

## SOCIAL ISOLATION, ITS IMPACT ON THE ELDERLY AND THEIR SUSCEPTIBILITY TO ELDER ABUSE

June 14, 2018  
21<sup>st</sup> Annual Elder Abuse Conference  
World Elder Abuse Awareness  
Mary Anne Croissant

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### What We Will Be Discussing Today

- What is Social Isolation?
- What Leads People to Be Socially Isolated?
- What are the Medical and Psychological Outcomes for Individuals Who are Socially Isolated?
- How are Older, Socially Isolated Individuals More Susceptible to Elder Abuse?
- What are Some Possible Solutions?

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### We Are Social Beings

- "Man is by nature a social animal" Aristotle
- "We human beings are social beings. We come into the world as the result of others' actions. We survive here in dependence on others. Whether we like it or not, there is hardly a moment of our lives when we do not benefit from others' activities. For this reason, it is hardly surprising that most of our happiness arises in the context of our relationships with others." Dalai Lama XIV
- Happiness is about meaningful social relationships. Robert Waldinger, Harvard Longitudinal Study.

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### What is Social Isolation Like For People?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5EsxU84ay4>

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### How would you define social isolation?

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### Defining Social Isolation

- Social isolation can be defined structurally as the absence of social interactions, contacts, and relationships with family and friends, with neighbors on an individual level, and with "society at large" on a broader level. (NYS APS)
- Social isolation: the voluntary or involuntary absence of having contact with others. (Psychology Dictionary.)

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## Defining Social Isolation

- Social isolation has been defined as, “the objective absence or paucity of contacts and interactions between an older person and a social network” (Cattan, White, Bond, & Learmouth, 2005)
- Social isolation is, “a state in which the individual lacks a sense of belonging socially, lacks engagement with others, has a minimal number of social contacts and they are deficient in fulfilling and quality relationships” (Alspach, 2013)

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## How Widespread Is the Problem of Social Isolation?

- An estimated one in five adults over age 50—at least 8 million— are affected by isolation.
- 27-28% People Over 65 Live Alone (11 to 12 Million People)
- Prolonged isolation can be as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.
- Social Isolation is Like Chronic Stress

“Framework for Isolation in Adults Over 50,” AARP Foundation (May 2012), Perspectives on Psychological Science, Holt-Lunstad-10(2), 227-237 (2015)

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## How Do Individuals Become Social Isolated?

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### What Leads to Social Isolation?

- Living Alone
- Mobility or Sensory Impairment
- Major Life Transitions or Losses
- Low Income or Limited Financial Resources
- Being a Caregiver for Someone With a Serious Condition

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### What Leads to Social Isolation?

- Psychological or Cognitive Challenges
- Inadequate Social Support
- Rural, Unsafe and/or Inaccessible Neighborhoods
- Transportation Access Challenges
- Language Barriers
- Age, Racial, Ethnic, Sexual Orientation and/or Gender Identity Barriers

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### What Are the Medical and Psychological Outcomes For Individuals Who Are Socially Isolated?

- Increases the Risk of Heart Disease by 29% and Stroke by 32%
- Increases Systolic Blood Pressure
- Weakens Immune System
- Twice As Likely to Die Prematurely
- Increases Hospitalization and Re-Hospitalization

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### What Are the Medical and Psychological Outcomes For Individuals Who Are Socially Isolated?

- Can Result in Loneliness and Depression
- Increases the Risk of Death in the Next Seven Years
- Of Those Older Adults Studied 45% Had High Probability of Cognitive Decline
- More Likely to Need Long-Term Care

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Each year, Medicare spends an **average \$1,608** more for every socially isolated adult.



Source: Medicare Spending More on Socially Isolated Older Adults

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#socialisolation

**AARP**  
Not Over 65

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### SOCIAL ISOLATION

is associated with  
**\$6.7 Billion**  
in additional Medicare  
spending each year.



Source: Medicare Spending More on Socially Isolated Older Adults

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### Social Isolation and Elder Abuse

- Both living with someone else and being socially isolated have been associated with higher elder abuse rates.
- These seemingly contradictory findings may turn out to be related in that abusers who live with the elder have more opportunity to abuse and yet may be isolated from the larger community themselves or may seek to isolate the elders from others so that the abuse is not discovered.

<https://ncea.acl.gov/faq/index.html#faq4>

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### Social Isolation and Elder Abuse

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How and Why Are Elderly Social Isolated  
Individuals More Vulnerable to Abuse?

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### How and Why Are Elderly Social Isolated Individuals More Vulnerable to Abuse?

- More vulnerable to:
  - Financial Exploitation
  - Physical Abuse
  - Emotional/Psychological Abuse
  - Sexual Abuse

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### Possible Solutions

- Keep Adults Mobile
  - Exercise
  - Take a Class
  - Visit a Senior Center
  - Eat Well
  - Volunteer
  - Skype With Family and Friends
  - Let People Know That You Are Lonely

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### Possible Solutions

- Homebound
  - Invite People Over For Coffee
  - Schedule a Time Each Day, If Possible to Connect By Phone With Someone
  - Allow Others to Visit
  - Let People Know That You Are Lonely
  - Skype With Family and Friends

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### As a Community How Can We Address Social Isolation?

- See Something, Say Something
- Recognize Social Isolation
- Work Together To Identify Possible Solutions
  - Office for Aging
  - APS
  - AARP
  - Medical and Mental Health Providers
  - Senior Centers

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### As a Community How Can We Address Social Isolation?

- Identify and Attend to Older Individuals Who are Living Alone Who Have No Meaningful Social Contacts
- Support Programs Like Senior Companions – That Provide Meaningful Social Contacts
- Ask the Question – “Are You Lonely?”
- Be Prepared To Help

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### How Can You Help?

- Check On Elderly Neighbors, Family Members Regularly
- Ask Them If They Are Lonely
- Ask Them What Would Make Them Less Lonely
- See Your Neighbor, Family Member Regularly – Even if it Is Only a Brief Visit
- Invite Them To Take the Questionnaire

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Self-Assessment Checklist	
I live alone.	YES NO
I lose or talk to my family members once or more times per week.	NO YES
I see or talk to my friends once or more times per week.	NO YES
I provide daily care or support to a family member or friend who needs assistance with everyday tasks (such as preparing meals, providing transportation and grocery shopping).	YES NO
I generally have a ride or the transportation that I need to get where I need to go.	NO YES
It is difficult or impossible to leave my home without assistance.	YES NO
I feel that I make a meaningful contribution to the world or people around me.	NO YES

  

Self-Assessment Checklist (cont.)	
On a weekly basis I participate in social activities with family/friends or attend organized group activities, such as church, cultural performances, group meals, exercise classes, support groups, etc.	NO YES
I often feel that I lack companionship.	YES NO
I often feel left out.	YES NO
If I had a problem and needed help or advice, I know someone I could rely on.	NO YES
If I feel good news or an interesting story to tell, I know someone I could tell.	NO YES
Within the past year I have suffered a major loss or change like death of a loved one or retirement.	YES NO
Total answers circled in left column:	<input type="text"/>

**Scoring: 2** You are at risk for isolation. Talk to someone about the reasons for this. You may have some things you can do to help improve your situation.

**3 or more** You may already be experiencing the negative consequences of isolation. Regular communication with someone, regular participation in group activities or support groups, or regular visits to someone you would benefit from seeing, may be helpful in reducing your isolation and keeping the barriers that may be causing it from increasing.

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## How Can You Help?

- Senior Companions
  - Office for Aging:
- NYS Aging Services:
  - <https://aging.ny.gov>
- Campaign to Combat Isolation & Loneliness
  - by [CareLinX](#) | Dec 6, 2016 | [Caregivers, Family](#)
- Inter Faith Works – (315) 449-3552
  - Senior Companions
  - One-to-One

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## How Can You Help?

**CONTACT**

- (315) 251-0600
- OASIS
  - <https://www.oasisnet.org/Syracuse-NY>
- PACE
  - CNY (315) 452-5800
- Dunbar Center
  - <https://www.syracusedunbarcenter.org>
  - (315) 760-3155

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### Can You Be The One Who Makes A Difference?



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Don't get all weird about  
getting older!  
Our age is merely the number  
of years the world has been  
enjoying us!!

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## QUESTIONS?

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