



Research Hub Bulletin - Spring 2012

The Research Hub supports the Campaign to End Loneliness by gathering, communicating and contributing to the evidence base around loneliness and isolation. Members of the Hub include leading academics in the field along with local authority and voluntary sector representatives.

This quarterly bulletin provides information on how to get involved, recent research and initiatives and keeps you up to date with the Research Hub's activities. Previous bulletins can be found on the Campaign to End Loneliness website.

News from the Research Hub

■ **The Campaign to End Loneliness and Age UK Oxfordshire are hosting a two-day international conference on the 9th and 10th of July in Oxford**

The purpose of this event is to inform action by national governments, local authorities, communities, charities, the academic research community, funders and individuals themselves.

The programme combines contributions from the leading academics in the field, with several interactive sessions exploring specific themes including: *Who is most at risk? What are the health impacts? What works in reducing loneliness? How can we prevent loneliness in later life?*

Confirmed speakers include:

- **Vanessa Burholt**, Professor of Innovative Ageing, University of Swansea
- **John T. Cacioppo**, Tiffany and Margaret Blake Distinguished Service Professor and Director, Center for Cognitive and Social Neuroscience, University of Chicago
- **Mima Cattan**, Professor in Public Health (Knowledge Translation), Northumbria University
- **Jenny de Jong Gierveld**, Professor Emeritus, Department of Sociology and Social Gerontology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam and Honorary Fellow, Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute, The Hague
- **Thomas Scharf**, Professor of Social Gerontology and Director of the Irish Centre for Social Gerontology, National University of Ireland, Galway
- **Christina Victor**, Professor of Public Health, School of Management and Health Studies, Brunel University

For more information or to book visit: www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/loneliness-conference/

■ Paul Cann speaks at the Campaign to End Loneliness and Department of Health Summit to tackle loneliness.

The Campaign to End Loneliness and the Department of Health hosted a Summit to tackle loneliness in older age on the 15th of March 2012.

This event brought together representatives from the local government, charity and business sectors to gain wider commitment to overcoming loneliness. It highlighted the importance of taking action to combat loneliness in older age, which is a pressing health issue.

Paul Cann, Chief Executive of Age UK Oxfordshire and member of the Research Hub spoke at the event on the research into loneliness and social isolation in the United Kingdom, evidence of its negative impact on health and how we know we can act.

A video of Paul's speech and a brief summary report of the event can be found at: www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/loneliness-summit/

■ New Research Hub members

We welcome a number of new members to the Research Hub, including:

- Daphne Berkovi, former PA and intergenerational practitioner, now full-time carer
- Martha Lester-Cribb, Quality Officer at Befriending Networks
- Jane James, Arts and Social Care Coordinator, Wolverhampton Arts and Heritage Service
- Joanne Knight, Strategic Commissioning Manager, Sheffield City Council
- Dr Karen Windle, Senior Research Fellow, Personal Social Services Research Unit (PSSRU) at the University of Kent

A full list of members and their professional biographies can be found online at www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/about-the-campaign/research-hub/

New research into loneliness and social isolation

■ Victor, C. R., Burholt, V. and Martin, W. 'Loneliness and Ethnic Minority Elders in Great Britain: An Exploratory Study' *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 27 (1) pp. 65-78

Within Great Britain few studies have examined the prevalence of loneliness amongst older people from ethnic minorities. In this exploratory study, Research Hub members Professor Victor and Professor Burholt consider the prevalence of loneliness amongst older people, those aged 65 years and over, from the key minority groups growing old in Britain (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African Caribbean, and Chinese) and draw explicit comparisons for these groups with the prevalence of loneliness reported for the general population and with older people in their countries of origin.

They identified very high rates of reported loneliness, ranging from 24% to 50% amongst for those elders originating from China, Africa, the Caribbean, Pakistan and Bangladesh whilst those from India approximated to the norms of 8–10% for Britain.

A full abstract can be found here: <http://www.springerlink.com/content/6q4302657026jk27/>

■ **McLaughlin, D. Leung, J., Pachana, N., Flicker, L., Hankey, G. and Dobson, A. 'Social support and subsequent disability: it is not the size of your network that counts' *Age and Ageing* 27 March 2012**

This short report examines whether high levels of social support and engagement may help sustain good health and functional ability. The aim of this analysis was to explore the effect of two aspects of social support on subsequent disability in a group of community dwelling older women and men in Australia.

The study found that social network size was not associated with subsequent disability in either women or men and that the provision of social support is insufficient to limit subsequent disability: support provided must be subjectively perceived to be relevant and adequate.

■ **Ong, A. D., Rothstein, J. D. and Uchino, B. N. 'Loneliness accentuates age differences in cardiovascular responses to social evaluative threat' *Psychology and Ageing* March 2012 27 (1) pp.190-198**

The social pain of loneliness produces changes in the body that mimic the aging process and increase the risk of heart disease, reports a recent Cornell study published in *Psychology and Aging*. Changes in cardiovascular functioning are part of normal aging, but loneliness appears to accelerate the process, say the researchers.

A summary of the study methodology and findings can be found on the Cornell University website at: www.news.cornell.edu/stories/April12/LonelinessAges.html. A brief abstract for this study is also available.

■ **Cacioppo JT, Hawkley LC, Luo Y and Waite LJ. 'Loneliness, health, and mortality in old age: A national longitudinal study' *Social Science and Medicine* 2012 74 (6) pp.907-14**

Reporting on the USA's Health and Retirement Study, this paper examines the relationship between loneliness, health, and mortality. The researchers found that feelings of loneliness were associated with increased mortality risk over a 6-year period. The effect was not explained by social relationships or health behaviours but was modestly explained by health outcomes.

The authors argue that this population-based data is contributing to growing evidence that loneliness is a risk factor for morbidity and mortality. A full copy of the text can be found here:

<http://paa2011.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=111219>.

■ **Ruis-Ottenheim, N. et al. 'Dispositional optimism and loneliness in older men' *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 27(2) February 2012, pp.151-159.**

The aim of this study was to investigate the association between dispositional optimism and the presence of feelings of loneliness in older men. Data was taken from the longitudinal population-based Zutphen Elderly Study.

The findings showed that the feelings of loneliness significantly increased during 10 years of follow-up but showed temporal stability. Dispositional optimism was correlated to lower feelings of loneliness over time in older men, independent of depression or changes in social network.

The article concludes there needs to be an increased clinical awareness of the susceptibility of older adults with low optimism to loneliness so that adequate support and care can be offered.

A full abstract can be found on the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) website: <http://www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/profile.asp?guid=ad4fedce-b5f5-4855-8ce9-ff787611e86a>

■ **Early results from Office for National Statistics (ONS) Measuring National Wellbeing Programme**

The ONS have released some early results from the 'Our Relationships' domain of their Measuring National Wellbeing programme. This section uses data from a range of sources, including the ONS Opinions (Omnibus) Survey, Ofcom and an 'Understanding Society' survey. This domain includes a question on loneliness.

Initial results have found that:

- Approximately 1 in 20 adults aged over 16 feel "completely lonely" in their daily lives (4.5% of respondents)
- Out of the respondents reporting high levels of satisfaction with life, 84.2% said they had high levels of satisfaction with their personal relationships
- The proportion of people who felt strongly that they belonged to a neighbourhood also changes with age – 87% of those aged over 65 "felt strongly that they belonged to their neighbourhood" compared to 66% of 25-34 year olds

The Campaign wrote a blog summarising these results and linking to the ONS results, which can be found here: <http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/blog/measuring-loneliness/>

■ **Local Government Association and Campaign to End Loneliness *Combating loneliness: a guide for local authorities***

The Local Government Association's [Ageing Well](#) programme and the Campaign to End Loneliness have produced a guide for councils interested in taking action at a local level to combat loneliness. This guide offers a brief summary of key research on the issue of loneliness, and some practical steps every local authority, working in partnership with other local actors, can take to tackle the problem.

Case studies from across the United Kingdom provide practical examples of how councils can act in areas such as:

- Public health
- Neighbourhood action
- Understanding risk factors
- Building community capacity
- Working with individuals

For a copy, visit the Campaign's website: <http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/want-to-help/improve-local-policy/>

■ **Overcoming Loneliness by Alice Muir (Sheldon Press)**

Drawing on the latest research, Alice Muir explores the theory that loneliness evolved as a survival impulse, and explains that it is rooted in the deep need human beings have for each other. This book is designed to help individuals:

- work out how much social interaction is right for you
- decide what to do when you are feeling lonely
- learn how to start a conversation and use body language effectively
- build your confidence and make new friends
- strengthen your current friendships

Alice Muir is a chartered psychologist and life coach.

Future research

■ **Befriending Clients Information Gathering Project, Befriending Networks and University of Edinburgh**

Martha Lester-Cribb, Quality Officer for Befriending Networks is currently working as an Exchange Fellow with Professor Platt at the University of Edinburgh. This study builds on an early pilot to use the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) to gather enough information from befriending clients for robust statistical analysis.

As well as using the WEMWBS, the study will explore social networks, social isolation, life events and general health, questioning both befriending clients and volunteers. Approximately 50 befriending services have been recruited to take part in the adult phase of the research. The first wave of data collection will run between March and August 2012, with a second wave of data collection from September 2012 to February 2013.

■ **Evaluating JRF's Neighbourhood Approaches to Loneliness Programme (Update from Richard Bryan, Qa Research)**

Qa Research are evaluating the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Neighbourhood Approaches to Loneliness Programme.

Programme overview

This three-year action research programme looks at how community activities may contribute to the well-being of people at risk of or experiencing loneliness; how they could play a central role in this activity; and how this involvement could in turn enhance community well-being.

The programme is supporting and facilitating community activity to address loneliness amongst people in four neighbourhoods within the districts of Bradford (Bradford Moor and Denholme) and York (Carr Estate, and New Earswick). There is also a focus on increasing the security, independence and well-being of people at risk of or experiencing loneliness. Key aims of the programme are to:

- explore what people who are experiencing or at risk of loneliness think they can do to change their situation;
- work with local communities and providers to adopt approaches and innovations that reflect this;
- influence the willingness of others in the neighbourhood to engage and contribute; and
- capture and share lessons in ways which are meaningful, enduring and replicable.

Evaluation methodology

Working alongside the Programme Manager since September 2011 Qa Research are mid-way through the evaluation and have so far undertaken:

- Desk research
- Observation at community feedback sessions
- 250 door-step baseline interviews with residents across the four neighbourhoods. The questionnaire covered a range of themes including awareness and involvement in the programme, social and inter-racial trust, political participation, giving and volunteering, faith-based engagement and health
- 4 discussion groups with residents
- Critical friend support to the Programme Manager

The final report for the evaluation is due in April 2013. Parts of the study still to be completed include:

- Ongoing observation at community feedback sessions
- 250 door-step follow-up interviews with residents across the four neighbourhoods to track change over time
- In-depth interviews with stakeholders
- Peer research and case studies
- Focus groups with residents across the four neighbourhoods
- Ongoing critical friend support to the Programme Manager

If you would like to know more about the evaluation please contact Richard Bryan on richard.bryan@garesearch.co.uk

■ National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) and Joseph Rowntree Foundation 'Not a One Way Street' research project

As part of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's A Better Life programme, the NDTi is working with the social enterprise Community Catalysts Ltd to identify and promote the various ways in which older people with high support needs can have a positive role in communities, within models of mutual support.

This research project will use elements of an NDTi framework, 'Keys to a Good Life' which promotes what is important for older people with high support needs. Community Catalysts has extensive experience in developing working relationships with networks to deliver support based on mutuality. Not a One Way Street aims to:

- Achieve a breadth and depth of vision, based on a rigorous analysis of examples of establishing mutual support and reciprocity with and for older people with high support needs
- Deepen our understanding of the intricacies involved in establishing and sustaining mutual support systems, including how people resolve issues as they arise and resilience may be achieved
- Examine issues and dynamics of replicability, developing guidance for different audiences on the conditions and circumstances for replicating models of mutual support and reciprocity

Not a One Way Street will run until August 2012 and has just completed an interim findings report. For more information, please contact Helen Bowers (helen.bowers@ndti.org.uk).

Answering your questions

The Research Hub work to support practitioners by communicating the evidence base around loneliness and isolation. This section addresses questions on the subject of loneliness posed to the Campaign to End Loneliness or to the academics.

If you would like to ask the Research Hub a question relating to loneliness or social isolation in older age, or receive a copy of these studies, please email Anna (anna@campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk)

■ Carers and Loneliness

Last month, we were asked if we knew of anything research relating to loneliness and being a family carer. Although old, a 1986 study by Linda George and Lisa Gwyther was recommended, which found:

“The well-being of family caregivers of older memory-impaired adults was examined in four dimensions: physical health, mental health, financial resources, and social participation. Results indicated that, relative to random community samples, caregivers are most likely to experience problems with mental health and social participation.

In addition, characteristics of the caregiving situation were more closely associated with caregiver well-being than were illness characteristics of the patients.” (**Caregiver Well-Being: A Multidimensional Examination of Family Caregivers of Demented Adults** *The Gerontological Society of America* Vol. 26, No. 3, 1986)

Daphne Berkovi, a member of the Research Hub who cares for her husband full time, gives a personal response to this question:

“During the past 2 years I have had to relinquish all work commitments, which involved working as a Personal Assistant in the public sector. Alongside this, I was a perpetual student at Birkbeck College,

and had to forego any further studies due to my caring responsibilities. My husband and I also had a vibrant social life.

What is acutely painful is the loss of communication with work and fellow student colleagues and even those individuals you hoped would keep in touch. Any form of contact is a delight, whether it is speaking to someone in the supermarket, or stroking someone's dog in the park."

■ Update on research into befriending services

In our last Research Bulletin, we answered a question about the small amount of 'robust' evidence showing the benefits of one-to-one befriending activities for older people. Since then, one of our Hub members has shared another piece of research that adds to the evidence base.

Using the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS), the charity Befriending Networks conducted a small pilot study with some of our member organisations and presented the results at the 2009 conference, "Assessing Change in Mental Well-being among Befriending Clients and Volunteers".

Ten befriending projects covering a range of client groups took part. A total of 48 replies were received from clients (at the start of their contact with the project). Their average WEMWBS score was 40, which is about 10 points lower than the average in general population samples.

Final returns were received from 36 clients, of whom 20 had been matched and 16 had not been matched. The average WEMWBS score of people who received befriending had increased by nearly 6 points, whereas the average score of people who received no befriending was little changed.

Although the sample was too small and the time-scale too short to draw definitive conclusions, these initial results suggested that there is value in carrying out a larger scale study.

Contributing to the Research Hub

If you would like to contribute to the next Research Bulletin please contact Anna Goodman (anna@campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk). Our next Bulletin will be released after the research conference in July. We welcome any contributions on published or unpublished research on the topic of loneliness in older age, including academic journals, new reports, non-academic articles, local evaluations and case studies.

About the Campaign to End Loneliness

The Campaign to End Loneliness is a coalition of organisations and individuals working together through research, policy, campaigning and innovation to combat loneliness and inspire individuals to keep connected in older age in the UK. The Campaign is led by 5 partners: Age UK Oxfordshire, Independent Age, Manchester City Council, Sense and WRVS. It is funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk