

Priorities for Irish Research into Loneliness among Older People: Results of a Roundtable Discussion

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Loneliness
Taskforce
Research
Network

ALONE
YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Background

- Ireland has the highest prevalence of loneliness among EU countries⁽¹⁾
- In 2023, the Loneliness Taskforce Research Network (LTRN) was established to develop policy recommendations based on research evidence (<https://lonelinessresearch.org/>)
- In 2024, the LTRN established research priorities for loneliness in Ireland; part of this exercise focused on research priorities for older adults

RESEARCH AIM: To identify experts' research priorities on the topic of loneliness among older people in Ireland



Methodology

Design

- **Phase 1:** Facilitated roundtable discussion in April 2024 among $n = 50$ researchers, service providers, and key stakeholders
- Participants self-assigned to groups arranged by domains of research: two tables focused on priorities among older people ($n = 20$)
- **Phase 2:** Survey of LTRN members ($n = 22$) to rank priority research topics

Analysis

- A modified version of previous research prioritisation exercise (2, 3) and validated checklist⁽⁴⁾ for health research priority setting was used in Phase 1
- In Phase 2 ranking was determined by frequency of selection and weighted by the level of priority for question (5).

References

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Results

Phase 1: Roundtable Discussion

- 10 research priorities for older adults were identified:
 - Interventions for older adults;
 - Prevalence of loneliness among older adults, including those:
 - Isolating due to COVID-19;
 - Experiencing mild cognitive impairment/early dementia;
 - Who have been bereaved;
 - Who are carers;
 - Living in residential care settings;
 - Impacts of hospital waiting lists on loneliness;
 - Impacts of financial challenges on loneliness;
 - Emotional and existential loneliness;
 - role of visitation services to alleviate loneliness in residential care settings

Phase 2: Priority Ranking Survey

- **Of all topics surveyed, loneliness in older adults was the joint second priority (with loneliness in young people the top priority)**
- The top three ranked research questions for older people were:
 - What are the impacts of financial challenges in later life on loneliness?
 - Can we marshal existing evidence on interventions for loneliness in older people to create a "universal toolkit" or service directory?
 - Can we better understand loneliness which is not ameliorated by improved social engagement (emotional or existential loneliness)?

Conclusions

- We present expert-led research priorities for loneliness among older people in Ireland.
- This study emphasises the need for targeted, evidence-based approaches to address loneliness across older adult and other age groups
- Findings will be used by Loneliness Taskforce to direct more expert-informed research on reducing loneliness in Ireland,

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