

Addressing older men's experiences of loneliness and social isolation in later life.

Loneliness can impact on people's lives at any time, however later life is consistently associated with loneliness ([Age UK, 2018](#)). While higher percentages of older women report loneliness as a problem compared to men, a greater number of older men (50+) report moderate to high levels of social isolation ([Beach & Bamford, 2013](#)). Loneliness is an emotional response where we desire increased social contact with others while social isolation is often measured in terms of our level of contact with others. Little research has been undertaken into older men's experiences of loneliness and isolation. This two-year study aimed to develop understanding of the ways in which older men (65+ years) from different social backgrounds and circumstances stay socially connected with others and combat loneliness and social isolation in later life. The objectives were:

- To develop a deeper understanding of how sexual identity, rurality, hearing loss and caring responsibilities shape older men's experiences of social engagement and participation;
- To ascertain the current membership of participants' social networks, levels of social engagement with others and sources of support;

Key findings

1. Variations in experiences of loneliness and social isolation across groups.

Loneliness and social isolation impacted negatively on men's social connections across the groups. Feeling 'left out', socially excluded, overlooked, cut-off: these were emotions commonly expressed across groups. The way loneliness is experienced in later life differs not only according to gender but also on the basis of other intersecting dimensions. Key differences are identified in Table 1.

2. Alleviating loneliness and reducing social isolation on one(en-GB)dh /S1T-wn

Practice and policy implications

For social care workers and statutory services:

- Social care practitioners need to understand how men from diverse social backgrounds and circumstances experience loneliness and isolation in different ways. This includes recognising challenges in speaking about loneliness and knowing how to initiate conversations about this.
- Alongside this, practitioners need a fine-grained understanding of the ways in which older age can intersect with other important aspects of identity and how these shape older men's patterns of social engagement and help-seeking.

For voluntary service providers who run groups:

- Group interventions may not always be the most suitable intervention for change, particularly for men who experience interpersonal difficulties in groups. One-to-one interventions are also needed.
- When planning groups, it is important to recognise that older men's identities, social

Further information:

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More information about the project is available at: www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/research/projects/current/older-men-at-the-margins/

To view resources and short films from the project on the Age UK website: www.ageuk.org.uk/men-and-loneliness/

Age UK (2018). All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life. URL: www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-press/articles/2018/october/all-the-lonely-people-report/

Campaign to End Loneliness (2019). Loneliness research. URL: www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/loneliness-research/

Independent Age (2013). Isolation: the emerging crisis for older men. URL: www.independentage.org/policy-research/research-reports/isolation-emerging-crisis-for-older-men

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