

What do you expect at your age? Loneliness and old age

Christina Victor,
Professor of Gerontology & Public Health,
School of Health Sciences & Social Care,
Brunel University

Presentation overview

- What is loneliness?
- Loneliness in old age: contemporary social problem?
- Loneliness & old age
- The importance of time and place in understanding loneliness
- Loneliness in new ageing populations; the example of minority elders

What is loneliness?

‘Loneliness and social isolation are subjective lived experiences that exist in the form of multiple realities constructed and reconstructed by individual older people within the context of their different lives and life histories’ (Victor et al., 2009).

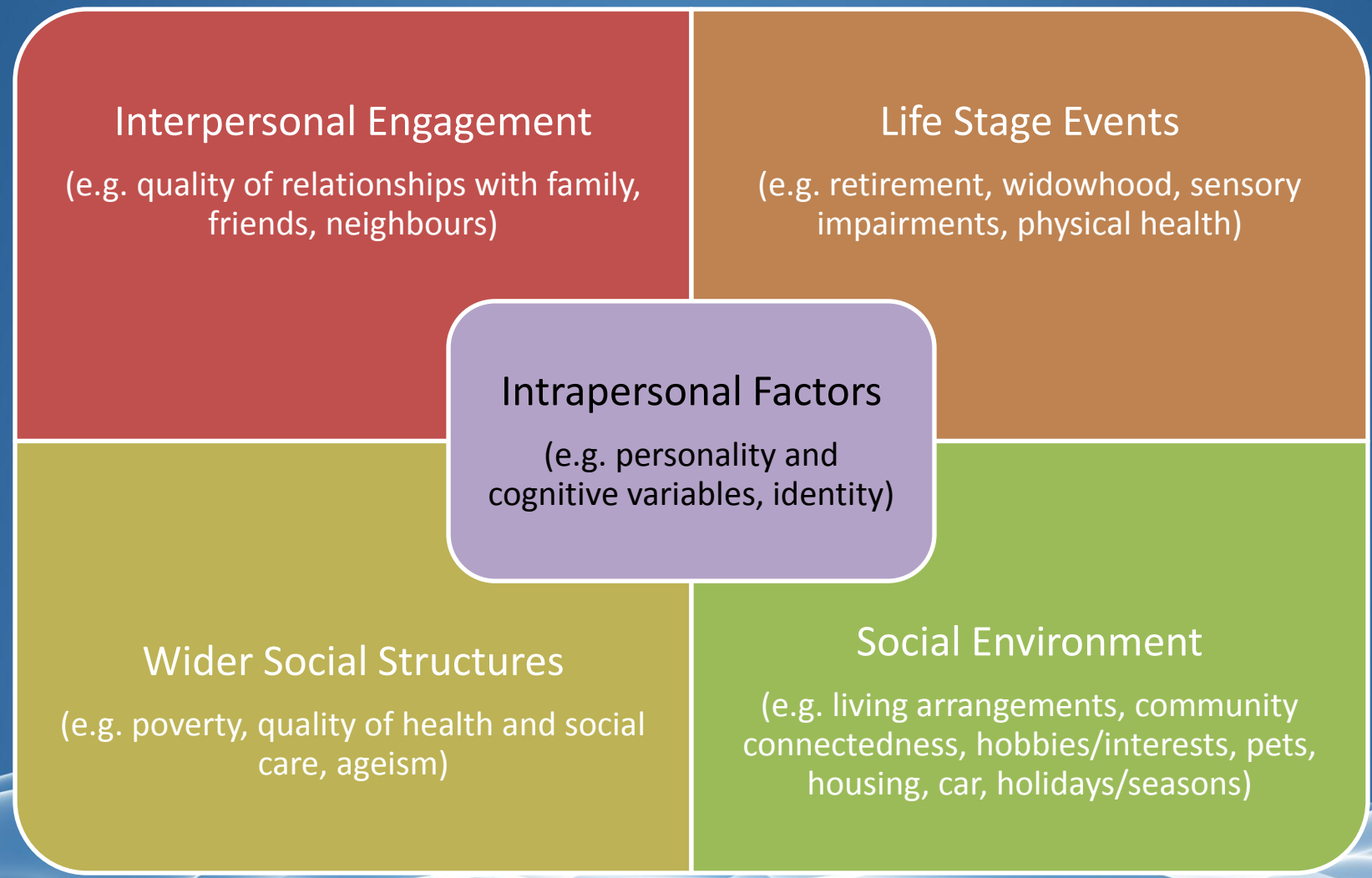
Cognitive discrepancy theory: loneliness the result of the dissonance between the desired and actual quantity and quality of social relationships

What is loneliness?

“You hear an awful lot from Help the Aged about poor old souls in unheated rooms and that sort of thing. I think they’re lonely because no one every speaks to them. I’m not lonely in that sense, and I’m not lonely in the material sense because if I want something I could go out and buy it, but it’s a different kind of loneliness...”

I have got friends, but they are not the quality of friends that I would like to have in just a few friends..XXX phoned me last weekend and we were on the phone for about half an hour and do you know she didn’t ask me one single thing about myself. There was absolutely nothing personal, and that’s when I feel lonely”.(interview 207-Sullivan & Victor 2012)

Understanding loneliness



Source: Sullivan & Victor, 2012

Terminological in exactitude!

From this theoretical perspective loneliness is distinct from but related to living alone, isolation, being alone & solitude



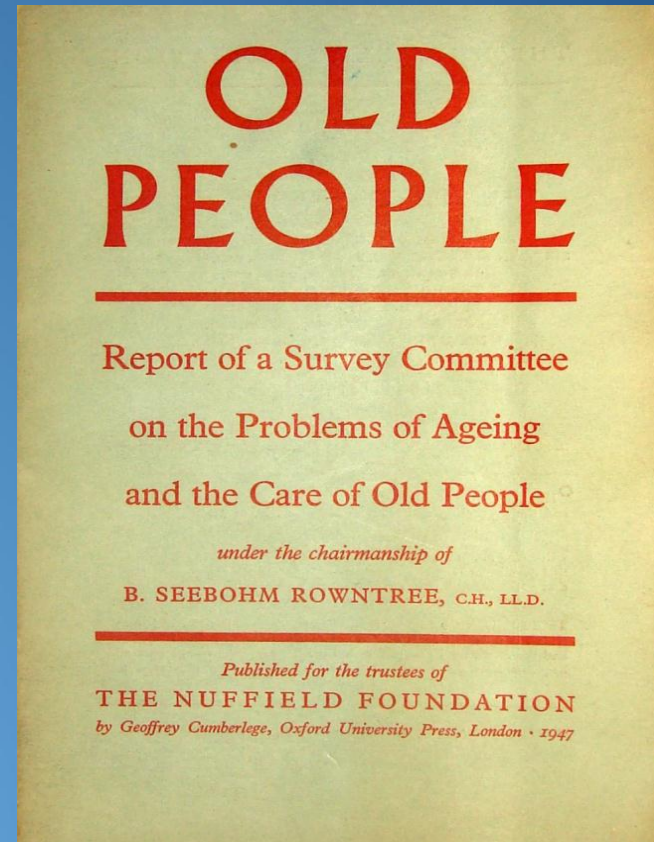
Loneliness: a contemporary social ill?

- In 1904 Rowntree identified poverty, war, slavery, intemperance, the opium trade, impurity and gambling as the “great scourges of humanity”
- In 2010 community breakdown in this category- it was felt that neighbours no longer know or look out for one another, which left people feeling isolated, lonely and fearful – particularly the elderly

Loneliness and old age

“A distressing feature of old age is loneliness. All who have done welfare work among the old have found it the most common, if at the same time the most imponderable, of the ills from which the aged suffer, and its frequency was amply confirmed by our study”

(Rowntree, 1947,52)

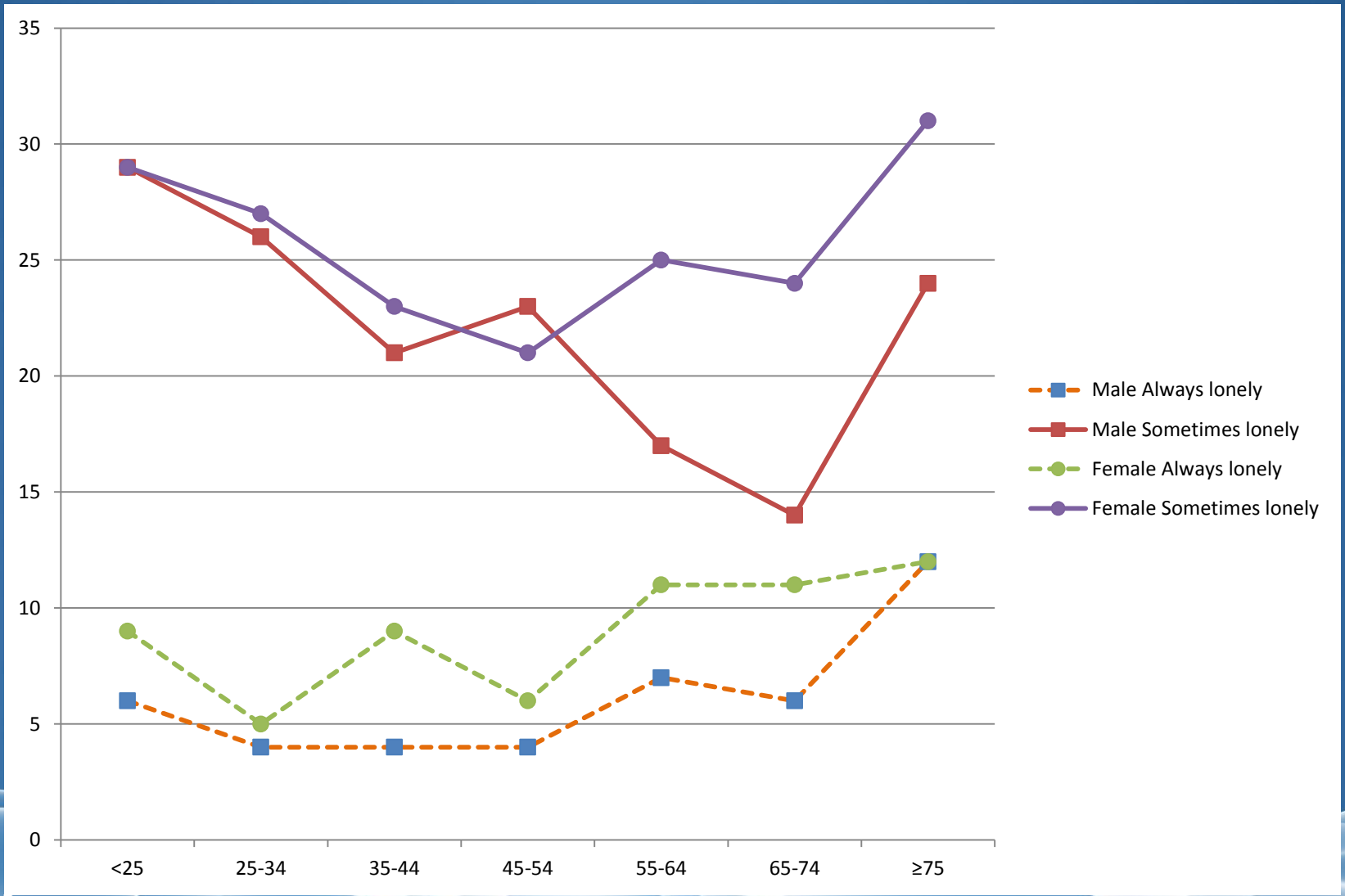


Loneliness & old age-common stereotypes

- The over 55s are the group most likely to be lonely.
- Loneliness seen as a universal and inevitable part of 'old age'
- Loneliness amongst older people is increasing
- ***“Loneliness is an inner, gnawing pain born of circumstance and inertia, verging on despair. There is a higher risk the older you get, and no one talks about it”*** Joan Bakewell-The Times
31/12/09



Are older people the loneliest?



Source: Victor & Yang, 2012

Has loneliness in old age increased?

	SHELDON 1948	TOWNSEND 1954	VICTOR 2005
Always/often	8	9	9
Sometimes	13	25	32
Never	79	66	61

Loneliness & ethnic minorities

	Loneliness rating (%)		
	Always/ often	Sometimes	Never
GB	9	32	61
Indian	7	30	62
Pakistani	16	34	16
Bangladeshi	16	50	10
African	11	50	39
Chinese	24	32	28
Caribbean	18	62	12

Source: Victor & Burholt, 2012

Loneliness & South Asian elders

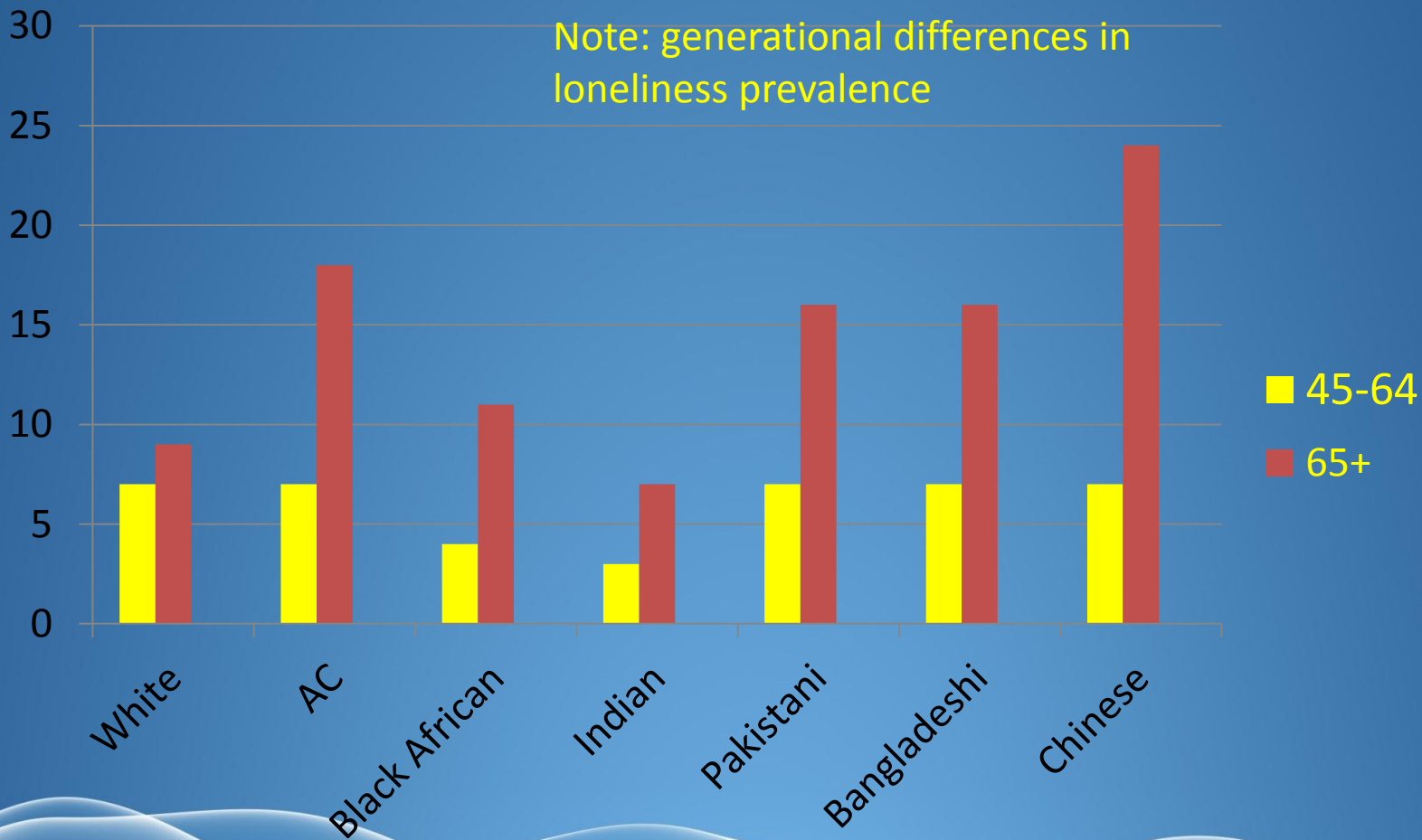
“My health worries me because I am a Diabetic and also have high blood pressure. I feel lonely and depress because of my health I do not enjoy many things.”

“Yes, when I think about my grandsons, I feel lonely sometimes. I wish they could live with us so I could be able to know them better”

“Our children are also like that. We ourselves keep forcing them that ‘Don’t do this; when we are no longer alive then you will become completely lonely’.”

Source: interviews with Bangladeshi & Pakistani people aged 50+

Loneliness & ethnic minorities



Source: Victor & Burholt, 2012

Care homes & loneliness

Loneliness may be present even while living in group settings:-

M (care worker) say "Why you cry? Why you cry?" so I say "I feeling lonely"

"...and when you live on your own, you know, it's a bit lonely, isn't? I mean, here I've got company, they're all very, very good. You couldn't fault them in any way. "

*" don't, I don't feel ill love...
...I just feel lonely."*

Spatial aspects of loneliness

- Loneliness linked to the absence of a person from specific place:-
- *“He wasn't in that chair” (Woman 29)*
- *“I never sat on my own as my husband was always there” (Woman 9)*
- *“I was always sat in that chair there and whenever I looked up from here she was there. But when she'd gone she was not ” (Man 8).*

Source: Bennett & Victor, 2012

Temporal aspects of loneliness

- 50% reported loneliness worse at night & two thirds at weekend (Victor et al, 2005)
- *"I'm lonely of a night. "(Man 16)*
- *"Of a night you're lonely". (Woman 12)*
- *"Such a lonely life ... Saturdays and Sundays are a bit dead for me..."*
- *"So long [Sunday] and so lonely."*

Longitudinal aspects of loneliness

Note: some older people 'recover' from loneliness-what factors are important for this?

	Improved loneliness (%)	Worse loneliness (%)	Consistently lonely (%)	Never lonely (%)
ESRC survey- Victor et al 2005 (based on retrospective comparison)	10	20	15	55
Victor & Bowling (2012)	12	25	22	44

Source: Victor & Bowling, 2012

Key points

- Loneliness not a universal aspect of old age
- Loneliness in old age comparable with young adults
- Spatial & temporal dimensions important as are longitudinal components
- Need to incorporate 'new ageing' populations such as minority elders
- All aspects noted need to be included within potential interventions

Key References

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Contact details

Christina Victor,
School of Health Sciences & Social Care,
Brunel University,
Uxbridge,
UB8 3PH

christina.victor@brunel.ac.uk