Research Hub Bulletin – Autumn 2011

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 related research and initiatives and keeps you up to date with the Research Hub's activities.

What's the purpose of the Research Hub?

- To keep abreast of developments in research relating to loneliness and social isolation in older people
- To undertake research relevant to the Campaign
- To support the work of the Campaign's Action Groups, particularly the "What works Action Group"
- To maintain or establish a dialogue both between members of the Research Hub and the Campaign
- To help synthesise the evidence messages
- To respond to media comments

Who's involved?

Ann Bowling – Professor of Healthcare of Older Adults, Kingston University

Vanessa Burholt – Professor of Gerontology and Director of the Interdisciplinary Centre on Ageing, Swansea University

Paul Cann – Chief Executive Age UK Oxfordshire

Mima Cattan – Professor in Public Health (Knowledge Translation) Northumbria University

Laura Ferguson – Director, Campaign to End Loneliness

Claire Garabedian – Postgraduate Research Student, Applied Social Science, Stirling University,

Angelika Kaiser, Research Administrator, Oxford Institute of Ageing, University of Oxford

Sally Richards Senior Lecturer in Social Work, Oxford Brookes University

Tracey Robbins – Programme Manager, Joseph Rowntree Foundation,

Phil Rossall – Research Manager, Age UK

Thomas Scharf – Professor of Social Gerontology and Director of the Irish Centre for Social Gerontology at NUI Galway, Ireland

Matthew Sowemimo – Head of Policy, WRVS

Rachel Taylor (Research Hub Chair), Research Officer, Oxfordshire County Council

Christina Victor – Professor of Public Health / Associate Deputy (Research) - School Management; Health, Brunel University

How to join and contribute to the knowledge of the Hub

If you would like to join the hub, contribute to the knowledge on loneliness and isolation, attend meetings or be a virtual member, please contact: rachel.taylor@oxfordshire.gov.uk. We'll keep you informed of developments you your name added to the mailing list.

We would welcome hearing from you and your contributions about published or unpublished findings you have come across – national, local or international (e.g. local evaluations, case studies, academic and non-academic journal articles etc.)

The next meeting is planned for the 12th of December.

What's been happening?

- **First meeting:** The research hub had its first meeting in Oxford in June which was attended by 7 members of the group. Some gaps in research were identified, particularly in relation to the role of technology in older people's loneliness and isolation.

- **Bidding for funding:** Another key gap appears to be an overview of evidence based interventions in social isolation and loneliness. Mima Cattan's systematic review of 2005 (Cattan et al, 2005) is the last comprehensive review. Burholt and Cattan are now exploring the idea of the bidding for funding for undertaking a realist synthesis study (a fast track type of systematic review) in order to quickly find out what evidence is out there since 2005.

- **British Gerontology Society (BGS) conference July 2011** Paul Cann chaired a symposium about the Campaign and the Evidence Hub at the BSG annual conference in July. Mima Cattan, Christina Victor, Vanessa Burholt, Phil Rossall and Laura Ferguson attended. The discussion focused on ways of developing and strengthening the evidence base on loneliness. What was very encouraging about the event, apart from the high attendance, was the number of very experienced and highly respected academic figures in the audience.

■ **Conference Planned for early 2012:** looking at "What do we know about loneliness?"

What is new in research?

Below are some new papers that support the evidence base in the area:

Loneliness compendium: Examples from research and practice
Katy Hole
30 March 2011

■ **An exploration of the research, rhetoric and issues surrounding loneliness**.

Loneliness can affect people at any time, and for some it can become an overwhelming problem. A new action research programme from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) and Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRHT) called 'Neighbourhood Approaches to Loneliness' will look at how a neighbourhood as a whole can support those who live with loneliness. This paper:

  ▪ defines loneliness;

  ▪ explores how lonely people can be identified and engaged

  ▪ outlines research and projects that could inform the Neighbourhood Approaches to Loneliness programme

■ **A Meta-Analysis of Interventions to Reduce Loneliness** Christopher M. Masi, Hsi-Yuan Chen, Louise C. Hawkley and John T. Cacioppo *Pers Soc Psychol Rev* 2011

This paper found interventions that addressed maladaptive social cognition had a larger mean effect size compared to interventions that addressed social support, social skills, and opportunities for social intervention.

■ **Interventions targeting social isolation in older people: a systematic review,** *BMC Public Health* 2011, Dickens et al

This review of 32 studies by researchers at the Primary Care Research Group, Peninsula College of Medicine & Dentistry, University of Exeter found the following:
  ▪ there is stronger evidence for group based interventions
  ▪ interventions with a theoretical basis had greater benefits
  ▪ activities and support had more positive outcomes than home visiting and internet training interventions
  ▪ those interventions that specifically targeted lonely or socially isolated people had less positive outcomes

■ **Social relationships and Mortality Risk: A meta-analytic review,** PLoS Medicine, July 2010, Holt-Lunstad, J.

This meta-analytic review was conducted to determine the extent to which social relationships influence risk for mortality, which aspects of social relationships are most highly predictive and which factors may moderate the risk.

Across 148 studies the random effects weighted average effect size was OR=1.50 indicating a 50% (95% CI 1.42 to 5.19) increased likelihood of survival for participants with stronger social relationships. Significant differences were found across type of social measurement evaluated; the association was strongest for complex measures of social integration and lowest for binary indicators of residential status (living along versus with others).

■ **The Lonely Society, Mental Health Society, 2009**

This report examines how modern society has changed the way people connect. It aims to raise awareness of loneliness and its effect on our mental health, detailing steps we can take to reduce isolation.

Up and coming research

■ *The transient nature of loneliness in later life: A longitudinal cohort study.*

ESRC funded 3 year PhD study by Deborah Morgan, supervised by Prof Vanessa Burholt (Centre for Innovative Ageing) and Dr Stephen Drinkwater (Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods).

This study is exploring: Whether individuals become more (or less) lonely and isolated as they grow older: which groups of older people are most (least) likely to demonstrate improvement or deterioration with regard to levels of loneliness: What is the risk of developing dementia for older people that are lonely? Data will be collected at two time points from 5000 older people living in Wales.

Related initiatives

■ **Action for Happiness**

A movement that is part of the Young Foundation and committed to building a happier society built on latest scientific research. They work with leading experts from the fields of psychology, education, economic and social innovation.

For more information visit: www.actionforhappiness.org

■ **The Commission for Rural Communities is looking to identify key stakeholders for a project on social isolation.**

This project led by the Commission for Rural Communities relates to the social isolation experienced by older people living in rural areas. It aims to make firm recommendations to the government and other bodies about the services provided to isolated rural people.

The Commission is aiming to identify key stakeholders to interview, asking questions relating to the key lines of enquiry. For further information visit:

http://www.rsnonline.org.uk/Services/Call-for-evidence-on-rural-isolation.html

■ **Alone Together by Professor Sherry Turkle**

MIT technology and society specialist Professor Sherry Turkle has spent fifteen-years studying human lives in the digital world. Her latest book, *Alone Together*, is based on interview with children and adults, studies of how pople interact with machines and socialise on digital networks.

A recording of her speech delivered to the RSA on changing human relationships can be found here: http://www.thersa.org/events/audio-and-past-events/2011/alone-together

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About the Campaign to End Loneliness

The Campaign to End Loneliness aims to create connections in older age by bringing others together to combat loneliness.

It was launched in 2011 by four founder partners: Age UK Oxfordshire, Counsel and Care, Independent Age and WRVS. It is funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. We will:

- **Raise awareness** – of loneliness and why working to reduce it matters.
- **Promote** - what works and find the gaps in current interventions to combat loneliness.
- **Share future-proofing ideas for individuals** – helping us all to future-proof our own lives against loneliness in older age.
- **Inspire vision and action from all** – working with others to create a vision of a society where loneliness in older age is ended