



# Loneliness and mental health



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# Get in touch!

UKRI Loneliness and social isolation in  
mental health network



**Led by:** Professor Sonia Johnson, **UCL**

**Partners:** University of Birmingham, Northumbria University, Royal College of Music, London School of Economics and Political Science, The Mental Elf, Public Health England, Campaign to End Loneliness, Association for Young People's Health, Wellbeing Enterprises, Bromley by Bow Centre, Zinc

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@UCL\_Loneliness

# What do we mean by loneliness?

- Mismatch between what you have and what you want
- Subjective, unpleasant state
- Not solitude
- Quality and quantity



[Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol](#). 2017 Dec;52(12):1451-1461. doi: 10.1007/s00127-017-1446-1. Epub 2017 Oct 28.

## **Social isolation in mental health: a conceptual and methodological review.**

[Wang J](#)<sup>1</sup>, [Lloyd-Evans B](#)<sup>2</sup>, [Giacco D](#)<sup>3</sup>, [Forsyth R](#)<sup>1</sup>, [Nebo C](#)<sup>1</sup>, [Mann F](#)<sup>1</sup>, [Johnson S](#)<sup>1,4</sup>.

 **Author information**

### **Abstract**

**PURPOSE:** Social isolation and related concepts have been discussed increasingly in the field of mental health. Despite this, there is a lack of conceptual clarity and consistency in the definition and operationalisation of these terms. This review aimed to provide a clear framework for social isolation and related concepts, and to identify well-established measures in the field of mental health for each conceptual domain discussed.

[J Affect Disord](#). 2019 Feb 15;245:188-199. doi: 10.1016/j.jad.2018.10.359. Epub 2018 Oct 29.

## **Conceptual framework for social connectedness in mental disorders: Systematic review and narrative synthesis.**

[Hare-Duke L](#)<sup>1</sup>, [Denning T](#)<sup>2</sup>, [de Oliveira D](#)<sup>2</sup>, [Milner K](#)<sup>2</sup>, [Slade M](#)<sup>2</sup>.

 **Author information**

### **Abstract**

**BACKGROUND:** Adults with mental disorders are at a high risk of loneliness. Loneliness has been implicated in a wide variety of physical and mental health problems. Social connectedness interventions are one means to tackle loneliness but have shown mixed effectiveness. This study aims to: (1) identify existing measures of social connectedness and (2) develop a conceptual framework of social connectedness to inform future measurement and the development of new interventions.

# All the lonely people

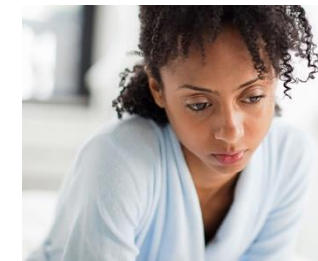
Britain high levels of loneliness, Eastern Europe highest

Older people – third over-50s and half over-80s

Peak in younger people, e.g. third of 16-24 year-olds

Much less known about children, one study found 20% 8-year-olds lonely (5% 'always lonely')

Unemployment, ethnic minority groups, low income



### **UCLA-loneliness scale (3-item)**

- 1. How often do you feel that you lack companionship?**
- 2. How often do you feel left out?**
- 3. How often do you feel isolated from others?**

## **A connected society**

A strategy for tackling loneliness –  
laying the foundations for change



# Is it really that bad?



Poorer outcomes in cardiovascular and respiratory disease

Sleep problems, emergency service use, GP attendance

Meta-analysis of 148 international studies: significantly increased risk of premature death (all cause)

Evidence for altered immune system function (e.g. HPA axis, natural killer cell activity, reduced inflammation)

# Lonely minds...

Marked cross-sectional associations between being lonely and:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Phobias
- Suicide/'parasuicide'
- Dementia
- Eating disorders
- Psychosis





# Research gaps

Looking at people with more severe mental health problems

- including psychosis

Longitudinal work

Qualitative work

Measures and mechanisms

Younger people

Interventions

the**bmj**opinion

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February 13, 2018

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THE LANCET

Psychiatry

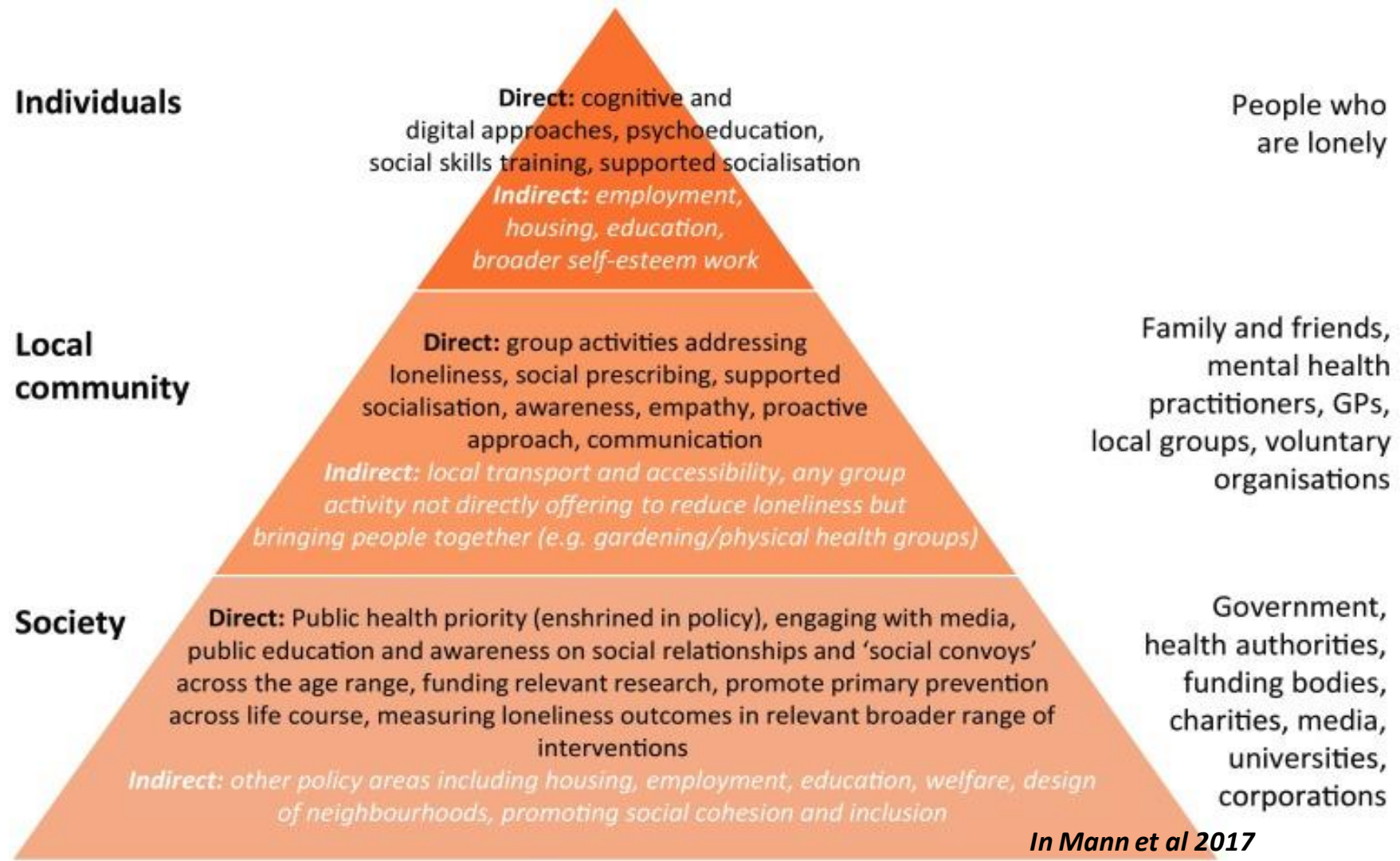
Volume 5, Issue 12, December 2018, Pages 955-956



Comment

Advancing our understanding of loneliness and mental health problems in young people

Alexandra Pitman <sup>a, b</sup> ✉, Farhana Mann <sup>a, b</sup>, Sonia Johnson <sup>a, b</sup>



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