

LONELINESS AND ELDER ABUSE IN OLDER POPULATIONS

-INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 'ELDER
ABUSE, AGEISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS:
INNOVATIVE APPROACHES'-

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LONELINESS

“Who knows what true loneliness is - not the conventional word, but the naked terror? To the lonely themselves it wears a mask.”

Joseph Conrad

WHAT IS LONELINESS

- ◉ An inherent human condition, but with serious impact on human life
- ◉ Loneliness defined as
 - ‘a subjective negative feeling associated with a perceived lack of a wider social network (social loneliness) or the absence of a specific desired companion (emotional loneliness)’ (Valtorta, 2012)
- ◉ The subjective feeling of not being connected to others, or of not having the desired or expected qualitative relationships
- ◉ Can feel lonely being surrounded by people
- ◉ Associated with social isolation
- ◉ Experiencing loneliness at some moments of our lives is normal, e.g after a loss of a significant other
- ◉ Review shows that for 15-30% of the population, loneliness becomes chronic (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010)

PREVALENCE OF LONELINESS IN OLDER POPULATION



- Research shows that loneliness is experienced at least sometimes by:
 - 80% of persons aged under 18
 - 40% of persons over 65 (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010)
- Decreases for middle age, but increases for those over 70 years old
- Among adults living in community and aged 65 and over: rates of severe loneliness of between 2% and 16% were reported
- At any one given time up to 32% of individuals aged over 55 feel lonely
- Common in long-term care, although studies are very few (one study: more than half of nursing home residents without cognitive impairment reported feeling lonely - Drageset, Kirkevold & Espehaug, 2011)
- Is increasing for very old age:
 - 20 and 30% of middle-aged and young-old persons
 - 50% of those aged 80 or over

(De Jong Gierveld, 1998; Perlman & Peplau, 1984; Pinquart & Sörensen, 2001)



PREVALENCE OF LONELINESS IN OLDER POPULATION

Country	Prevalence of loneliness in old age (%)
Ireland	10 (O'Connell, Chin, Cunningham, Lawlor, 2003)
Finland	33 (Rokach, Orzeck&Neto, 2001)
England	5-16 (Qereshi & Walker, 1989)
Singapore	11.9 (Lim & Kua, 2011)
China	28 (Luo & Waite, 2014)
US	13 (Abramson & Silverstein, 2006)
Australia	7 - severe loneliness 31.5 - lonely sometimes (Victor, Scambler, Bond & Bowling, 2000)
New Zealand	52 - moderately or severely lonely (Yeung, Cooper & Dale, 2015)

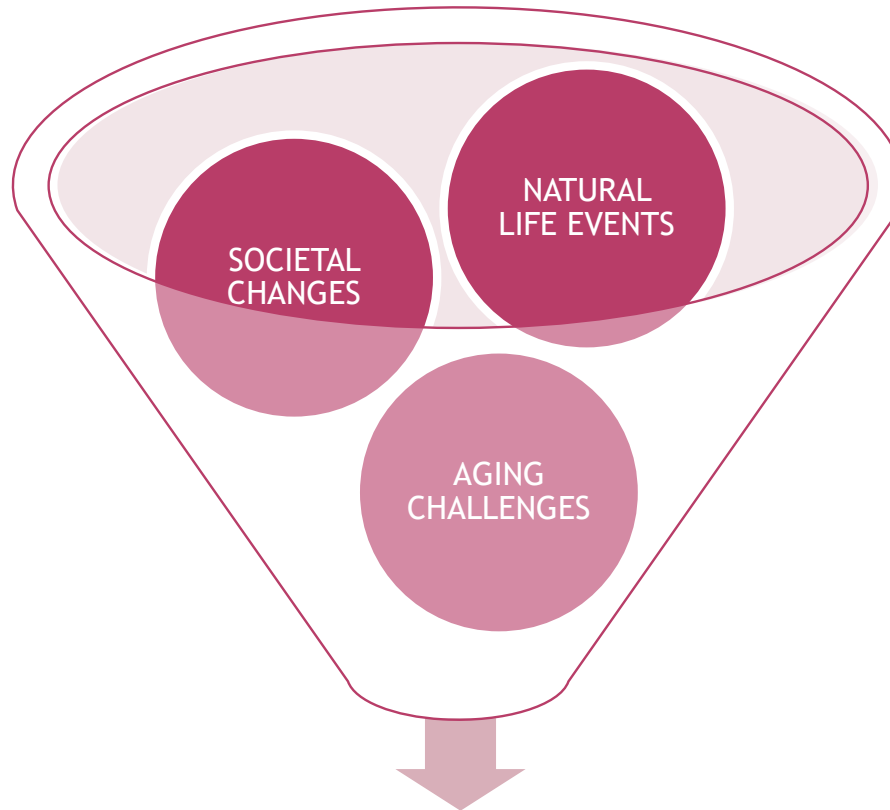
CONSEQUENCES OF LONELINESS IN OLD AGE

- ◉ Has negative effects on health status
 -  predictor for morbidity and mortality
- ◉ Increases the risk of Alzheimer's Disease (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010)
- ◉ Is also a risk factor for impaired cognitive performance and cognitive decline over time (Crooks Lubben, Petitti, Little, & Chiu, 2008; Ertel, Glymour, Berkman, 2008; Maki et al., 2013; Seeman Lusignolo, Albert, & Berkman, 2001)
- ◉ Cognitive decline  loneliness

CONSEQUENCES OF LONELINESS IN OLD AGE

- ◉ Decreases Quality Of Life and well-being (Perissinotto, Cenzer, Covinsky, 2012)
- ◉ Is a risk factor for depression (Adams, Sanders & Auth, 2010) and is associated with low functional status(Perissinotto, Cenzer, Covinsky, 2012)
- ◉ Lonely older people are less able to function properly in their daily life  restrictions in physical roles and regression in physical health  perceived emotional and physical health affected

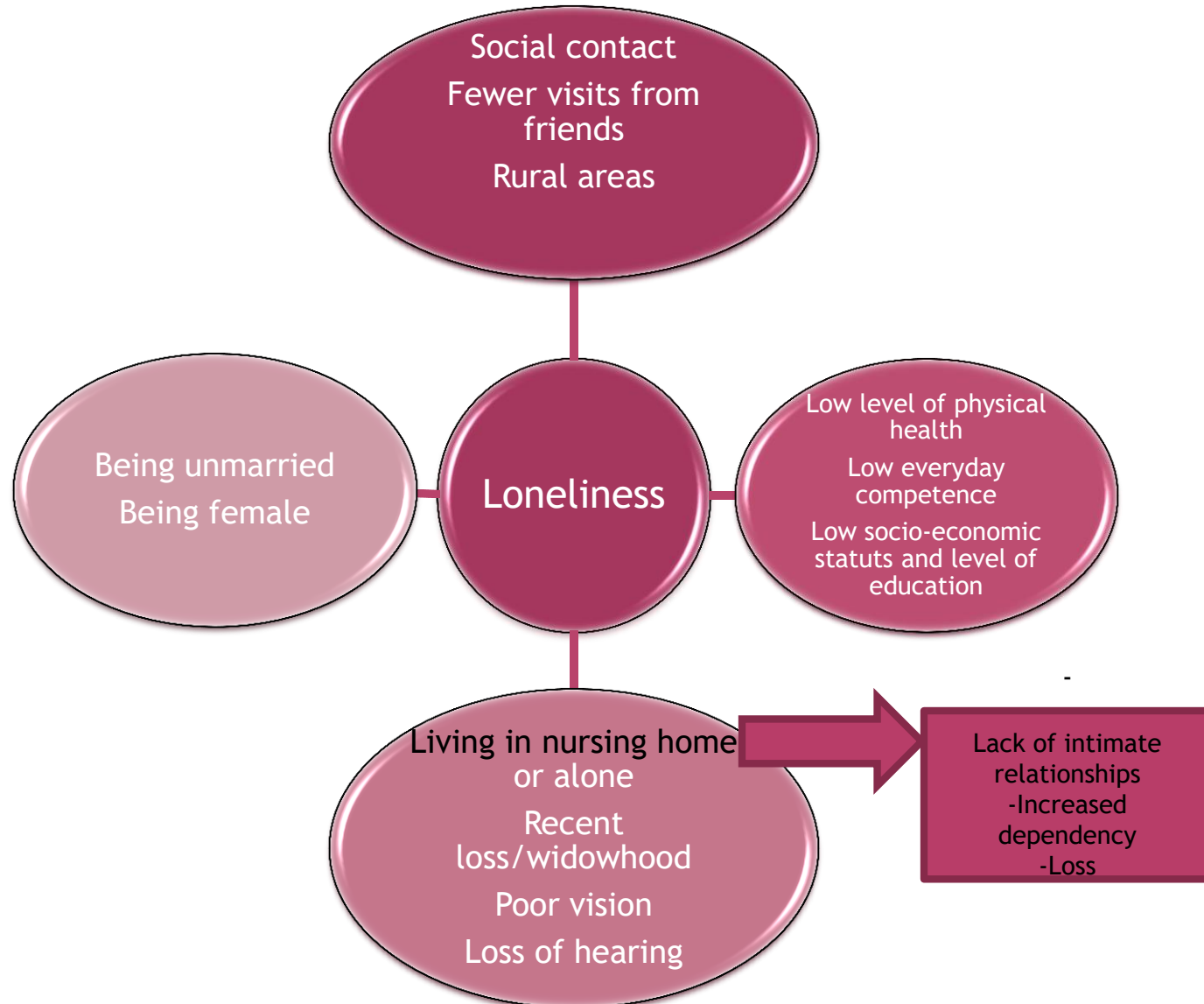
PREDICTORS OF LONELINESS IN OLD AGE



LONELINESS

- subjective experience
- lower in societies with traditional structure

PREDICTORS OF LONELINESS IN OLD AGE



LONELINESS AND ELDER ABUSE

- Loneliness is a risk factor for elder abuse (Dong, 2007; Cooper, Selwood & Livingston, 2008)
- In a research carried out on Chinese older women (Dong, 2009), every 1-point increase in the loneliness score was associated with 44% increased risk for mistreatment
- After adding the interaction of social support, loneliness was no longer associated with increased risk for mistreatment
- Greater social support, and perceived social support, impacts on loneliness as a risk factor for the mistreatment in this study

LONELINESS AND ELDER ABUSE

- ◉ 2 factors connected to an increased risk of elder abuse:
 - perceived social alienation from the community
 - loss of friends (von Heydrich, Schiamberg, & Chee, 2012)
- ◉ Low social support increases the likelihood of elder mistreatment (Acierno et al., 2010), carrying also financial costs - 12 million dollars annually (Dong & Simmons, 2011)
- ◉ Living with a caregiver, particularly with a spouse, in an isolated dyad, is also associated with an increased risk of abuse for some vulnerable older adults (Beach et al., 2005; Cooney et al., 2006; Paveza et al., 1992)
- ◉ Due to lack of social support, socially isolated older adults are also highly vulnerable to financial abuse

WHY IS LONELINESS A RISK FACTOR FOR ELDER ABUSE?

Social support is very low or absent, no confident/close person to report elder abuse to or talk about acts of mistreatment

LONELINESS

Enhances the older person's vulnerability, leading to potential financial abuse

LONELINESS

Enhances the older person's vulnerability in terms of physical and mental health, determining dependence and lack of resources to stand up for own rights, opening the way to abuse

LONELINESS

INTERVENTIONS ON LONELINESS

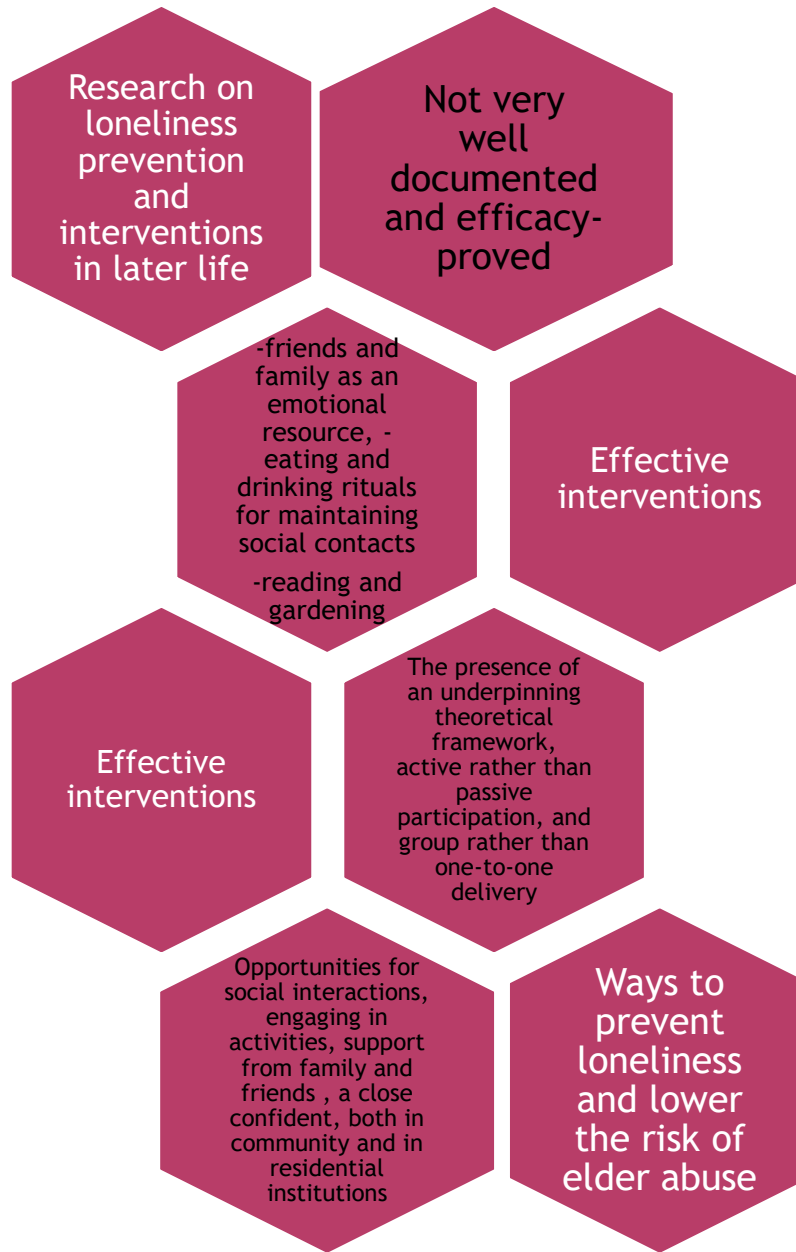
Enhancing social skills

Increasing opportunities for social interactions

Providing social support

Addressing maladaptive social cognitions

INTERVENTIONS ON LONELINESS



CONCLUSIONS

- Loneliness - a public health issue for later life, with serious consequences on physical and mental health of older people
- Being also a risk factor for elder abuse, loneliness needs to be further investigated, in what would be its mechanisms, causes, and effective ways of reducing or eliminating it
- Reaching older people at risk of loneliness and social isolation, providing social support and interaction - essential for reducing loneliness and elder abuse in old age

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**THANK YOU FOR
YOUR
ATTENTION!**