation and poor health outcomes. Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

Elderly people booking GP appointments to avoid loneliness

Loneliness interventions could cut unnecessary GP visits

Research evidence is limited:

Studies (mostly) cross-sectional;

Loneliness only measured once;

Other factors linked to service use such as key health problems often not reported;

Self-report of service use (and we are all very inaccurate in our recall of this!)

So how do we make sense of this?

Lonely elderly make 30million
GP visits a year just for company

LONELY pensioners make 30 million visits a year to the doctor – just to have someone to talk to, an alarming survey has found.

All too often, GPs are the only human contact which chronically lonely patients have. Three out of four GPs say they see between 1 and 5 people a day who have come in mainly because they are lonely. These moments of meaningful connection matter.



What is the denominator?

Total GP visits per year in England= 350 million

Roughly one third are those aged 60+=116 million

So if 30 million of these are for loneliness this represents about 26%

What proportion of GP consultations are for loneliness?

Source: Telephone survey of 1007 GPs in October 2013 and 10% said they saw 6-10 patients per day who were lonely....

How would the GPs know?

Were there any other factors involved??

Beware the law of unintended consequences!

We need to be careful in our language and use of evidence of negative health effects to argue for why loneliness matters.

Do we want to deter older people (or anyone else) from going to the GP because they fear they will be labelled time wasting, lonely elders?

Do we want to 'force' loneliness interventions to evaluate their impact on factors such as GP use, hospital admissions etc where local small studies will be unlikely to demonstrate any effect

Does loneliness generate worse health outcomes than smoking 15 cigarettes a day? We must engage critically with evidence

Always remember association does not imply causation (is loneliness a cause or consequence of dementia?)

When interpreting data-we want both the numerator (there are 800,000 lonely people in Britain) and the denominator (there are 60 million people in Britain). Beware of evidence that gives the numerator only!

So is loneliness.....what do you think?

A problem of old age?

- 10% lonely- v similar to young adults

A public health problem?

- Prevalence is not increasing
- No accurate 'screening' test for loneliness
- Limited evidence for effective interventions
- Uncertainty over negative health outcomes

A moral panic linked to service use

- No robust evidence for 'excess' service use

BUT loneliness unequivocally compromises wellbeing and if only for that we should take it seriously

Questions?

16

FRIDAY 17 FEBRUARY 2012 **EVENING STANDARD**

QUOTE OF THE DAY

**“Anyone would be lying
if they said they didn’t
get lonely at times”**

**George Clooney confesses that he often goes to
bed at 10pm and falls asleep in front of the TV**



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