

Loneliness and Social Isolation Select Committee

Topics

- Defining social isolation and loneliness
- Understanding impact
- Understanding the extent of the issue
- Key challenges
- Overview of what KCC is doing

Defining loneliness and social isolation

Defining loneliness and social isolation

- Loneliness and isolation are not the same thing.
- Loneliness is a subjective concept, which is influenced not only by circumstances and events, but is also subject to cultural and psychological factors.
- Isolation is an objective state whereby the number of contacts a person has can be counted.
- One way of describing this distinction is that you can be lonely in a crowded room, but you will not be socially isolated.

Loneliness

Loneliness can be defined as an unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when there is a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want.

(Perlman and Peplau, 1981).

Loneliness

- There are different types of loneliness:
 - Emotional loneliness: when we miss the companionship of one particular person
 - Social loneliness: when we lack a wider social network or group of friends
 - It can also be experienced as the lack of a useful role in society

Loneliness

- Loneliness can be a transient feeling that comes and goes.
- It can be situational; for example only occurring at certain times like weekends, bank holidays or Christmas.
- Or loneliness can be chronic; this means someone feels lonely all or most of the time.

Social isolation

Social Isolation is characterised by an involuntary absence of social interactions, social support structures and engagement with wider community activities or structures.

Social isolation

Some people become socially isolated over time as a result of deteriorating health and mobility, others because of a trigger event.

- Trigger events range from being widowed, or being made redundant, to having public transport links cut.
- Trigger factors are likely to hit hardest later in life, so social isolation has a strongly negative impact on older people and is considered to be a major contributing factor in the decline into dependency.

Social Isolation and Loneliness

- Loneliness is linked to social isolation but it is not the same thing.
- One of the most effective ways of combating loneliness is to combat isolation.
- Of the two, social isolation would seem the easiest to rectify, however, with so many possible contributory factors leading to the state of isolation there is no single solution to the problem.

Understanding Impact

Impact

Studies showing a scientific link between loneliness and mental and physical ill health are recent, but they back up substantial research indicating that relationships and connectedness are good.

Impact

Examples include:

- Loneliness and social isolation are harmful to our health: research shows that lacking social connections is as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. (Holt-Lunstad, 2015)
- Social networks and friendships not only have an impact on reducing the risk of mortality or developing certain diseases, but they also help individuals to recover when they do fall ill (Marmot, 2010).

Physical Health Impacts

Research suggests that loneliness:

- increases the likelihood of mortality by 26%
- is associated with an increased risk of developing coronary heart disease and stroke
- increases the risk of high blood pressure
- places people at higher risk of the onset of disability
- is comparable to the impact of well-known risk factors such as obesity, and has a similar influence as cigarette smoking

Impact on Mental health

Research suggests that loneliness:

- puts individuals at greater risk of cognitive decline
- increases the risk of developing clinical dementia
- Increases the risk of developing depression
- is predictive of suicide in older age

Impact on health and social care

Research suggests that lonely individuals are more likely to:

- Visit their GP more frequently than needed
- have higher use of medication
- have higher incidence of falls
- Have increased risk factors for long term care
- Undergo early entry into residential or nursing care
- Use accident and emergency services independent of chronic illness.

Impact on health and social care

Academic research is clear that preventing and alleviating loneliness is vital to enabling older people to remain as independent as possible.

Financial Impact

Recent research commissioned by Eden Project initiative The Big Lunch and funded by the Big Lottery, found that disconnected communities could be costing the UK economy £32 billion every year.

The study shows the annual cost to public services of social isolation and disconnected communities, including:

- Demand on health and care services: £5.2 billion
- Demand on policing: £205 million
- Disconnected communities are also linked to a loss of productivity, with a net cost to the economy of nearly £12 billion every year.

Financial

According to research, carried out by Centre for Economics and Business Research, neighbourliness already delivers substantial economic benefits to UK society, representing an annual saving of £23.8 billion in total.

This saving comes from sharing between neighbours, an increase in social connection and reductions in the demands on public services such as healthcare, social care, welfare and the environment. It also includes the productivity benefits associated with a happier and healthier workforce: a net gain to the economy of £6.4 billion, which is equivalent to 0.34% of UK GDP in 2015.

Understanding the extent of loneliness and social isolation

INDY/PULSE

**BRITAIN HAS BEEN VOTED THE
LONELINESS CAPITAL OF EUROPE -
SO HOW DID WE BECOME SO
ISOLATED?**

Scale

Although loneliness can be compounded by age related issues, it is not just an issue for old age.

The scale of the problem is much more widespread and applies to:

- Children and young adults
- University students
- People with disabilities (including physical and learning disabilities)
- Refugees and migrants
- Carers
- People living with dementia
- Older People

Older People

Whilst loneliness and social isolation do affect all age groups, older people may be more vulnerable due to additional factors they experience putting them more at risk, and because of barriers that they experience in overcoming social isolation.

10% of over 65s categorising themselves as “lonely or very lonely”, which equates to 26,231 individuals in Kent

(Campaign to End Loneliness) and (2011 Census: 262,306 over 65's in Kent)

Risk Factors

Family dispersal

Infrequent phone contact

Increased use of social media to communicate

Single person households

Across the UK 51% of people over 75 live alone, which equates to over 65,300 individuals in Kent

Trigger effects

Some more closely associated with older age, for example, retirement, bereavement. Caring role.

Disconnected communities

Lack of local shops, post office, banks. Commuter belts. Transient populations. Working adults. Lack of transport options.

Lack of face to face interaction

Isolation from activities

Lack of meaningful relationships

Loneliness and social isolation

Barriers

Dementia Friendly Communities Engagement Events June 2017

Caring responsibilities can isolate people even though they are with someone.

Can't drive anymore. No or infrequent buses. Bus stop too far to walk.

I have no way of getting there

I can't leave my husband too long

I can't physically manage it

Lack of physical ability or restricted mobility

Lack of disposable income can prevent people getting out and accessing activities.

I can't afford it

Even if I get there I can't get in

Inaccessible buildings, narrow doorways, heavy doors, steps, no ramps

Lack of confidence. Fear of stigma due to conditions

I have no one to go with me or take me

I'm scared

Fear of falling, crime and other perceived threats

It takes too much time and energy.

Time and effort outweighs gain.



Coping with Loneliness

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nothing you can do
try to get out
phonecalls
nothing you can do
stay positive
watch out window
television
radio photographs
speak to people
reading
keep brain active
talk to care staff

The key challenges in addressing loneliness and social isolation

Key challenges

There are solutions available, but some key challenges include:

- Not everyone who is socially isolated is lonely
- You can't make people engage
- Number of factors could be contributing
- Individual issues require individual solutions
- It's not always clear what help is available
- Older people are less likely to use online directories or internet to find help

Overview of current provision and partnership working

What is most important to older people

Dementia Friendly Communities Engagement Events June 2017



What can be done?

Those services that look most promising include befriending schemes, social group schemes and Community Navigators.

www.scie.org.uk May 2012

What we are already doing

- Befriending
- Day services
- Care navigators
- Dementia peer support and cafes
- Kent Pathways Services
- Live Well Kent
- Extra Care Housing
- Community Wardens
- St Stephens community work
- Delivering differently in neighbourhoods
- Support for carers (Carers cafes,
- Stronger Kent Communities (Rural Kent Coffee and information project)
- Arts, culture, heritage and sport / physical activities

Key Messages

- Loneliness and social isolation are not the same thing – although they are connected
- Loneliness and social isolation can be experienced at any age, but several factors place older people more at risk
- A range of factors can contribute to loneliness and social isolation
- People often face real and perceived barriers in becoming less lonely or isolated
- There is support available, but people may need help to find and use it

Questions

