

Loneliness in Elderly-Melody or Saga?

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Abstract:-

Loneliness in older adults has become a widespread public health issue that hurts their mental, physical, and social health. Older people are more likely to feel lonely and cut off from others because people are living longer and families are changing. This review paper analyzes the phenomenon of loneliness in the elderly, including its causes, manifestations, and implications for healthcare, especially nursing. Loneliness is not just a feeling; it is a complicated problem that affects your mental, emotional, and physical health. Finding problems early and taking specific steps to fix them can greatly improve quality of life and lower the risk of getting sick, especially by addressing the underlying causes of loneliness, such as social isolation and lack of support systems. This paper examines the importance of implementing a comprehensive and interdisciplinary strategy to support isolated elderly individuals.

Keywords-health issue, elderly, whole person, loneliness

Introduction

Georges Bernano said, "No one ever finds out how lonely he really is." Even though everyone is so connected these days, older people in India are having trouble with loneliness and feeling less connected to the world around them. If you don't talk to, spend time with, or have relationships with other people, you might feel lonely. People of all ages can feel lonely, but older people are more likely to do so. The Age Well Foundation says that half of all older people in India, which has more than a billion

people, are lonely. According to the 2011 Census, almost 15 million older Indians live alone, and three out of four of them are women. One out of every seven older people in India lives in a home where no one is younger than 60. The researchers discovered that 47.49% of older people lived alone. It was scary to see the numbers from cities: 3,205 out of 5,000 older people said they were lonely. A lot of older people in our country, especially those over 75, are lonely and don't feel like they belong. When someone wants more friends than they have,

they are lonely. Many studies around the world have looked at how loneliness affects physical and mental health. There are many ways to define loneliness. The literature delineates three distinct categories of loneliness, influenced by various internal and external factors: situational loneliness, which arises from the dissolution of social connections due to unforeseen circumstances such as disasters, migration, and interpersonal conflicts; and developmental loneliness, which stems from individual shortcomings. Separation, poverty, physical disability, and other external factors, as well as internal loneliness stemming from specific personality traits, inadequate coping mechanisms, and diminished self-esteem. People also think of loneliness as both emotional and social. When someone realizes that they no longer have a close relationship with someone they care about, like a spouse or sibling, they feel emotionally lonely. Social loneliness occurs when a person recognizes the deterioration of their previous social network. Research indicates that marriage and a robust, supportive social network are among the most significant factors contributing to loneliness in older adults. Is it getting worse to be alone in the last few decades? A lot of

people in the news say that being alone has gotten worse in the last few decades. The reasons for this trend include more people living alone, more divorces, smaller family networks because birth rates are going down, and how moving around more often and to different places can hurt personal relationships. But how much proof do we have that people are getting lonelier over time? Care has been a problem for a long time. It's clear that older people have health problems that get worse over time and need constant care and management. Many people said that being alone made them feel lonely.¹

The Agewell study also found that "poor health," "isolation and lack of social interaction," and "less interaction with family members" were other reasons for feeling lonely. Young adults often start their own homes at a young age in countries where family ties are weak. Public and private institutions mostly take care of sick or disabled family members. In countries where families are close, young adults usually live with their parents until they get married. A lot of the help that is given to the poor and needy comes from family members. Areas with weak families tend to value individualism more, while areas with strong families tend to value collectivism

more. The problems could be as bad as joint pain that makes it hard to move or cough all the time, or they could be as bad as cancer or heart disease. In 2011, the Ministry of Social Justice said that 160 out of every 1,000 elderly people living in cities have heart disease. Older men are more likely to have bladder problems, and older women are more likely to have joint problems. About 64 out of every 1,000 elderly people in rural areas and 55 in urban areas have a disability that makes it hard for them to hear, see, or move. A lot of older people are also dealing with depression these days. Neurosciences in Rural Practice published a study in 2011 that found that about 22% of older people in India, or one in five, are depressed. The average for the whole world is 10.3%. Ankur Barua from Melaka-Manipal Medical College in Malaysia led the study, which used data from Asia, Europe, Australia, North America, and South America. This is a scary situation because older people usually have more than one illness. Being alone makes anxiety, depression, and physical symptoms worse. There is a connection between how bad depression is and how lonely someone is, but not how well they get along with others. Older women with depression who don't have many friends tend to feel more alone.

But this isn't the case for older men who are sad. It has always been important in India to show respect to older people and give them a special place in the family. The younger generation felt it was their responsibility to take care of them in return. The joint family system is still common in rural India, but more and more young people are moving to cities to find work, leaving the older people alone in their homes. Things get worse when no one in the villages can help them. In rural India, there is still no way to hire a nurse or caregiver to look after old people who live alone. There aren't enough old age homes, especially in Indian villages, where an old man or woman could spend their last days in peace with someone to care for them. So, elderly people who live alone have to do everything they need to do every day and take care of themselves until they die. Being alone has a big effect on older people's health and mental health. To adapt to their environment, everyone needs to have both close relationships and a large group of friends who care about them. When you don't have enough of these kinds of relationships, you may feel lonely and cut off from others, either emotionally or socially.

Aging is a natural and unavoidable process that brings about changes in

biology, psychology, and social life. Many older adults have fulfilling lives; however, a significant number suffer from loneliness, defined as the subjective feeling of social disconnection, irrespective of the presence or absence of others. Being alone isn't the same as being socially isolated, which means not having any social contact. But they often happen at the same time and make each other worse. In places like India, the problem has gotten worse because cities are growing quickly, younger family members are moving away, and families are moving from living together to living alone. Older people often feel lonely because they are retiring, losing loved ones, getting sick, and losing mobility. More and more people are realizing that this condition is a major risk factor for health, with effects that are similar to those of other major risk factors, such as heart disease and depression, which can lead to a decline in overall well-being and quality of life.²

Types and Ideas of Loneliness

There are many different kinds of loneliness that older people can feel:

- Emotional loneliness is the feeling of being alone because you lost a close emotional connection, like a spouse.

- Social loneliness— caused by not having a larger social network or being involved in the community. loneliness happens when you move, get sick, or go to jail.
- Chronic loneliness is a long-term and persistent feeling of loneliness that has a big effect on overall health.

Knowing these types helps you come up with the right care plans and interventions, such as tailored social support programs and mental health resources that address the specific needs of individuals experiencing situational or chronic loneliness.

Factors that cause Many factors contribute to the loneliness of older people:

- Demographic Factors: Older age, being female, and living alone
- Social Factors: losing a spouse, spending less time with family, and receiving little help from the community.
- Health-Related Factors: Long-term illness, disability, and problems with the senses

- Psychological Factors: Low self-esteem, trouble coping, and fear of being dependent
- Economic Factors: Not having enough money and not being able to get resources

These things often work together to make loneliness worse, leading to increased feelings of isolation and negatively affecting overall well-being.

Signs of Loneliness

Loneliness manifests across multiple dimensions, impacting emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and physical health. Emotional and mental problems are the most obvious signs of loneliness. Older people might feel sad, empty, and alone all the time. These symptoms can progress to clinical conditions such as depression, which is often underdiagnosed in older adults. People who are lonely often feel anxious, irritable, and moody. They may also feel like they don't have a purpose and are less valuable. Older adults may perceive themselves as unnecessary or undervalued, leading to negative emotions. In severe cases, loneliness can trigger suicidal ideation, requiring immediate recognition. Changes in

behavior are important signs that someone is lonely. A big part of this is social withdrawal, which means that people stay away from others and don't talk to their family or friends. People may not want to do things they used to like as much. People often forget to take care of themselves by skipping routines and not cleaning up after themselves. Insomnia or hypersomnia are two common sleep problems.

Some people may need their caregivers more, while others may not want help because they don't feel good enough or are afraid of being a burden. Cognitive Manifestations: Being alone has a big effect on how well your brain works. People who are older may say they have trouble remembering things, staying focused, and paying attention. Long-term loneliness has been associated with an elevated risk of neurocognitive disorders, including dementia. Cognitive decline may be aggravated by insufficient mental stimulation and social interaction, potentially exacerbating symptoms of neurocognitive disorders and resulting in heightened feelings of isolation and confusion. People who already have trouble thinking clearly may feel lost and

confused. People are starting to understand how being alone can hurt their bodies. Being lonely for a long time can make you tired, give you low energy, and make your body hurt all over. Changes in appetite, like not wanting to eat or eating too much, are also common.³

Being alone can make you more likely to get long-term diseases like heart disease and high blood pressure. It could also weaken the immune system, which makes people more likely to get sick. Sleep problems make your health even worse. Social Signs of Loneliness: Spending less time with family, friends, and the community is a sign of loneliness. Older people might say they feel like no one cares about them or that they are being ignored. People often don't have strong relationships or support systems. When people stop doing things like working or making decisions for their families, they may feel like they have no purpose.

Older people who live in places like nursing homes may feel even more lonely because they are in new places and don't have many friends. Being alone has a big effect on the quality of

life of older people. It makes people less happy with their lives, less able to do things, and more likely to go to the doctor. Chronic illness and loneliness feed off of each other: being sick makes you feel alone, and being alone makes you feel worse. Studies show that loneliness can increase the risk of death, just like smoking and being overweight. So, dealing with loneliness is important for both your mental health and your life expectancy.

Evaluation of Loneliness

Evaluating is an important part of dealing with loneliness. Healthcare professionals should utilize both subjective and objective methodologies, including: patient interviews, self-report measures, standardized scales (e.g., the UCLA Loneliness Scale), and the monitoring of behavioural and social interaction patterns. A comprehensive evaluation must also consider underlying medical, psychological, and social factors. For therapy, it's important to build trust and a good relationship.

Older people can share their feelings and feel better by listening actively and talking to them with empathy. Getting people to participate in their

communities Getting people to join in on group activities, community events, and social gatherings can help them feel less alone. To make sure activities are fun and interesting, they should be based on what the person likes and is good at. This could be sports, arts and crafts, or volunteering. Family involvement is important for fighting loneliness.⁴

Teaching family members about the emotional needs of older people and getting them to spend time together can help. Emotional Support, Counselling and therapy can be helpful, especially for people who are very sad or alone. It is important to think about sending someone to a mental health professional when it is necessary. Getting more exercise and changing your lifestyle. Exercise is good for both your body and mind. Encouraging hobbies and free time activities can give people a sense of purpose, which can make them feel better mentally and physically. How to Use Technology Video calls and social media are two examples of digital tools that can help older people stay in touch with family and friends, especially when they can't see them in person.⁷ Both the community and the government should take action. Senior citizen clubs, day-

care centres and outreach services are just a few examples of programs that should be created to help older people. Nurses are very important for finding and dealing with loneliness in older people. They are in a unique position to figure out what patients need emotionally and socially because they are the first people to see them.

Nursing duties include: Finding loneliness and its symptoms early on Giving emotional support and counselling Working with teams from different fields Teaching patients and their families ,Pushing for policies that help older people stay healthy For complete care, it is important to include psychosocial care in everyday nursing practice.⁵

In a Nutshell

Loneliness in older adults is a complex problem that can have serious effects on their mental, physical, and social health. It can show up in a lot of ways, like mental health problems, memory loss, and long-term health issues. As the population ages, healthcare systems around the world are making it a priority to deal with loneliness. To do this, they need to use a thorough approach that

includes early evaluation, personalized interventions, and strong social support systems. Healthcare workers and nurses need to look at health as a whole and understand that loneliness is a big problem that can affect health. It is possible to improve the health and quality of life of older people by encouraging meaningful relationships and active aging.

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