

ABSTRACT
The population of older people is growing rapidly, especially those aged above 85. The proportion of older people living alone is also mounting fast. Traditional modes of family support have declined. People in urban areas marry later, and have fewer children than in the past. Loneliness has become a significant concern in the older adult population. Loneliness has been associated with old age also because of multiple losses that may occur. These include loss of health, social status, friends, and spouse. It has a harmful effect on health and well being. Hence it becomes the responsibility of children and family to prevent loneliness and isolation among old age.

KEYWORDS: Old Age, Loneliness, Isolation

INTRODUCTION
The population of older people is growing rapidly, especially those aged above 85. The proportion of older people living alone is also mounting fast. Traditional modes of family support have declined. People in urban areas marry later, and have fewer children than in the past. More and more children are migrating in search of better opportunities, leaving their old folk behind. Also, people are increasingly making their homes further from their original communities.

BACKGROUND
Despite its many obvious advantages, physical/emotional security and economies of scale being the more obvious ones, the joint family system is collapsing. Forget living in harmony with extended families, today we find it difficult to tolerate our own parents. Thousands of elderly citizens are dumped and left alone to die in our country. In the 1981 census, the average number of people per Indian household was 5.55. By 1991 it had declined to 5.1. India is aging rapidly. Its old are growing older because of increasing life expectancy and the younger generation is not around to witness it. The problem is getting more acute, as many elderly folk stay behind, while their children move out in pursuit of careers. In metros, there are thousands of NRI parents living alone in flats, with their children and grand children
living abroad. Currently it is estimated that 11% of India’s elderly live alone or with non relatives. By 2025, it is estimated that 25% of those over 60 and 40% of those over 75 are likely to be living alone\(^1\). Ten million people in the UK are over 65 years old. The latest projections are for 5.5 million more older people by 2030 and the number will have nearly doubled to around 19 million by 2050. Within this total, the number of very old people grows even faster. There are currently 3 million people aged more than 80 years and this is projected to almost double by 2030, and reach 8 million by 2050\(^2\).

**STARTLING FACTS\(^1\)**
According to the survey conducted by “Help Age India” in 2008 it was revealed that,

- 12% older people said no one cares they exist.
- 13% feel trapped within their own homes.
- 21% feel more or less alone and socialize with very few people, including their own children.
- The most severely isolated and lonely are people over 75, particularly older women, especially those who are widowed and living alone.
- Older people with low incomes and with a long-term illness are almost 3 times more likely to feel isolated as older people in general (31% compared to 10%).

**3 main factors that contributed to isolation**

- 26% felt loneliness sets in after retirement.
- 41% said they began to feel lonely after their spouse passed away.
- 33% said they felt alone after their children became independent and moved away.

**FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ISOLATION OF OLDER PEOPLE\(^1\)**

- Retirement
- Illness or disability
- The death of a spouse
- Migration or shifting away of children
- Poverty
- Lack of access to social opportunities.

According to the cross sectional study conducted in urban and rural areas of Chandigarh to assess the health problems and why do aged feel lonely, it was found that out of total 361 aged persons of Chandigarh 311(86.1%) persons reported one or more health related complaints. Loneliness was more prevalent among persons who lived alone (92.2%) as compared to those who lived with their spouse (58.9%)\(^3\).
According to the research conducted in Oct 2012 by PCP 500 people over the age of 75 were interviewed across England, Scotland and Wales. In this study revealed that 15% of respondents aged 85 years & older in the study live more than 40 miles apart from their children & 12% respondents living alone live more than 40 miles from their children. 17% of people aged 75 to 79 years say that they feel lonely: this figure rises to over 63% in those aged 80 and over.

NEED FOR TACKLING LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

Loneliness and social isolation can affect everyone but older people are particularly vulnerable after the loss of friends and family, reduced mobility or limited income. It is estimated that among those aged over 65, between 5 and 16 per cent report loneliness and 12 per cent feel isolated. These figures are likely to increase due to demographic developments including family dispersal and the ageing of the population. For example, the number of people aged more than 80 is expected to treble in the next 20 years, while those aged over 90 will double.

Studies show that acute loneliness and social isolation can impact gravely on wellbeing and quality of life, with demonstrable negative health effects. Being lonely has a significant and lasting negative effect on blood pressure. It is also associated with depression (either as a cause or as a consequence) and higher rates of mortality. Loneliness and social isolation is a public health issue, with research highlighting the influence of social relationships on the risk of death as comparable to well-established risks such as smoking and alcohol consumption.

DIFFERENT WAYS TO HELP SENIORS TO AVOID ISOLATION

- Make transportation available
- Promote sense of purpose
- Encourage religious seniors to maintain attendance at their places of worship
- Give a senior a pet or plant to take care of
- Encourage a positive body image
- Encourage hearing and vision tests
- Make adaptive technologies available
- Notify neighbours
- Encourage dining with others
• Give extra support to seniors who have recently lost a spouse
• Identification of socially isolated seniors by health professionals

RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

• Exploring and documenting the experiences of different ethnicities with loneliness and social isolation
• Exploring and documenting the interaction of loneliness with poverty
• Exploring and documenting the experiences of individuals whose spouses have a disability or physical or cognitive decline.
• Identifying the specific health enhancing elements of social support.

DISCUSSION
As the proportion of the elderly in global population grows, it becomes increasingly essential to understand age-related changes and issues. For many elderly people, social isolation and loneliness are becoming the main obstacles for them to enjoy the rest of their life. Analyzing the relationship between social isolation, loneliness and well-being not only deepens the knowledge of the three phenomena, but also provides an overview of how the three phenomena interact with each other.

CONCLUSION
Social isolation and loneliness have many additive risk factors. Because of current social and demographic trends an increasing amount of seniors may be at risk of being socially isolated or lonely. Given the potential harmful effects of social isolation and loneliness in seniors it is recommended that governments at all levels work to reduce these deleterious effects.

REFERENCES


