



21st Century crisis or moral panic
Some social and psychological dimensions of
loneliness

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21st century human crisis or moral panic?



What is loneliness and why does it matter?



Who experiences loneliness and why?



Some examples of loneliness and its pathways



Religious and spiritual dimensions?



The problems of loneliness research?

What is loneliness ?



“.....exceedingly unpleasant and driving experience connected with inadequate discharge of the need for human intimacy,”
(Harry Stack Sullivan, 1953)



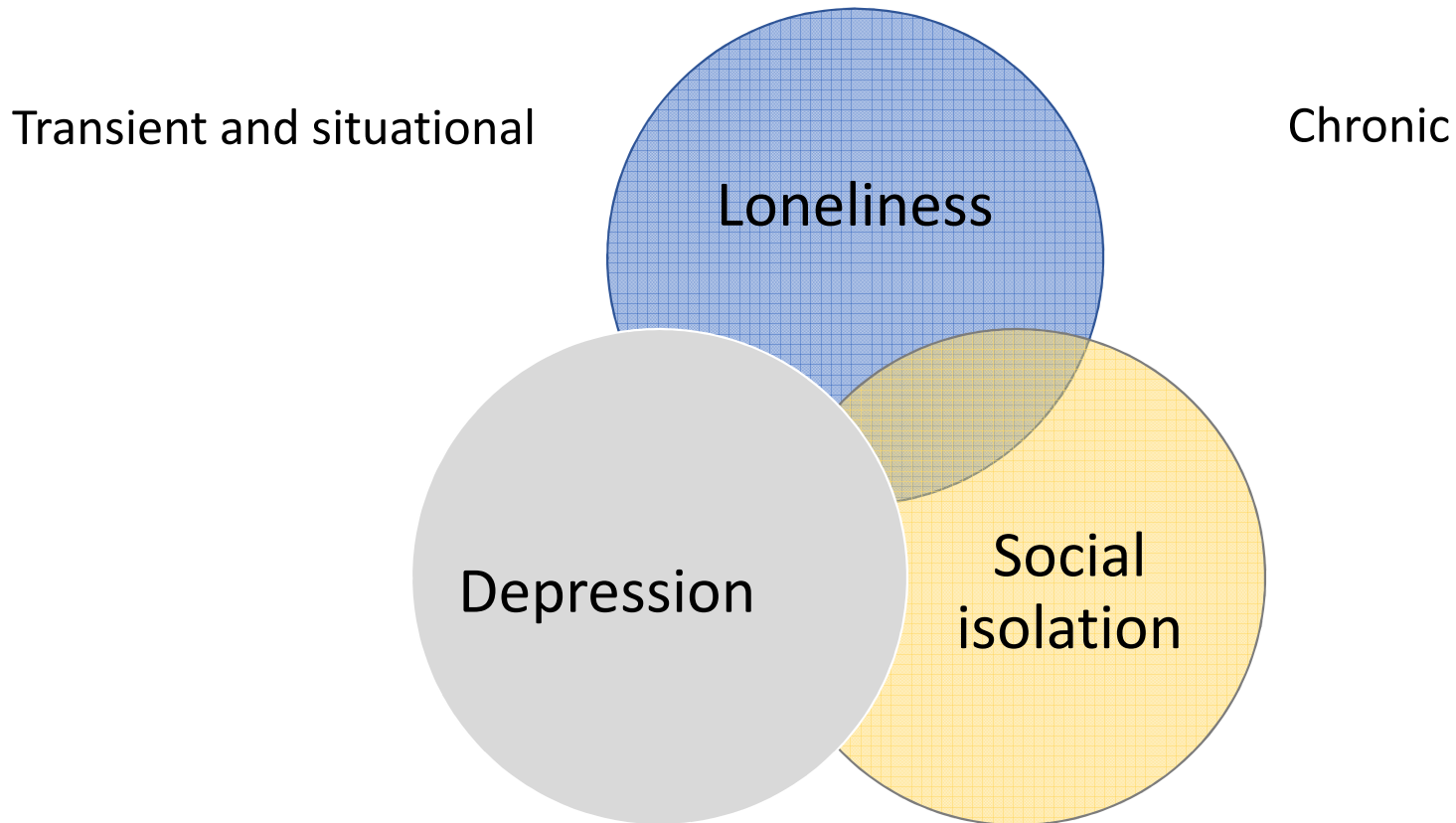
“Loneliness appears to be such a frightening and painful experience that people will do practically everything to avoid it” “real loneliness plays an essential role in the genesis of mental disorder” (Fromm- Reichmann 1959)



“Loneliness is a proximity-promoting mechanism necessary for the survival of the species (Bowlby, 1973)

Defining Loneliness

- A perception that one's social network is deficient either quantitatively or qualitatively



Loneliness across the lifespan

- 40% of young people (16-24 years) feel lonely often/a lot
- People who feel discriminated against
- More women report feeling shame about feeling lonely than men.
- More Facebook friends – but no overlap with their real-life friends.
- Lower levels of trust in others

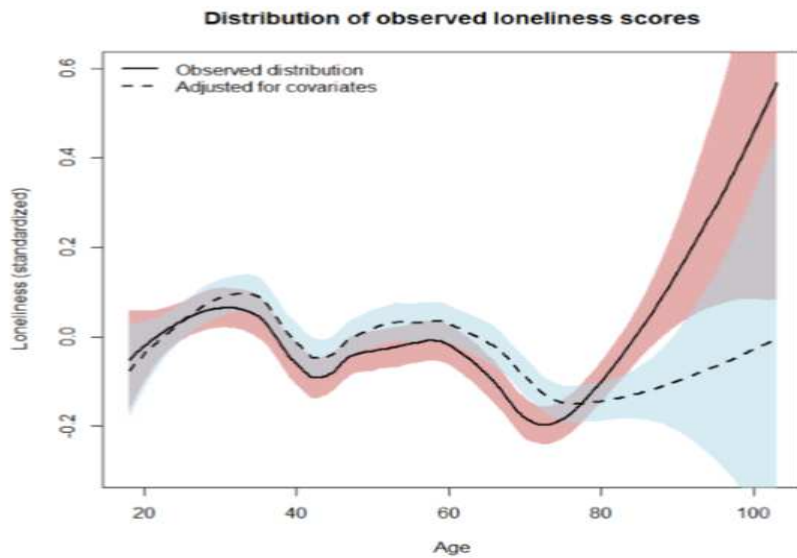
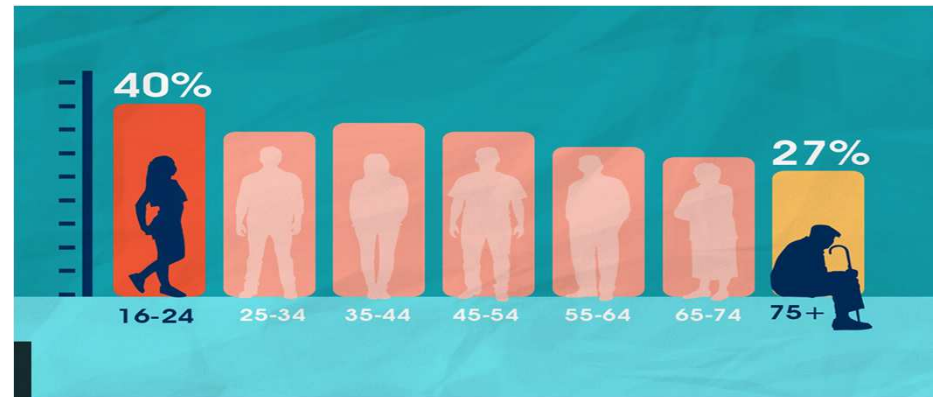


Figure 1. Distribution of observed and adjusted loneliness from adolescence to old age. The confidence bands reflect the 95% confidence interval of the LOESS line.

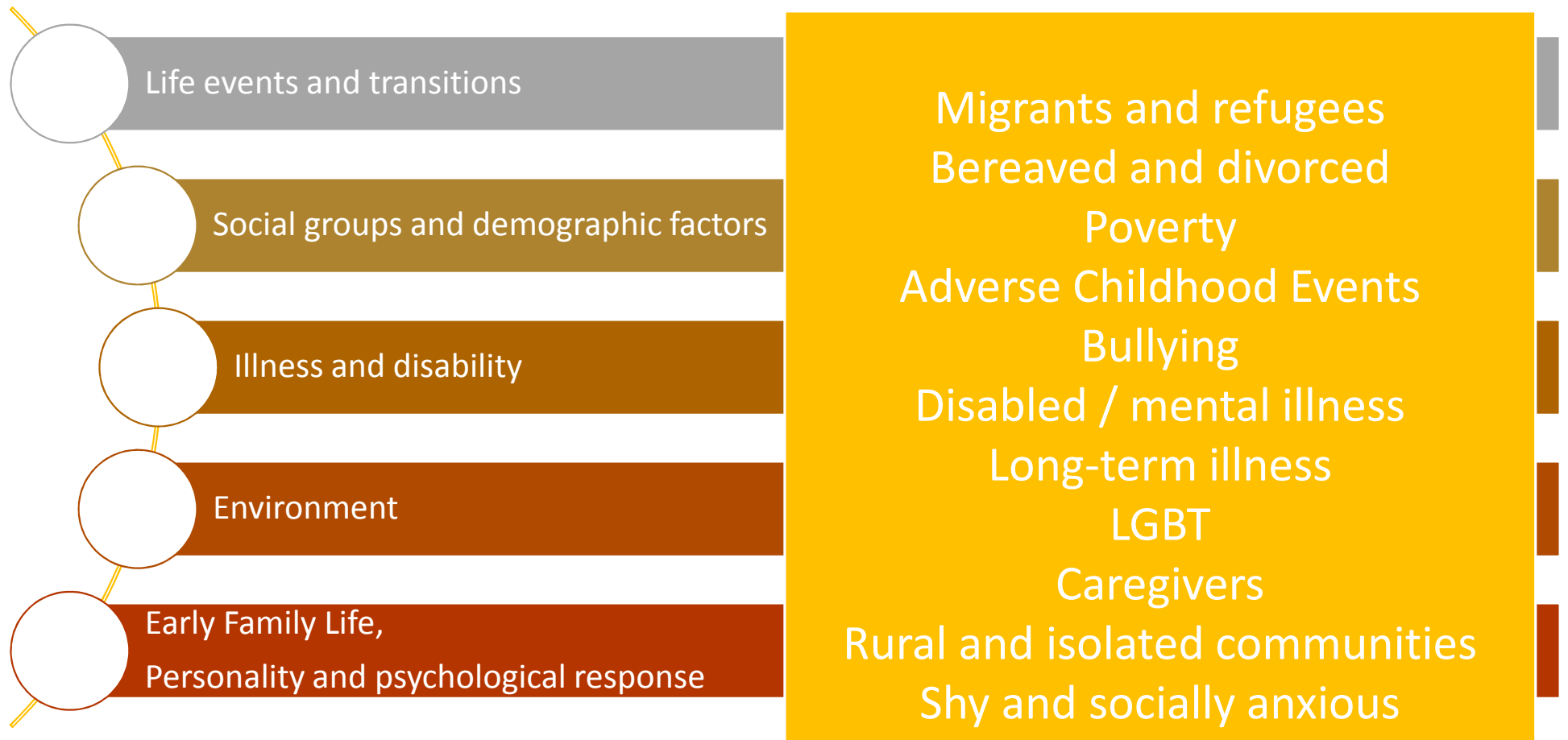


Age and loneliness in 25 European nations

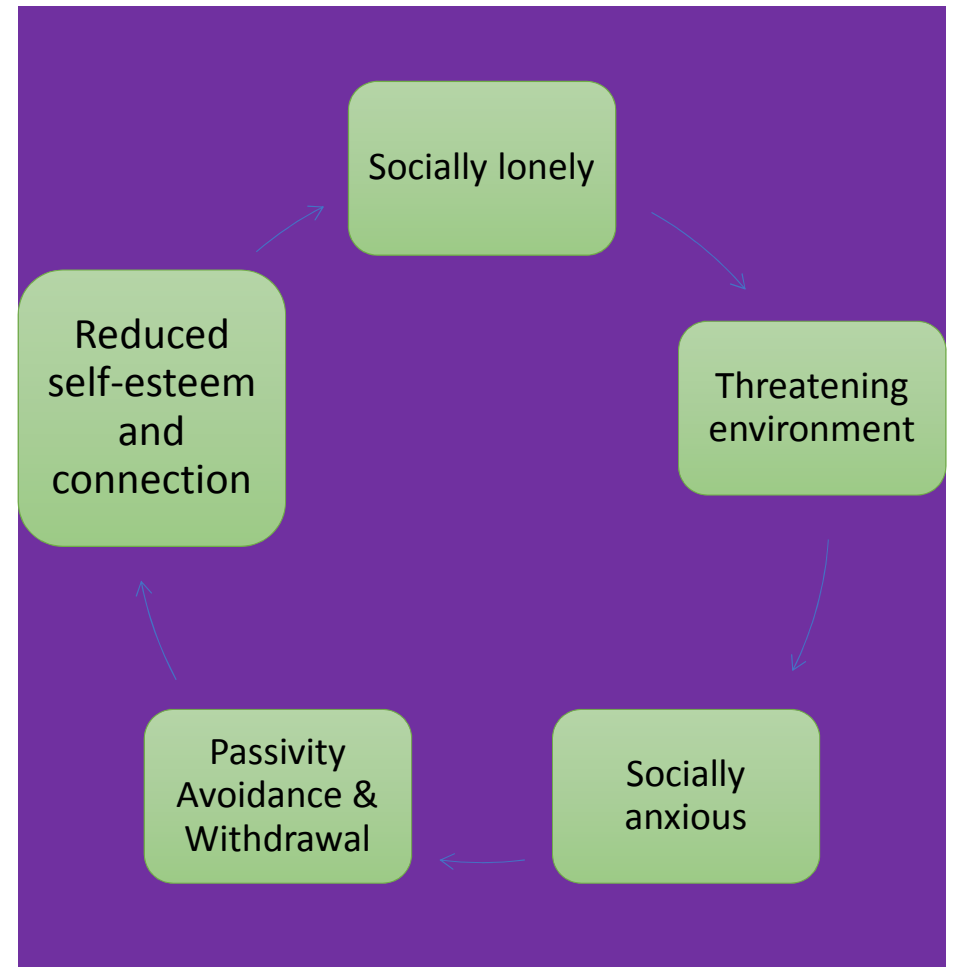
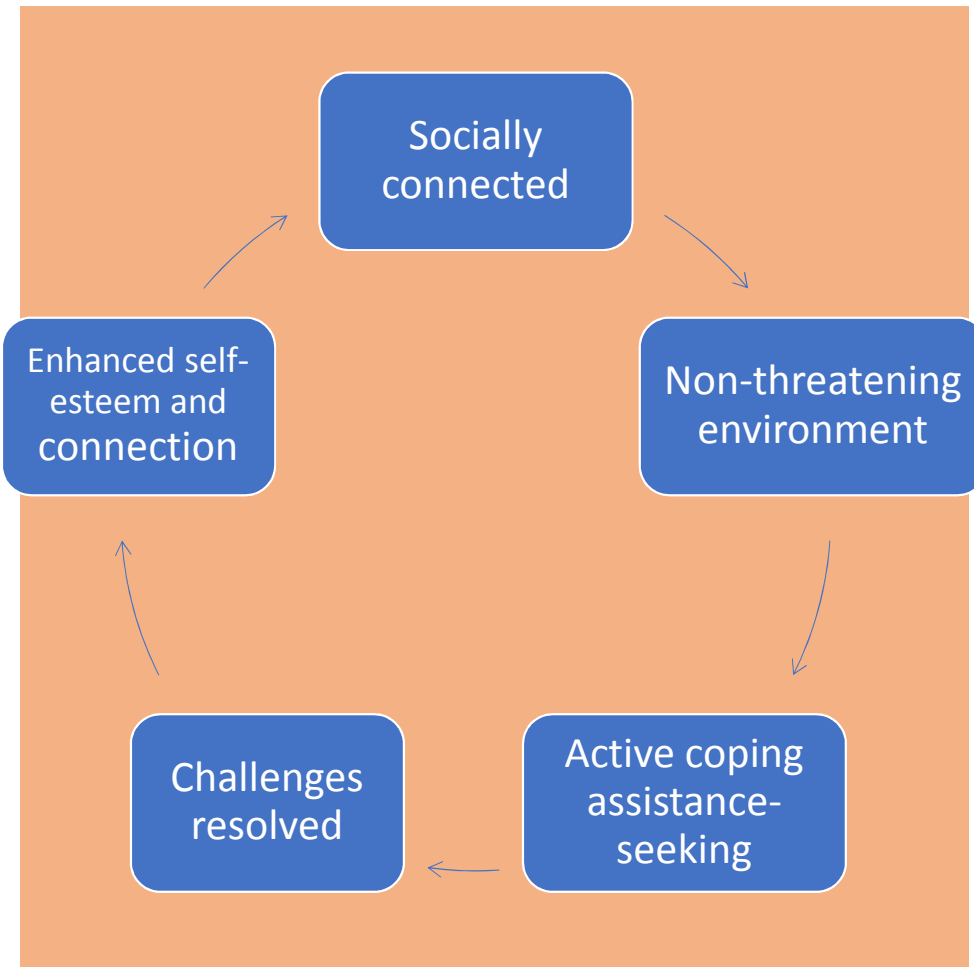
KEMING YANG and CHRISTINA VICTOR *Ageing & Society* 31, 2011, 1368–1388.

- People in most Northern European nations, including Denmark, Finland, Norway, The Netherlands, Ireland and Switzerland, report the lowest levels of loneliness across all three age groups
- Highest levels of loneliness in all former Soviet states, including Ukraine, Russia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and Latvia in all age groups.
- Strongly associated with low SES, poor health and absence of partner
- Cultural differences in the ‘Loneliness threshold’ effect? - ‘the minimal level of social contact that is needed for a person to avoid the subjective experience of loneliness ’
- Economic transformation – driving outward-migration (especially the younger and middle-aged)

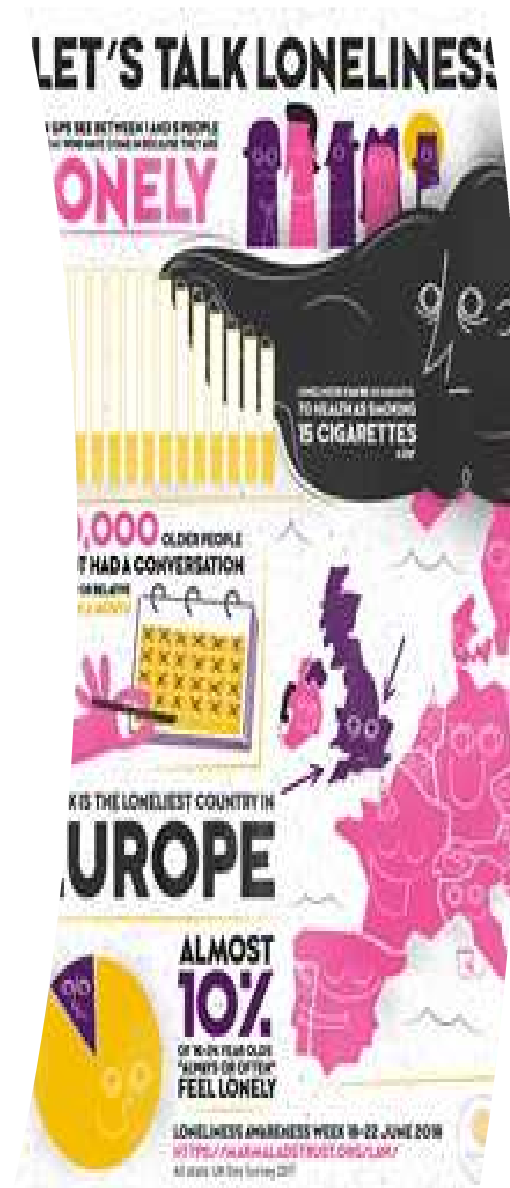
All the Lonely People — Where Do They All Come From?



Social cognition bias and loneliness



Loneliness & isolation associated with loneliness



- Sleep disorders
 - High blood pressure
 - Poor quality of life
 - Frailty
 - Cardiovascular disease
 - Stroke
 - Depression & anxiety
 - Dementia
 - Increased mortality
- **References:** House et al. Science 1988; Loucks et al Psychosomatic Medicine 67:353-358 (2005) Berkman et al. Am J Epidemiol 2004; Berkman L and Syme SL. Social networks, host resistance, and mortality: a nine-year follow-up study of Alameda County residents. Epidemiology 109: 186-204, 1979.; Iwaskaki et al.; Reynolds et al; Schoenenbach et al ; Steptoe et al. 2003 Psychosomatic Medicine 65:137-144 (2003) Rutledge et al. 2004 Psychosomatic Medicine 66:882-888 (2004) Steptoe et al. 2004 Psychoneuroendocrinology

LONELY IN PERIL Loneliness as bad for you as 15 cigarettes a day as 1 million people are expected to spend Christmas alone

The Jo Cox Loneliness Commission, whose study revealed the risks, is calling on the Government to fund new ways of battling the loneliness epidemic

By Ben Griffiths

9th December 2017, 8:26 pm | Updated: 9th December 2017, 10:52 pm



LONELINESS is as bad for people as 15 cigarettes a day, a report has revealed. And being alone can increase your chance of death by a third.

Loneliness Might Be A Bigger Health Risk Than Smoking Or Obesity



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

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

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



What's to be done about loneliness?

- Loneliness as part of a social inequalities agenda
- Rethinking community, social capital and connectedness
- Regaining meaning and purpose in work and life
- What's important - values and directions
- Understanding and preparing for rapid social change
- Individual adaptation & preparation – lessons from religion and spirituality

A pill for loneliness? Scientists race to treat the condition that causes mental illness and even premature death

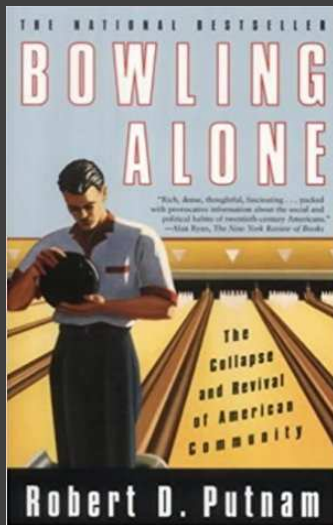
- More than half of Americans say that they are often or sometimes lonely
- Experts have said that we are in the midst of a loneliness epidemic
- Feelings of social isolation have been linked to greater risks of depression, diabetes, dementia and even death
- Dr Stephanie Cacioppo is working on a drug to treat loneliness at the University of Chicago

Scientists are working on a pill for loneliness

Modern life has led to greater isolation, which can fuel an array of disorders. If there are medications for social pains like depression and anxiety, why not loneliness?



Summary



More research on loneliness as part of the sequelae of adverse childhood events (ACE) – poor attachment, low self-esteem, shame, breakdown of trust, disengagement.

“A secure base” – preventing loneliness over the life course?

Cultural/structural risk and protective factors (class and upbringing; education; maladaptive coping beliefs and strategies)

Understanding the effects of secularism and individualism
“cognitive aliens”

The need for personal resilience – Philosophical/spiritual preparation for ageing –

Understanding relationship between social media, consumerism and loneliness

The next steps

- Agree on a **unified language and definition** of loneliness – taking account of different domains (emotional, social and existential).
- **Standardised and validated measurement** that go beyond frequency
- A better understanding of **specific root causes, causal pathways and trajectories**
- Robust longitudinal studies
- **Political and civic leadership** -planning for an ageing population, using a public health approach and multiple and appropriate stakeholder perspectives
- **Interventions/opportunities** to match a diversity of needs and goals,



Thank you