LONELINESS AND ISOLATION

Presentation to Central Florida Presbytery by

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Scope

- Intro to POAMN
- Loneliness / Isolation
- Research
- Risk Factors
- Loneliness & Health

THE "WHO, WHAT, HOW" ON POAMN

- POAMN is 45 years old!
  - 1980: An office on Older Adult Ministry was added to the PC(USA) staff in Louisville
  - Does anyone know who this lady is?

Dr. Miriam Dunson

  - 2003: Downsizing within PC(USA) disbanded the office
  - An all-volunteer force assumed the reins and POAMN has continued ever since as a 501©3 but part of a collective under the PMA, Office of Christian Formation.

WHAT DOES POAMN DO?

- POAMN Offers:
  - OAM program ideas, videos, articles, newsletters and reflection topics that share wisdom from seasoned leaders.
  - An annual resource guide filled with information to help churches start/lead an OAM activity.
  - Webinars, learning cohorts (though OCF) and an OAM certificate course through Columbia Theological Seminary.
  - An annual, national 2-3 day conference
    - 2025's event is in Boulder CO next week!

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

- Become a member! Annual membership is:
  - $50 single. $75 couples, $125 organization (e.g. church, presbytery, care home….)
- Find/invite someone in your congregations to become the point of contact, or a conduit to POAMN.
- Trawl our website for information, resources, good ideas
- Attend our webinars,
- Tell us what *you're* doing for OAM in your church community
  - We love success stories!
- Apply for a grant to assist in an OAM-related initiative

It's all at www.poamn.org

ISOLATION & LONELINESS

QUESTION:

Are Loneliness and Isolation synonymous or different?

ISOLATION & LONELINESS

Isolation

- ***Physical*** separation from social or familiar contact
- Lack of community involvement
- Limited or no access to services
- Affects 1 in 3 adults aged 50 and older
- A lack of social contacts and having few people to interact with regularly.

  You can live alone and not feel lonely or socially isolated and you can feel lonely while being with other people
- Lower income exacerbates the problem; half of midlife and older adults who earn less than $30,000 a year say they feel isolated.

Isolation is a more physical/factual situation

Loneliness

- An individual's personal, ***subjective feelings*** of being alone and/or lonely
- **Social loneliness**-from less interactions than desired
- **Emotional loneliness**-less intimate relationships than desired
- An increasing number of Americans are suffering from chronic loneliness, now more of a public health threat than obesity.
- Census data show that more than 25% of U.S. households consist of just one person.
- Loneliness is a universal human emotion, yet it is both complex and unique to each individual.
- Loneliness has no single common cause, so the prevention and treatments for this damaging state of mind vary immensely.

In America

- There are 100 Million adults between 50-80 years old
  - One in three feels a lack of companionship
  - One-fourth feel isolated from other people

https://www.healthyagingpoll.org/report/loneliness-and-health

https://www.healthpopuli.com/2019/03/04/loneliness-is-a-health-risk-especially-among-older-people/?utm_source=HR19000+WHCC+Track+SDoH+Business+Strategy+03112019&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=HR19000

How do you measure to what degree someone is lonely?

- The most frequently used measure of loneliness is the revised UCLA Loneliness Scale – a 20-item questionnaire measuring general feelings of social isolation and dissatisfaction with one's social interactions

UCLA Loneliness Scale

Instructions: The following statements describe how people might feel. For each statement, indicate how often you feel the way described using the numbers below. **There are no right or wrong answers.**

1=Never **2**=Rarely **3**=Sometimes **4**=Always

1. How often do you feel unhappy doing so many things alone?
2. How often do you feel you have no one to talk to?
3. How often do you feel you cannot tolerate being so alone?
4. How often do you feel as if no one understands you?
5. How often do you find yourself waiting for people to call or write?
6. How often do you feel completely alone?
7. How often do you feel unable to reach out and communicate with those around you?
8. How often do you feel starved for company?
9. How often do you feel it is difficult for you to make friends?
10. How often do you feel shut out and excluded by others?

+10 more questions (see handout)

Scoring: 0–34 = a low degree of loneliness, 35–49 a moderate degree of loneliness, 50–64 a moderately high degree of loneliness, and 65–80 a high degree of loneliness.

LONELINESS AND RISK FACTORS

- Loneliness is associated with an increased risk of developing coronary heart disease and stroke
- The effect of loneliness and isolation on mortality is comparable to the impact of well-known risk factors such as obesity, and is similar to smoking 15 cigarettes /day)
- Loneliness increases the risk of high blood pressure.
- Lonely individuals are also at higher risk of the onset of disability

Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Layton JB. Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. PLoS Med 2010;7(7) Perspectives on Psychological Science-2015-Holt-Lunstad-227-37.pdf
http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316
Valtorta NK, et al. Heart 2016;0:1–8. doi:10.1136/heartjnl-2015-308790

Physical / Mental Effects of Social Isolation

- Increases our levels of the stress hormone cortisol
- Adversely affects our immune cells
- Tends to raise our blood pressure
- Increases our risk of depression
- Increases our sleep problems
- Accelerates the progression of Dementia/Alzheimer's

http://www.worldhealth.net/news/social_isolation_impact_upon_mental_and

PSYCHOLOGICALLY, LONELINESS IS NOT ABOUT HOW MANY FRIENDS YOU HAVE, IT'S ABOUT FEELING DISCONNECTED FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD.

Psychological Effects of Isolation/Loneliness

- Anxiety
- Fear
- Aggression
- Memory Impairment

http://psychcentral.com/news/2007/11/15/stress-effects-from-social-isolation-explained/1542.html

WHAT CAN WE/YOU DO?

1. **Identify those who are, or are at risk of becoming, isolated or lonely.**

2. **Build and improve social connections in communities, in order to help protect those at risk of loneliness and isolation.**

3. **Create an environment where people can connect with their neighbors, communities or people with similar interests**

HOW?

- ***How*** *can we i*dentify those who are, or are at risk of becoming, isolated or lonely?
- ***How*** can we build and improve social connections in (church) communities, in order to help protect those at risk of loneliness and isolation?
- ***How*** *can we c*reate an environment where people can connect with their neighbors, local communities or people with the same interests?

And what if someone is in denial, depressed, stubborn…..

and/or reluctant to participate, or is someone who doesn't endear themselves to others.

POSSIBLE ANSWERS TO THE "HOW"

- Regular Social Interaction: (phone calls, visits, zoom mtgs)
- Community Engagement: encourage participation in local community events, senior centers: meet *new* people.
- Volunteering: Generates purpose and social connections
- Technology: Classes on smartphone use, tablets, video comms….
- Health and Wellness: Regular exercise, healthy eating can improve mood and reduce feelings of loneliness
- Mental Stimulation: Challenge the mind! (puzzles, reading) Learn a new skill to build confidence and social connections.

Often, a multi-faceted approach is needed

How many of these can a church pursue/implement?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What initiatives are ongoing in your churches that address, or could address, loneliness and isolation? Please share.
- How do we get reclusive/reluctant individuals to come be involved; or should we even be coercing them?
- And (without overtly judging) we can sometimes see why people are lonely; can we equip them to fit in more with others (or should we?)

Please add your questions for me, or comments/answers to the questions above in the chat.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Watch a 30 minute YouTube video https://youtu.be/uDFUqnkm6Ak?si=1U35c173UK3vaJ5t and/or a 2 minute You Tube video https://youtu.be/C9Gk45_c6BQ?si=QX2RomwDJLiPoSp9
- Surgeon General's report (2023) on Loneliness and isolation
  - AI condensed the 82 page report into a 10 page summary (I can provide it to those who wish)
- Today's presentation is available and useable to all who wish