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Interventions to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people

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Overview

- Background and policy context
- Methods and results
- What makes an intervention successful
- What next?



““The trouble is not that I am single and likely to stay single, but that I am lonely and likely to stay lonely.”

Charlotte Bronte





Background

- Established evidence base on the prevalence of loneliness and SI amongst community dwelling older people.
- Wide range of negative health outcomes linked to loneliness and SI.
- Mechanisms by which loneliness and SI impact on health are not well understood.



Policy context

- Minister for Loneliness:
~~Tracey Crouch~~ Mims Davies
- A connected society: A Strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change
- Campaign to End Loneliness, Jo Cox Foundation
- Significant media attention





How are we tackling loneliness

- A wide range of activities and interventions have been developed, aimed at alleviating loneliness.
- Central to government policy and charity initiatives.
- Evidence base?



Review

Interventions to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people: an integrative review

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What is known about this topic

- Loneliness and social isolation are major health problems for older adults.
- A growing range of interventions have been developed to tackle social isolation and loneliness.
- Little is known about the range and scope of effective interventions, and what aspects of interventions contribute to their success.

What this paper adds

- A range of interventions were described which relied on differing mechanism for reducing social isolation and loneliness.
- Common features of successful

Abstract

Loneliness and social isolation are major problems for older adults. Interventions and activities aimed at reducing social isolation and loneliness are widely advocated as a solution to this growing problem. The aim of this study was to conduct an integrative review to identify the range and scope of interventions that target social isolation and loneliness among older people, to gain insight into why interventions are successful and to determine the effectiveness of those interventions. Six electronic databases were searched from 2003 until January 2016 for literature relating to interventions with a primary or secondary outcome of reducing or preventing social isolation and/or loneliness among older people. Data evaluation followed Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre guidelines and data analysis was conducted using a descriptive thematic method for synthesising data. The review identified 38 studies. A range of interventions were described which relied on differing mechanisms for reducing social isolation and loneliness. The majority of interventions reported some success in reducing social isolation and loneliness, but the quality of evidence was generally weak. Factors which were associated with the most effective interventions included adaptability, a community development approach, and productive engagement. A wide range of interventions have been developed to tackle social isolation and loneliness among older people. However, the quality of the evidence base is weak and further research is required to provide more robust data on the effectiveness of interventions. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to further develop theoretical understandings of how successful interventions mediate social isolation and loneliness.



Interventions to reduce SI and loneliness among older people

Aim:

- Review literature on interventions that target loneliness and/or SI in older people
- Provide a more complete overview of the range and scope of interventions
- Gain insight into why interventions are successful
- Explore effectiveness



Methods

- Integrative review using systematic search methods.
- Six electronic databases searched.
- Screening of titles, abstracts, full texts
- Evaluation of quality (EPPI criteria)
- Descriptive thematic analysis



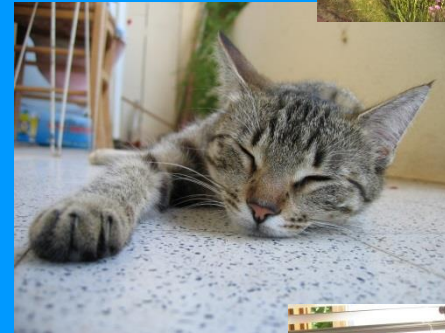
Results

- 39 articles met inclusion criteria
- 6 RCT's, 21 quantitative, 10 qualitative, 2 mixed methods
- Inconsistent levels of quality & consistency
- International evidence base



Six key categories of intervention

1. Facilitating social interactions
2. Befriending
3. Psychological therapies
4. Health and social care provision
5. Animals
6. Leisure/skill development





Do they work?

- “While evidence is variable, majority of activities are **at least moderately successful** in reducing social isolation/loneliness”.
- Solitary interventions can be effective.



What makes interventions successful?

1. Adaptability

- Interventions must be adaptable to local context/setting, particularly when implemented by a national organisation





What makes interventions successful?

2. Community engagement

- Interventions involving older people in the design and implementation were more likely to be successful





What makes interventions successful?

3. Productive engagement

- ‘Doing’ things accumulates more social contacts than watching or listening to things. Involves action and creativeness and is often directed towards a (common) goal





In summary

- Loneliness is a major problem for older people
- Huge growth in loneliness interventions; needs to be accompanied by an evidence base.
- Some evidence of interventions being successful, but complex to evaluate
- Greater theoretical understandings needed
- How to access the 'lonely'



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Thank you

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