Social Connection and Health

Julianne Holt-Lunstad, PhD
Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience
Imagine a treatment that:

• Increases survival by as much as 50%
• Reduces risk for cardiovascular disease by 29% and stroke by 32%
• Reduces likelihood of developing Depression
• Reduces likelihood of developing Dementia
• Increases your immune response
• Increases wellbeing

Sources: Holt-Lunstad et al, 2010; Valtorta et al, 2016; also see Erzen et al, 2018; Cohen, 2020; Holt-Lunstad, 2018, 2022; Office of Surgeon General, 2023
Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation 2023

The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community
What is Loneliness?

**Colloquial use:**
catch-all term for all forms of lacking social connection

**Definition:**
A subjective distressing feeling, resulting from the discrepancy or unmet need between an individual’s desired and actual level of social connection.
Trends began well before the pandemic.

About 1 in 2 American adults report experiencing loneliness.

Source: Office of the Surgeon General, 2023
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety/Stress</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression/Sadness</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation/Loneliness</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 in 3 Relationship stress or dysfunction

1 in 5 Absence of human connection

Holt-Lunstad, 2023
This goes beyond “loneliness”

All aspects of social connection are associated with health and longevity

Source: Office of the Surgeon General, 2023
The Importance of Social Connection

Social Connection is a critical and underappreciated contributor to individual and population health, well-being, community safety, resilience, and prosperity.
Humans are Social Beings

Biological basis for the need for connection

Holt-Lunstad, 2023
The influence of Social Connection on Health and Economy

Physical Health
- Cardiovascular Disease
- Stroke
- Type 2 Diabetes

Mental & Behavioral Health
- Depression & Anxiety
- Suicidality
- Addiction

Cognitive Health
- Cognitive decline
- Dementia
- Alzheimer’s Disease

Economic Health
- Billions in health care Spending
- Productivity
- $154 Billion due to Absenteeism
- Quality of work

Sources: Holt-Lunstad, 2022; NASEM, 2020; AARP, 2017; Park et al, 2020; McClelland et al, 2020; Office of Surgeon General, 2023; Cigna 2021
Lacking social connection is as dangerous as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.

Note: This is not specific to “loneliness” but lacking social connection in a variety of ways.
Are Isolation and Loneliness Equal Threats to Health?

Social Isolation
Stronger predictor of physical health and mortality

Loneliness
Stronger predictor of mental health

Source: Hong et al, *SSM Population Health*, 2023
Connections to others can influence survival in times of crises
This affects us all

We need social connection at all ages, young particularly vulnerable
No one is immune—we all face barriers, but some groups more so than others
This is a human issue.
Thank you!

For more information:
Email: Julianne_holt-lunstad@byu.edu
Website: www.Julianneholtlunstad.com