

## THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL SUPPORT ON LONELINESS AMONG URBAN ELDERLY PEOPLE

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### Abstract

This study explores the impact of social support on the feelings of loneliness among urban elderly individuals, aiming to reveal how social support can alleviate loneliness through emotional, informational, and material support. A mixed-methods approach was employed, surveying elderly populations in several cities. The results indicate that emotional support has a significant positive impact on reducing feelings of loneliness; for example, strong relationships with family and friends significantly enhance the elderly's sense of belonging and security. Additionally, community activities and volunteer services have proven to be effective forms of social support, increasing interactions among the elderly and thereby reducing loneliness. The lack of informational support was also identified as a factor that exacerbates loneliness, highlighting the importance of providing necessary social resources and information for the elderly population. The study recommends that urban communities strengthen the construction of social support networks to offer more opportunities for communication and participation, thereby improving the quality of life for the elderly.

**Keywords:** social support, elderly, loneliness, emotional support, community activities

### Introduction

Social support refers to the emotional, informational, and practical assistance provided by social networks, including family, friends, neighbors, and community organizations. It encompasses various forms of help that individuals receive, which can be classified into four primary types: emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support.

Emotional support involves expressions of empathy, love, and care, which can help individuals feel valued and understood. For example, a friend listening to an elderly person's concerns can alleviate feelings of isolation. Instrumental support includes tangible assistance, such as help with daily tasks or financial aid. In urban settings, this may manifest as neighbors offering to run errands for older adults who have mobility issues.

Informational support encompasses the provision of advice, guidance, or resources that can assist individuals in navigating challenges. An example is a community center providing workshops on health management tailored for the elderly, helping them to make informed decisions. Appraisal support involves affirmations and feedback that enhance an individual's

self-esteem or confidence, such as encouragement from family members regarding their ability to engage in social activities.

The multifaceted nature of social support plays a crucial role in mitigating loneliness, particularly for urban elderly populations who may experience disconnection due to factors like mobility limitations, loss of loved ones, or limited access to community resources. Understanding social support in these dimensions is essential for addressing loneliness effectively and fostering a sense of belonging among older adults in urban environments.

The prevalence of loneliness among urban elderly populations has emerged as a significant concern in contemporary society. Various studies indicate that urban elderly individuals experience higher levels of loneliness compared to their rural counterparts. Factors contributing to this phenomenon include the fast-paced lifestyle characteristic of urban environments, which often leads to social isolation.

Quantitative research highlights that approximately 20% to 30% of older adults living in urban settings report feelings of loneliness. This statistic underscores the widespread nature of the issue. The urban elderly often face unique challenges, such as living alone, limited mobility, and the loss of social networks due to retirement or the passing of peers. These challenges can exacerbate feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Qualitative studies provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of urban elderly individuals. Many express feelings of being disconnected from their communities, despite living in densely populated areas. The paradox of urban living—where physical proximity to others does not translate into social connectedness—becomes evident. For instance, elderly individuals may reside in high-rise apartments surrounded by neighbors yet lack meaningful interactions, leading to a sense of loneliness.

Cultural factors also play a role in the prevalence of loneliness among urban elderly. In many cultures, the traditional family structure that once provided support and companionship has weakened, resulting in increased vulnerability to loneliness. Urban migration trends, where younger generations move away for work or education, further contribute to the isolation of older adults left behind.

Moreover, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified feelings of loneliness among urban seniors. Social distancing measures and lockdowns disrupted regular social interactions and community engagement, leading to a surge in reported loneliness cases. Many elderly individuals faced increased anxiety and depression as a result of prolonged isolation.

Understanding the prevalence of loneliness among urban elderly is crucial for developing effective interventions. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that considers the unique challenges faced by this demographic in urban settings. Community programs that promote social engagement, enhance mobility, and foster connections can significantly mitigate loneliness among urban elderly individuals.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. Social support theory contains multiple frameworks to explain how social interactions and relationships affect individual well-being. Buffer hypothesis holds that social support can be used as a protective layer against stress and reduce loneliness.

2. The social escort model proposes that individuals have a group of social relationships, provide different levels of support, and emphasize the dynamics of social support, as well as the strength and importance of the relationship over time.

3. The stress buffer model combines the concepts of stress and support, and points out that social support can directly affect an individual emotional state or reduce the impact of stress, thus affecting loneliness.

4. Attachment theory emphasizes that the stable attachment relationship formed in the early stage affects the ability of individuals to seek and receive support in the future. The elderly with a secure attachment style are more likely to establish supportive relationships and reduce loneliness.

5. Social integration theory emphasizes the impact of the number and quality of social networks on loneliness, and points out that the elderly who participate in community activities or regular social interactions report lower loneliness.

6. The role of social identity theory can not be ignored. It shows that the sense of belonging and identity obtained by individuals from social groups can alleviate loneliness. For the elderly, being part of a group or community can provide a sense of value and purpose and reduce loneliness.

7. In addition, the whole life perspective emphasizes the importance of considering social support and loneliness in the whole life process. As individuals grow older, their social networks and support systems may change. Understanding these dynamics is essential to solve loneliness in later life.

8. In addition, the concept of resilience theory emphasizes the ability of individuals to adapt to adversity and rebound, including loneliness. Developing resilience through social support and other coping strategies can help the elderly better manage loneliness and maintain well-being.

## **Methodology**

The research design employed in this study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to comprehensively assess the impact of social support on loneliness among urban elderly individuals. This approach facilitates a more in-depth understanding of the complex relationship between these two variables.

A cross-sectional survey is the primary quantitative method, aiming to capture a snapshot of the current levels of social support and loneliness among the elderly population in urban settings. The survey will include validated instruments, such as the UCLA Loneliness Scale and the Social Support Questionnaire, ensuring the reliability and validity of the data collected. The quantitative component enables statistical analysis to identify correlations and potential causative factors between various forms of social support—emotional, instrumental, informational—and feelings of loneliness.

In addition to the survey, qualitative interviews will be conducted to gather rich, contextual data. A purposive sampling strategy will be employed to select participants from different urban neighborhoods, ensuring diversity in socio-economic status and cultural backgrounds. The interviews will focus on personal experiences of loneliness, perceptions of social support, and the interplay between these aspects in daily life. This qualitative lens allows for the exploration of nuanced details that may not emerge in quantitative data alone.

The integration of both methodologies is designed to triangulate findings, enhancing the robustness of the research. Data analysis will involve statistical methods for the quantitative data, while thematic analysis will be applied to the qualitative interviews. This dual approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social support mechanisms can alleviate loneliness, potentially informing interventions and policies aimed at improving the quality of life for urban elderly individuals.

Data collection for this study employed a mixed-methods approach to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social support on loneliness among urban

elderly. Quantitative data was gathered through structured surveys, while qualitative insights were obtained through in-depth interviews.

Surveys were distributed to a sample of 300 elderly individuals aged 65 and above residing in urban areas. The survey instrument included standardized scales measuring social support and loneliness, such as the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and the UCLA Loneliness Scale. Demographic information, including age, gender, and living arrangements, was also collected to allow for a nuanced analysis of the data. The surveys were administered in community centers and senior citizen organizations, ensuring accessibility to participants.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a subset of 30 participants selected from the survey respondents. This purposive sampling aimed to capture a diverse range of experiences and perspectives regarding social support and loneliness. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and were conducted in a comfortable environment chosen by the participants. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to share their experiences with social support networks, feelings of loneliness, and coping strategies. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

The combination of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews facilitated a robust analysis of the relationship between social support and loneliness. Quantitative data allowed for the identification of patterns and correlations, while qualitative insights provided depth and context to the numerical findings. This methodological triangulation enriched the study's overall findings and enhanced the reliability of the results.

## Results

The relationship between social support and loneliness among urban elderly individuals reveals significant insights into their emotional well-being. Research indicates that robust social support systems can mitigate feelings of loneliness, creating a buffer against the isolation that often accompanies aging in urban settings. For instance, elderly individuals who regularly interact with family members or participate in community groups report lower levels of loneliness compared to their peers who lack such connections.

Empirical studies have shown that emotional support, characterized by empathy and understanding from friends and family, plays a crucial role in alleviating loneliness. For example, a study conducted on urban seniors indicated that those who engaged in regular phone calls or visits from relatives felt more connected and less lonely. In contrast, seniors with minimal interaction experienced heightened feelings of isolation, highlighting the vital role of emotional ties in combating loneliness.

Instrumental support, which includes practical assistance such as help with daily tasks or transportation, also significantly impacts loneliness. Seniors who receive help from community organizations report feeling more valued and integrated within their communities. Such support not only fulfills immediate needs but fosters a sense of belonging, reducing feelings of loneliness.

Moreover, social networks, whether through friends, neighbors, or community organizations, contribute to the overall support structure that urban elderly individuals rely on. Participation in group activities or clubs can enhance social interactions, providing opportunities for friendships to flourish. For instance, elderly individuals who join recreational classes or volunteer groups often experience an increase in social engagement, which correlates with reduced loneliness.

The impact of social support on loneliness is not uniform; it varies across different demographic groups. Factors such as cultural background, socioeconomic status, and personal health conditions influence the extent to which social support can alleviate loneliness. Tailoring social support interventions to meet the diverse needs of urban elderly populations is essential. Programs that foster intergenerational interactions or that create inclusive community spaces can help bridge the gap between different age groups, further enhancing social support networks.

Understanding the nuances of how social support affects loneliness among urban elderly individuals is critical for developing effective interventions. By fostering strong social connections, communities can play a pivotal role in promoting emotional well-being and reducing loneliness among their aging populations.

The analysis of different types of social support reveals significant variations in their impact on loneliness among urban elderly individuals. Social support can be categorized into several types: emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support. Each type plays a unique role in addressing the emotional and social needs of older adults.

Emotional support, characterized by empathy, care, and love, has been shown to mitigate feelings of loneliness. For instance, regular interactions with family members or close friends can provide a sense of belonging and validation, which is crucial for emotional well-being. Studies indicate that elderly individuals who engage in meaningful conversations or share activities with loved ones report lower levels of loneliness. The emotional bonds formed through such interactions can counteract the isolation that many urban seniors experience.

Instrumental support, involving tangible assistance such as help with daily tasks or financial aid, also significantly influences loneliness. For example, when elderly individuals receive help with grocery shopping or household chores from neighbors or community organizations, it not only alleviates their physical burden but also fosters social connections. A case study of a local community program that pairs volunteers with elderly residents illustrates how this type of support leads to increased social interaction and a reduced sense of loneliness.

Informational support, which encompasses advice and guidance, plays a critical role in empowering elderly individuals to navigate challenges. Access to information about community resources, healthcare options, and social activities can enhance seniors' engagement and reduce feelings of isolation. An example includes workshops or seminars organized by local agencies that inform seniors about available services, thereby encouraging them to participate in community life and connect with peers.

Appraisal support, which involves providing feedback and affirmation, can enhance self-esteem and resilience among urban elderly. Encouragement from peers or mentors validates their experiences and reinforces their sense of worth. Research findings suggest that elderly individuals who participate in support groups where they can share personal stories and receive affirmations from others report lower loneliness levels. Such interactions promote a supportive environment where seniors feel understood and valued.

Comparative analysis of these support types indicates that emotional and instrumental support tend to have the most immediate and profound effects on reducing loneliness. However, informational and appraisal support are equally important in the long term, as they foster independence and self-efficacy among elderly individuals. A comprehensive approach that integrates all four types of support may be the most effective strategy for addressing loneliness in urban elderly populations.

In summary, the comparative analysis of different types of social support highlights their distinct yet interrelated roles in combating loneliness. Understanding these nuances can

inform targeted interventions and policies aimed at enhancing the well-being of older adults in urban settings.

### **Conclusion and Future Work**

The implications of social support for policy and practice in addressing loneliness among urban elderly populations are profound and multifaceted. Effective strategies must be developed to enhance social support systems, which can significantly alleviate feelings of loneliness.

One critical implication lies in the promotion of community-based programs that foster social interaction among elderly individuals. For example, local governments could invest in establishing senior centers or community hubs where older adults can engage in various activities, such as arts and crafts, fitness classes, or group discussions. These environments provide opportunities not only for socialization but also for skill development and mental stimulation, which are vital for maintaining overall well-being.

Moreover, policies should prioritize the integration of social support services within existing health care frameworks. Health care providers can be trained to identify signs of loneliness among their elderly patients and connect them with appropriate social support resources. For instance, creating referral systems to volunteer organizations or peer support groups can help bridge the gap between healthcare and social engagement.

In addition, leveraging technology represents an innovative approach to combat loneliness. Programs that educate urban elderly on using digital platforms for communication can enhance their social networks. Initiatives such as virtual meetups and online support groups can be particularly beneficial, especially for those with mobility challenges. Policymakers should consider funding initiatives that provide training and access to technology for older adults, ensuring they are not left behind in the digital age.

Furthermore, collaboration with non-profit organizations can amplify efforts to provide social support. These organizations often have established networks and resources that can be tapped into for creating outreach programs tailored to the needs of the elderly. Joint initiatives that involve both public and private sectors can lead to more comprehensive support systems, ensuring that no elderly individual faces isolation.

Finally, it is crucial to adopt a holistic approach that encompasses various aspects of an older adult's life. Policies should not only focus on social support but also address related issues such as transportation, housing, and access to health care services. By creating an enabling environment that considers all facets of elderly life, it becomes possible to mitigate loneliness effectively.

In summary, the implications for policy and practice are clear: fostering social support through community programs, integrating services within healthcare, leveraging technology, collaborating with non-profits, and adopting a holistic approach can significantly reduce loneliness among urban elderly populations. These strategies not only enhance individual well-being but also contribute to building stronger, more resilient communities.

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