The Effectiveness and Suitability of Interventions for Social Isolation and Loneliness for Older People from Minoritised Ethnic Groups Living in the UK

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Background & Objectives

- Social isolation and loneliness are a public health concern and are costly to individuals and society.
- The intersection of age and ethnicity with the adverse outcomes of health and socio-economic inequalities, racism and negative migration-related experiences places older minoritised people in positions of vulnerability to social isolation and loneliness.
- Little is known about older minoritised people’s lived experiences of social isolation and loneliness and the types of interventions that would reduce social isolation and loneliness in this population.
- With the number of older minoritised people rising faster than that of older white people, more research is needed.

This study adopted a mixed methods approach, informed by an intersectionality framework, conducted in four iterative phases to:

- Understand quantitatively whether social isolation and loneliness is likely to be different among older people from minoritised ethnic groups compared to older white people.
- Understand qualitatively how social isolation and loneliness is experienced by older minoritised people.
- Use this information to understand their needs.
- Review interventions on social isolation and loneliness for older people.
- Assess the size of the gulf between what older minoritised people consider that they need and what is offered or identified as important.

Methods & Findings

**Phase 1: Quantitative Exploration**

- **Aim:** To explore ethnic variations in indicators of social isolation & loneliness.
- **Data & Analysis:** Logistic regression of data from Understanding Society: UK Longitudinal Household study.
- **Results:** Compared to older White people, older minoritised people were more likely to report having fewer close friends and less likely to have their friends living locally.

**Phase 2: Qualitative Exploration**

- **Aim:** To explore the social networks and ties of older minoritised people living in the UK.
- **Data & Analysis:** Pen portrait analysis of interviews with ten older minoritised people.
- **Findings:** Community-based groups may have a key role to play in preventing loneliness & isolation in older minoritised people.

**Phase 3A: Systematic Review (I)**

- **Aim:** To assess the effectiveness of community-based group interventions (CBGIs) for social isolation & loneliness in older people.
- **Data & Analysis:** Meta-analysis of outcome evaluations.
- **Findings:** The evidence of effectiveness was unclear; some studies reported a positive impact and others reported a negative impact on loneliness & social isolation.

**Phase 3B: Systematic Review (II)**

- **Aim:** To assess factors associated with (non)effective CBGIs for social isolation & loneliness in older people.
- **Data & Analysis:** Narrative synthesis, ICA and QCA using data from Process & Outcome evaluations.
- **Findings:** The most effective interventions adopt cognitive approaches to reducing loneliness, recruit participants with shared characteristics & provide participants with opportunities to connect.

**Phase 4A: Re-use of Qualitative Data**

- **Aim:** To explore older minoritised people’s preferences and positioning in relation to social participation.
- **Data & analysis:** Dialogic/Performance analysis of older minoritised people’s narratives.
- **Findings:** Older minoritised people find shared characteristics and social interaction important and resist narratives of dependency. Loneliness is identified as dynamic and influenced by wider societal processes.

**Phase 4B: Cross-Case Synthesis**

- **Aim:** To assess whether community-based group interventions meet the needs of older minoritised people.
- **Data & Analysis:** Comparative analysis of findings from Phase 3a and Phase 4b.
- **Findings:** For CBGIs to be suitable & acceptable for older minoritised people they need to be tailored to the aspects of their identities that they value, & provide opportunities to connect based on these aspects of identity & activities that they find meaningful.

Contributions of This Study

- Provides a holistic understanding of social isolation & loneliness in older minoritised people living in the UK.
- Augments the sparse evidence base of social isolation & loneliness in older minoritised people living in the UK.
- Provides evidence that challenges widely held stereotypical assumptions about this population.
- Illustrates the value of using a mixed-methods approach informed by an intersectionality framework which allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the complex individual and societal-level processes that intersect to produce vulnerability to social isolation and loneliness for some older minoritised people while reducing this for others.

- Offers practical information, based on their accounts of their experiences, about what is required of CBGI interventions to meet their needs.
- Can enable policymakers, practitioners, and interventionists to design and implement effective future interventions for social isolation and loneliness.
- Illustrates how the gap between research and practice can be bridged for those inside and outside academia.

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