

UKRI Loneliness & Social Isolation in Mental Health Research Network

Newsletter March 2019



Introduction to the Network

Welcome to the **Loneliness and Social Isolation in Mental Health Research Network**! We're one of the 8 new mental health research networks funded by the UKRI. Each of the networks has its own specific focus and our remit is to understand how loneliness and social isolation are linked to mental illness, how they are experienced in individuals with mental illness, and how we can work together to prevent and alleviate social disconnection and mental ill-health.

To do this we're bringing together individuals with lived experience, community organisations, practitioners, and policy-makers, as well as academic researchers from diverse disciplines, such as neuroscience, arts interventions, the built environment, and design and technology. This is a hugely exciting endeavour and **we need your help to make it happen!**

In the first 18 months we will be focusing on understanding how loneliness and social isolation relate to mental ill health. In the second phase of the network we will be looking more at what interventions work best to improve the mental health of people who feel lonely.

Funding will be available for small interdisciplinary research projects through two funding calls, the first of which is planned for the Autumn. We will keep you posted on the application process and we particularly encourage early career researchers and researchers with lived experience to apply. For more details, please keep an eye on [our website](#) for when we update this with the application process.

Our two network research fellows/coordinators, Ellie and Mary, have been recruited from a large pool of applicants and are now in post. Don't let them get lonely: please get in touch with any ideas, feedback or ways you'd like to get involved!

Introducing our new coordinators:

Dr Eiluned (Ellie) Pearce

ellie.pearce@ucl.ac.uk



Hi, I'm Ellie and I'll be around for the duration of the network (3.5 years). I have a background in evolutionary anthropology, and amongst other things I've conducted research into the social bonding and wellbeing outcomes of group singing. I've also worked in the charity sector both as a practitioner (running a befriending scheme for older adults and activities for children with visual impairments) and as a research consultant helping charities to evaluate their services. I'm really delighted to bring together both these strands as one of the Network coordinators, and look forward to meeting you if I haven't already!

Dr Mary Birken

m.birken@ucl.ac.uk



Hello, I'm Mary and I will be working within the network for the first 18 months, focusing on rapid and systematic review of the current research literature on loneliness/social isolation and mental illness. I am an occupational therapist and I have worked clinically in mental health before moving into mental health research. I am looking forward to contributing to progressing research in the area of loneliness and social isolation in mental health as part of the network.

Get Involved - We Need You!

- **Finding a name for our network:** The current title is a bit of a mouthful. We want to find something snappy that still describes what we're doing and we'd like your input. If you have a suggestion please email ellie.pearce@ucl.ac.uk or m.birken@ucl.ac.uk.
- **Please tell us about any ongoing or planned research studies or evaluations** that you are conducting or know about. This will help us review the state of the art in order to identify research gaps. **Do let us know about published and unpublished work** – all are gratefully received to help complement our systematic searches: email ellie.pearce@ucl.ac.uk or m.birken@ucl.ac.uk.
- **Please let us know if you have suggestions of community organisations and researchers who might be interested in the network.** Feel free to pass on our contact details: email ellie.pearce@ucl.ac.uk or m.birken@ucl.ac.uk.
- **Planning our website – we want your blurbs!** We'd like to create a directory of individuals and organisations on our website so that getting in touch with potential collaborators is as easy as possible. If you want to be included please send us (1) a photo (2) your email address (3) a 100 word summary of your interests around loneliness/social isolation in mental health including target population, types of mental illness. You may also want to let us know what kinds of organisations/individuals you would like to be put in touch with. You can see our current website [here](#).
- **Get involved on Twitter: @UCL_Loneliness**

What have we been up to so far?

- **We held our launch event in December 2018 at Friends House in Euston:** You can see photos of the event and the presentation slides on [our website](#).
- **We took part in a Mental Health Question Time event on loneliness:** this was held on the evening of our launch, and was livestreamed by The Mental Elf. A number of network members were on the panel, including Michelle Lim, Mark One in Four, Farhana Mann, Pamela Qualter, and Tim Matthews. You can see a video of the event [here](#).
- **We were successful in a funding bid** to conduct a piece of work looking at psychological models – we can let you know more details when this is officially announced.
- **Our Lived Experience Advisory Group had a great first meeting** and together we're planning a process of consultation to explore people's lived experience of loneliness/isolation and mental illness through a series of interviews.
- **We met with UCL Innovation & Enterprise** and local community partners to discuss potential links with industry and third sector organisations.
- **We kicked off some Master's projects on the topic of loneliness:** we have some great UCL master's students working on qualitative and quantitative studies around mental health and loneliness, supervised by network members.
- **We started to scope the literature to identify gaps:** Mary, Ellie and Louis (our visiting student from the Netherlands) are busy trawling research databases on the look-out for relevant research to synthesise as part of our mapping exercise.
- **We published an opinion piece in [Lancet Psychiatry](#) (December 2018)** on the need to increase our understanding of loneliness and mental health in young people.
- Added to the [Mental Elf blogs on loneliness](#) by some of our network members.
- **Attended the MQ Science Meeting** where network members Luc Goossens, Pamela Qualter, and Tim Matthews presented their work as part of a symposium entitled "Loneliness and mental health: a two-way relationship?".

What are our plans?

- We're **meeting up with the other UKRI-funded networks** in April to explore how we can work together to keep mental health on the national and international agenda, and Ellie and Mary have met with other network coordinators to start sharing ideas.
- We're in the process of **revamping our website** – watch this space!
- We're continuing to get to grips with the published and grey literature to **identify gaps in the current research** ahead of our **first round of grant calls in the Autumn**.
- **Consulting with people with lived experience** to help inform the focus of our funding calls and the themes of our events.
- **Giving opportunities to Early Career Researchers** to meet each other and get involved in research funded through the network – please pass this on to any ECRs who may be interested.
- **Grow the network:** please spread the word!
- **Finding out what members want from the network – let us know!**

Community spotlight on:

[Bromley-by-Bow Centre](#)



The Bromley by Bow Centre is an innovative community organisation in east London, working in one of the most deprived wards in the UK. Their model integrates primary care with non-clinical services that aim to improve the wider social determinants of health. Social Prescribing is one of these services that aims to reduce social isolation and loneliness by connecting patients to a wide range of services and support available locally.

In partnership with Public Health England, the Wellcome Trust and the Health Foundation, they have embarked on a robust multiyear embedded research and evaluation programme that will create a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of the Bromley by Bow Centre's holistic approach. They are keen to continue this work in order to facilitate student teaching, inform policy and practice related to tackling long standing health inequalities in deprived communities across the country through our knowledge share programme. All of this work is underpinned with the ambition of building resilience and resourcefulness through connections between individuals, groups, communities and services.

If you are interested in learning more, or visiting the centre contact the insights team by emailing insights@bbbc.org.uk or giving them a call on **020 8709 9741**.

Find a collaborator

- Researchers linked to the NIHR School of Public Health Research and based at UCL are looking for practitioners who have programs / policies that they would like to evaluate. They'd like to collaborate on [a joint funding bid](#): the NIHR School of Public Health Research has set up the [Public Health Practice Evaluation Scheme \(PHPES\)](#) to fund projects led by practitioners (e.g. individuals working in local authorities, NHS, or social care settings) to evaluate innovative local projects, policies, strategies or initiatives. Please contact jennifer.dykxhoorn.15@ucl.ac.uk if you're interested.

Hot off the press:

- [Mindfulness training reduces loneliness and increases social contact in a randomized controlled trial](#)
- A preprint of a research paper reporting a meta-analysis of [Loneliness Across the Lifespan](#)
- [New report on mental health research](#) from MQ
- Inspiring programme addressing loneliness and isolation in [women in New York](#)
- Mental Elf blog describing [new research](#) on whether social interventions can improve social functioning in youth who are at risk of psychosis

Events:

- **Network events:** Details soon!
- **Other events of interest:**
 - [Wellbeing Symposium](#) Monday 1st April 2019, 1.30-2pm, Deloitte Building, London £80+VAT
 - Dr Viviana Wuthrich will be giving a talk on "Enhancing treatment of anxiety and depression in older adults by increasing social participation" on **Tue 16 Apr 11:00-12:00** in Seminar Rm, Wing A, 6th floor Maple House, UCL .
 - [Zinc Mission 1 Celebration Event](#) 27th June, 6.30-8.30pm, Beveridge Hall in Senate House in Bloomsbury, celebrating the starting of 17 new businesses aiming to improve women's and girl's mental and emotional health.

Funding opportunities:

- [SMaRteN plus funds](#) £100,000 available for research investigating student mental health
Deadline: 9th May
- [British Academy/Wolfson Fellowships](#) up to £130,000 over 3 years for early career researchers for admin/teaching buy-out, public engagement and travel
Deadline: 15th May
- [Mental Health Research UK and Schizophrenia Research Fund PhD Studentships](#)
Deadline: 31st May
- [NIHR Public Health Practice Evaluation Scheme](#) £50,000-250,000 per project evaluating innovative local projects or policies focused on improving population health or health inequalities
Deadline: 3rd June
- [Global Challenges Research Fund](#) to address challenges in developing countries including wellbeing.
Deadline: various calls – check website
- [ESRC-Alan Turing Institute Joint Fellowship Scheme](#) for two fellowships for up to 36 months, focusing on (i) public policy and government innovation and (ii) urban analytics.
Deadline: 6th June
- [ESRC New investigator grants](#) £100,000-£300,000 for postdoctoral researchers to develop independent research projects
Deadline: ongoing
- [Reaching Communities England](#) Flexible funding over £10,000 for up to 5 years to organisations in England who want to take action on issues that matter to people and communities
Deadline: ongoing
- [Allen Lane Foundation – Social Cohesion Programme](#) Up to £110,000 per year for 25 projects benefitting people affected by mental health problems or helping social cohesion.
Deadline: ongoing

Useful links

- [MQ](#) mental health research charity
- [Mental Health Foundation](#)
- [Campaign to End Loneliness](#)
- [Mind](#)
- [The Jo Cox Foundation](#)