

Tackling loneliness requires a new approach that addresses societal inequalities

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A review into loneliness inequalities conducted by some of the U.K.'s leading scholars in the field has highlighted key social and societal factors that lead to loneliness inequalities.

Significantly, this departure from viewing [loneliness](#) as an individual problem to be treated by interventions such as befriending services or behavioral therapy suggests that loneliness could be improved by policy changes that reduce inequalities.

Policy makers and public services across the U.K. have placed considerable importance on tackling loneliness—however, to do this effectively, it is vital to understand inequalities in the experience of loneliness.

While loneliness is something anyone can experience, it is now clear that it doesn't affect all members of society equally. Indeed, research evidence shows overwhelmingly that some groups are more likely to experience loneliness than others.

The review has been written for the Wales Center for Public Policy by Professor Pam Qualter from The University of Manchester, Professor Manuela Barreto from The University of Exeter and Dr. David Doyle from Amsterdam University Medical Center. It summarizes evidence from Wales, the U.K. and around the world about which groups in society disproportionately experience loneliness—these include racially minoritized and LGBT+ groups, migrants, disabled people, those in poor physical or [mental health](#), caregivers, [unemployed people](#), and people living in poverty.

The review brings together new international evidence on the wider societal and structural factors which may contribute to loneliness inequalities—helping to explain why marginalized groups are disproportionately affected. Its key findings include:

- Loneliness affects some groups in society more than others, especially those who face multiple forms of disadvantage
- Differences from dominant society can lead to increased

loneliness

- Loneliness is often a fact of life for [disabled people](#)
- Marginalized groups are more likely to experience [social exclusion](#), bullying and discrimination which lead to poor psychological well-being and increased loneliness
- Six societal conditions identified that increase loneliness disparities: community attitudes, public policies, demographic diversity, physical and [social environment](#) and area deprivation
- Reducing social exclusion and valuing difference must play a key part in addressing loneliness inequalities—rather than focusing on individual deficits

Dr. Hannah Durrant, senior research fellow at the Wales Center for Public Policy, says, "This groundbreaking [review](#) brings together—for the first time—an impressive body of international [research evidence](#) on loneliness inequalities, and the interpersonal and structural factors that drive them. It complements our previous research which found that people who already face multiple forms of disadvantage are the most likely to be lonely.

"Understanding risk of loneliness in this way means that if we want to tackle it, we need to tackle the prejudices and structural factors that produce inequalities, and focus on the role that people, policy and public services play in making our societies and communities more equal. The good news is that [policy makers](#) and public services across Wales and beyond have placed considerable importance on tackling loneliness. This report provides new insight on what we need to do to achieve that goal."

"The report highlights that loneliness is not equally distributed in the population, emerging more frequently among those who are marginalized" said Professor Manuela Barreto, the report's lead author. "This social patterning of loneliness makes it clear that we need to go beyond a focus on individual deficits to understand how loneliness

emerges.

"Relatedly, we need to complement solutions focused on addressing individual deficits, like psychological therapy and befriending services, with interventions that address deficits in communities, especially when it comes to ensure communities are genuinely inclusive."

More information: Loneliness Inequalities Evidence Review.
www.wcpp.org.uk/publication/loneliness-inequalities-evidence-review/

Provided by University of Manchester

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