Assessment and Practical Solutions for Social Connectedness within Clinical and Community Settings

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Definitions (related but different)

**SOCIAL ISOLATION (~25% ages 65+)
• Objective measure
  • Lack of social contacts
  • Limited interaction with others

• Associated with
  • Social network, family/household structure
  • Mobility, impairments, transportation, etc.

**LONELINESS (~43% ages 65+)
• Subjective measure
  • Feeling isolated or alone
  • Lacking companionship
  • Feeling misunderstood or of limited value

• Associated with
  • Social network, family/household structure
  • Quality and meaningful interactions

**SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS
Interactions: inclusion, support, cohesion, integration

Risk Factors

• Social disconnectedness can impact all individuals
  • Ages, backgrounds, socioeconomic status levels, and geographic regions

• Known risk factors include:
  • Ages 18 to 50
  • Household size and structure
  • Employment status
  • Impairments (mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive)
  • Complex chronic disease profiles
  • Transportation
  • Technology access
  • Marginalized identity
  • Language and communication barriers

• Associated with
  • Premature mortality
  • Negative physical, mental, psychological effects
  • Health-related behaviors

COVID-19 Social Connectivity Paradox

SOCIAL ISOLATION RISK
LONELINESS RISK
CONNECTIVITY RISK

COVID-19 INFECTION RISK

LEVEL OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

Measuring Risk

- Social connectedness is a complex issue with a multitude of contributing factors
  - Impact millions of adults
  - Often ‘invisible’ and unidentified
  - May present differently based on setting

- Social isolation, loneliness, disconnectedness, social network, social support, social resources…
  - Depression, anxiety, negative affect, optimism, resilience

- Important to identify the goals and aims of an initiative, then match with the most appropriate measure(s) to accomplish objectives

Source: 2020 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) report: “Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System.” (originally from Valtorta et al., 2016)
Contextualizing Risk & Solutions

• Offering appropriate solutions requires an understanding of the issue(s)

• Prioritize what is important and who should be assessed
  • Varies by setting and client base
  • Varies by organization, staff, services provided
  • Varies by partners and referral sources

• “Love/Hate” relationship with data
  • Balance value/meaning with burdens
  • Leverage existing sources and partners
  • Data sharing and feedback
Coordinating Tailored Solutions

• Common issues across settings/organizations
  • Increased risk because of COVID-19
  • No ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution
  • Competing demands (organization and client)
  • Need to diversify offerings (bike, swim, jog)

• Above the surface
  • Lighter touch
  • Greater reach
  • First step (gateway)

• Below the surface
  • Heavier lift
  • Behind the scenes
  • More activation energy

• Harmonized selection and implementation of complementary solutions (social care coordination)
**distanced connectivity** noun

distanced con·nec·tiv·i·ty | ′di-stən(t)st (ˌ)kä-, nek-′ti-və-tē

1 a : Efforts to maintain and repair the fractured or diminished structural, functional, and quality aspects of *physical* social connectedness through the telephone, computer, or other smart devices.

1 b : Innovative and practical solutions to foster **safe** and meaningful interactions among older adults and others in their network(s).

Distanced Connectivity Examples

• Get friendly phone calls from a peer (wellness and reassurance)
• Attend virtual programs about health and wellness
• Join a support group
• Talk with a trained professional
• Attend social clubs and activities (also faith)
• Volunteer to help others
• Distribute pre-populated tablets with Wi-Fi

• **Opportunities**
  • Safe
  • Overcome geospatial barriers
  • Convenience of participation and expertise
  • Low cost (growing market)

• **Challenges**
  • Digital divide
  • Technological literacy
  • Punctuated
  • Unknown impact relative to face-to-face programs and services
Current Efforts & Models

• Emerging feasible and effective approaches (Williams et al., 2021)
  • Educational programs
  • Befriending interventions & social facilitation
  • Leisure/skill development
  • Animal interventions
  • Health and social care provision
  • Psychological therapy

• Array of measures, aims, and objectives
  • UCLA Loneliness Scale
  • De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale
  • Campaign to End Loneliness Measurement Tool
  • Upstream Social Interaction Risk Screener (U-SIRS)
  • Duke Social Support Index (DSSI)
  • Berkman-Syme Social Network Index
  • Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ)
  • Animal interventions
  • Health and social care provision
  • Psychological therapy

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<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Solution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Area Agency on Aging (AAA)</td>
<td>Staff/EBP Leaders</td>
<td>Wellness calls, virtual EBPs, tablets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>CHW</td>
<td>Case management with community and faith partners</td>
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<td>Community-based organizations (CBO)</td>
<td>Staff/Volunteers</td>
<td>Virtual programming/virtual congregate meals</td>
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<td>University</td>
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<td>Assisted Living</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Mass screening and care referrals/tablets</td>
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Making Tailored Connections

“NO WRONG DOOR”

- Utilize “no wrong door” system
- Conduct robust screening for social isolation risk
- Utilize community and faith services to make tailored connections
Distanced Connectivity Recommendations

- Maintaining client and staff safety is paramount
- Data are important to guide our efforts and document successes
- Identify ways to introduce meaningful interactions in different settings
  - Incorporate telephonic or internet-based services and programs
- No need to ‘recreate the wheel’
  - Assess effectiveness of existing interventions for ‘unintended benefits’
- Share successes and lessons learned

Resources for getting connected at safe distances during COVID-19

- Administration for Community Living: https://acl.gov/COVID-19
- AARP Foundation: https://connect2affect.org/ and https://committoconnect.org/
Thank you!

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