Professor Vivian Lou

Loneliness and Aging in Hong Kong: Call for Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Abstract

This presentation explores the escalating issue of loneliness among the older adults in Hong Kong. Globally, the population aged 60+ is projected to double by 2050, with those aged 65+ set to comprise one-sixth of the world's population. Hong Kong mirrors this trend, with 21.65% of its population aged 65+ in 2021, projected to rise to 36% by 2046. Loneliness, a subjective feeling of social disconnection, is prevalent, affecting 20-34% of older adults worldwide. In Hong Kong, studies indicate that 29-68.3% of elderly individuals experience loneliness. The impact of loneliness on health reveals a 31% increased risk of dementia and a 26% higher mortality rate among lonely older adults. Specific risk factors in Hong Kong include living alone, children migrating overseas, digital illiteracy, and high-density housing, which calls for interdisciplinary collaboration. The presentation also highlights interventions to mitigate loneliness, such as narrative therapy interventions, which have shown promise in reducing loneliness in short-term trials. In conclusion, it underscores the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and policy initiatives in addressing this complex issue. Future research directions include focusing on marginalized groups, developing new detection tools, and integrating health services to create a supportive environment for the elderly.

Professor Edmond Choi

Loneliness Across Borders: A Comparative Study of Hong Kongers in Hong Kong and the UK Diaspora

Abstract

The socio-political upheaval in Hong Kong in 2019 triggered a significant emigration wave, with the United Kingdom (UK) emerging as a primary destination due to the British National Overseas (BNO) visa scheme. This policy enables eligible Hong Kong residents and their dependents to relocate, work, and eventually attain citizenship in the UK. According to UK Home Office statistics, over 150,000 Hong Kongers had resettled in the UK by the end of 2024, marking one of the most rapid and sizable migrations in recent history.

Migration involves profound life-course disruptions, including occupational shifts, the breakdown and reconstruction of social support networks, and adaptation to new environments. These challenges can lead to psychosocial difficulties, with loneliness being a critical concern. This study adopts a comparative framework to examine loneliness and psychological well-being among two groups: Hong Kongers remaining in their home society and those in the UK diaspora.

Using preliminary survey data, this presentation analyzes the psychological well-being of Hong Kongers who migrated under the BNO scheme, identifying key factors associated with loneliness. Additionally, the study explores the broader implications of loneliness on mental health outcomes and quality of life.

Professor Tarani Chandola

Loneliness, Social Isolation and Stress Biomarkers

Abstract

The effect of social isolation on increased mortality risk is more than double that of loneliness. However, much of research on the underlying biological mechanisms focusses on loneliness as a chronic stressor in relation to the Hypothalamic–Pituitary–Adrenal (HPA) axis functioning, with considerable inconsistency in the reported associations. Dysregulation of the HPA axis functioning is likely to be found at the extremes of the cortisol distribution, which necessitates the use of statistical methods that go beyond estimating effects at average levels of cortisol.

This study examined the associations between loneliness and social isolation and HPA axis dysregulation among 3,678 older adults in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (wave 6). There was a diverging pattern of associations between social isolation/loneliness and hair cortisol. Social isolation was positively associated with cortisol at the highest levels of the cortisol distribution while loneliness was negatively associated with cortisol at the highest levels of the cortisol distribution. Moreover, it was the lonely older adults who were not depressed who had lower levels of cortisol, in contrast to the lonely but depressed older adults who had the highest levels of cortisol. Social isolation was also associated with greater levels of hair cortisone at the highest levels of the cortisone distribution. Additionally, social isolation interacted with cortisol resulting in higher levels of inflammation (C-Reactive Protein) for older adults with higher levels of cortisol who were socially isolated.

Social isolation, rather than loneliness, is associated with HPA-axis dysregulation at the highest levels of the distribution of hair cortisol and cortisone. There was some evidence of glucocorticoid resistance leading to greater inflammation among older adults who were socially isolated with HPA axis dysregulation. Future research on loneliness among older adults should consider loneliness as an epiphenomenon, rather than a direct target of intervention to reduce mortality risk.

Professor Roger Patulny

How Men Experience and Manage Social Connection and Loneliness: Six Key Themes

Abstract

There are concerns that lonely and disconnected men are turning towards more hegemonic and even toxic masculine forms. It is timely to reexamine how men navigate masculinity, intimacy and loneliness. Professor Roger Patulny will present findings from survey research on Australian men's emotions alongside findings from a scoping review on masculinity, social disconnection and loneliness.

Important themes to emerge from this research suggest men experience and manage loneliness in the context of needing to: (i) display strength and emotional control; (i) appear independent, successful and benevolent; (iii) be a good partner, provider and family man; (iv) undertake meaningful physical and public activities; (v) engage in appropriate digital interactions; (vi) navigate conflicting forms of contemporary masculinity. The findings suggest the need for gender-sensitive, age appropriate, group-activity initiatives that promote male socialization, and support educational programs that work with a range of masculinities, ages, institutions, role models, and gender relations.

<u>Dr. Aaron Hames</u>

Culture and the Lonely Self

Abstract

Loneliness is commonly viewed as the experience of distress in relation to a gap between desired and actual social life. Regardless of the degree of people's awareness or ability to articulate the condition, loneliness has effects on health, sometimes significant. In this model, culture appears as a force that influences expectations as well as a structuring factor of social life. This talk considers another aspect of culture: the notion of the self. Using examples from older individuals in Japan, Dr. Aaron Hames suggests that the degree of orientation of the self toward others influences the experience and potential perniciousness of loneliness. In the absence or lack of fulfilling relationships, an individual must confront a threat to the nature of their own self.

Dr. Chan Kai Tai

Loneliness is a Universal Human Experience

Abstract

In human history, loneliness might be exacerbated by the emergence of alienation in the process of urbanisation and industrialisation. Across the millennium, when digitalization has infiltrated in into our society and culture, the impact of loneliness to youth mental health could be more complex than ever. In particular, the association of excessive digital item use and boredom as well as paradoxical experience of physical isolation and digital presence might further complicate the clinical picture. This talk is to visit the concept of loneliness in an interdisciplinary perspective, followed by conceptualisation of loneliness in the contemporary sense, and subsequently to reexamine clinical practice in youth mental health related to loneliness.

<u>Ms. Melissa Chiu</u>

Revisiting Loneliness in Youth Mental Health: Innovative Approaches from the JC LevelMind Initiative

Abstract

Hong Kong youth are experiencing unprecedented levels of loneliness, particularly evident in post-pandemic observations. Our service data study reveals intensifying patterns of social withdrawal, amplified by academic pressure, complex family dynamics, and urban isolation. These factors create a unique landscape where traditional support systems struggle to meet emerging needs.

From frontline experience at youth centers, it observes increasing cases of school refusal and social withdrawal, often masking deeper emotional struggles. Young people present with trauma manifestations stemming from recent social events and pandemic isolation. Cultural barriers and stigma continue to challenge help-seeking behaviors, especially among those most isolated.

The JC LevelMind initiative responds through innovative community-based solutions, demonstrating promising outcomes through her signature programs. The Loneliness Museum Project has successfully engaged youth through creative expression, while our Youth-to-Youth Advocacy program builds peer support networks. Community engagement strategies show that when young people are empowered as active participants, they develop stronger social connections and improved mental wellbeing.

Ms. Gemma María García Calderó

Loneliness During COVID-19 and Beyond: Preliminary Insights from the INCLUDE Study in Switzerland

Abstract

It is widely acknowledged that the Covid-19 pandemic, and successive Coronavirus-related restriction measures disrupted social interactions, increasing social isolation and loneliness. It is known that not all population groups were equally affected by the social restriction measures. There are some at-risk factors which predisposed certain groups to suffer more from loneliness, for instance, being young, having previous mental health issues, having a chronic illness, being unemployed or migrant. Loneliness prevention and alleviation was not foreseen in Pandemic Management Plans (PMPs) and there is a need to inform how should loneliness be included when planning pandemic public health measures. The INCLUDE project, aims to contribute towards this goal through its mixed methods design. First, it provides an overview of both the existing qualitative studies of young population's loneliness experiences during Covid-19 and the effectiveness of different loneliness interventions. Second, it affords a close understanding of the needs of the Swiss context by means of a) a city survey of existing loneliness interventions, b) in-depth interviews with people from at-risk groups who experienced loneliness during Covid-19, c) focus groups with relevant stakeholders who accompanied at-risk population during that time, and d) a national representative survey about the acceptability of different pandemic-compatible loneliness interventions. The results of the project will be triangulated in order to provide suitable recommendations for integrating loneliness in future pandemic planning.