

# **Strategies for encouraging psychological and emotional resilience to loneliness**

*Introduction from Sonia Johnson*

UKRI Loneliness and Social Isolation in Mental Health  
workshop

*(For Campaign to End Loneliness Commission)*

- ***Context of our work***
- ***Introduction to the Loneliness & Social Isolation in Mental Health Day***
- ***Plan for the day***

“Why do people have to be this lonely? What's the point of it all? Millions of people in this world, all of them yearning, looking to others to satisfy them, yet isolating themselves. Why? Was the earth put here just to nourish human loneliness?”

— Haruki Murakami, [Sputnik Sweetheart](#)



## Context of our work

- Well-understood that loneliness has social & emotional aspects:
  - Lack of company contributes to loneliness
  - But one can be very lonely in a crowd/despite rarely being alone
- Loneliness has many social correlates – age, marital status, illness/disability, poverty etc.
- Yet interventions that just increase social participation may fail to engage people or to reduce loneliness
- So far: psychological and social approaches taken to loneliness intervention – combining the two seems rare

## Context for today

- What potential strategies are there for addressing loneliness through targeting psychological factors?
- Team from UKRI Mental and Social Isolation in Mental Health network commissioned to review evidence and models for the Campaign to End Loneliness
- Led by Prof Roz Shafran, Institute of Child Health, UCL



Campaign to  
**EndLoneliness**  
CONNECTIONS IN OLDER AGE

# Aims of the UKRI Cross-Disciplinary Network on Loneliness & Social Isolation in Mental Health

- Overall aim: To establish a cross-disciplinary network to allow rapid advances to be made in understanding of the mental health impacts of loneliness and social isolation, and of how these may be alleviated
- Objectives include:
  - Creating links across areas and disciplines
  - Mapping evidence and research on key questions
  - Commissioning small projects that will seed further research
  - Giving rise to further projects, including studentships, fellowships, large grants
  - Establishing an effective PPI voice regarding this topic
  - Developing early years researcher capacity & supporting careers of existing early year researchers
  - Engaging public

## Stage 1 Cross-disciplinary mapping & priority setting (first 18 months)

Mapping of evidence and current research on these questions, agreement on research priorities:

- A. What are the impacts of loneliness and of social isolation on mental health in the general population?
- B. Is intervening to reduce loneliness and/or social isolation a potential means of preventing mental health problems in the population? If so, what strategies are most promising?
- C. What is the impact of loneliness and of social isolation on people living with mental health problems? **(Stakeholder consultation included)**
- D. Is intervening to reduce loneliness and/or social isolation a potential means of improving mental health outcomes and the daily lives of people living with mental health problems? If so, which strategies are most promising?

## Stage 2 Commissioning and conduct of Network Plus projects

- Months 10-36 (18 months) *First wave overlapping with Stage 1*
- Series of small medium projects commissioned by network
- Any bidder
- Support in preparing bids, especially for ECRs and service user/survivor-led projects
- Potential to seed larger-scale work
- £450,000 pot.
- At least two service user/survivor-led projects



## Stage 3 Dissemination and future planning

- Final conference
- Policy maker round table
- Three planning meetings to initiate large proposals
- Further outputs

**One of eight UKRI cross-disciplinary networks, all with small grants to award**

# Disciplines

Epidemiology

Mental health care research

Sociology

Music

Art

Architecture

Geography

Service user/survivor research

Health policy

Peer support & social interventions

Neuroscience

Psychology

Theology

Engineering

Design

Anthropology

Sports science

Psychology of religion

Social psychology

History



**Loneliness & social isolation in mental health network – sandpit @ Cumberland lodge**



## Loneliness and Social Isolation in Mental Health research network

The Loneliness and Social Isolation in Mental Health is a new research network that will bring together many different relative perspectives on this topic. It is funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), a body that brings together UK Research Councils in different fields. The network was launched in December 2018, and is one of eight UKRI-funded researcher networks. It brings together researchers, health practitioners, charities, people with lived experience of mental ill health, and other organisations to address important mental health research questions. Researchers include clinical researchers, psychologists, social scientists, neuroscientists and specialists in the arts and in digital innovations.

The Network is intended to greatly accelerate the pace of research on loneliness and social isolation in mental health. Topics we are

### Tweets by @UCL\_Loneliness

Mental Health and Loneliness Network Retweeted

**Side By Side Network - Coproduction in M**  
 @ByYrSide  
 @UCL\_Loneliness #MHLoneliness

Apr 13, 2019

Mental Health and Loneliness Network Retweeted

**Alexandra Pitman**  
 @DrAPitman

Really important study funded by @ESRC & @McPinFoundation do please pass this on @SOBScharity @CruseCare @AfterSuicideUK @suicidebereaved @griefencounter @cbukhelp @SBUK11 @Angelasamata @OutlookSW @shirziucsf @TheMindEdTrust @samaritans @JamesPlaceUK @MindCharity @theCALMzone

Apr 12, 2019

Mental Health and Loneliness Network Retweeted

**The Thyroid Trust**  
 @ThyroidTrust

**Contact: Dr Mary Birken & Dr Ellie Pearce –**  
[m.birken@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.birken@ucl.ac.uk); [ellie.pearce@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ellie.pearce@ucl.ac.uk)

**Twitter: @UCL\_loneliness**

**<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/psychiatry/research/epidemiology/Loneliness-and-Social-Isolation>**



# Today's plans

## UKRI Loneliness and Social Isolation in Mental Health research network

### Strategies for encouraging psychological and emotional resilience in response to loneliness

Stakeholder Event: 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2019

Leolin Price Lecture Theatre and Winter Garden, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, London

9.45 - 10.00 - Arrival, register

*Chair of Morning Session: Pamela Qualter, University of Manchester*

10.00 - 10.15 - Introduction to the Network: Sonia Johnson, UCL

10.15 - 10.30 - Background to the project: Robin Hewings, Campaign to End Loneliness

10.30 - 10.50 - Interventions to reduce loneliness in Older Adults: Clare Gardiner, University of Sheffield

10.50 - 11.10 - Psychological factors that contribute to loneliness and how to address them: Michelle Lim, Swinburne University, Australia

11.10 - 11.30 - Commentary and discussion led by Essi Viding, UCL

11.30 - 11.45 -

**TEA/COFFEE**

11.45 - 12.30 - What models and therapies are there for reducing loneliness via internal factors? Evidence so far: Sophie Bennett and Mary Birken, UCL.

12.30 - 1.15 - Topic-based group discussions: Session 1

Table 1: What's missing? Contributing evidence - Lead Sonia Johnson

Table 2: Third Sector perspective - Lead British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (Jeremy Bacon/Jo Pybis)

Table 3: What's promising - Lead Mary Birken

Table 4: Commentary on the evidence synthesis - Lead Sophie Bennett

Table 5: Older Adult Perspective - Lead Christina Victor

1.15 - 2.00-

**LUNCH**

*Chair of Afternoon Session: Prisha Shah*

2.00 - 2.20 - Important contexts for consideration of individual differences in response to loneliness: A holistic approach: Christina Victor, Brunel University

2.20 - 2.40 - Deciding what works for whom in what context: Some personal stories: Bev Turner and Nick Barber

2.40 - 3.20 - Topic-based group discussions Session 2 (with afternoon Tea/Coffee)

3.20 - 3.40 - What works for whom under what circumstances - A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Approach: Joshua Buckman, UCL

3.40 - 4.00 - Next steps - Alexandra Pitman, UCL