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1. Introduction

This written comparative report explores in-depth what it means to be an elderly person in the UK and Spain, exploring the concepts of isolation and loneliness in both countries and comparing the current policies and legislation in place.

The change in the population's age structure is a phenomenon that has been announced well in advance. Today, demographic ageing is ongoing, with subregional variations between countries, but it is well established. From the point of view of its economic and social implications, it is perhaps the most important transformation of this era.

Generally, the definition of an older person is someone over the age of 65. However, it must be taken into consideration that people age at different rates biologically, which means that a 70-year-old could be healthier than someone aged 60. Considering this fact, the concept of frailty has a greater impact in terms of the likelihood that care and support are required (NHS, 2022); and although age does not reflect functional ability, governments must plan to meet the future needs of an increasingly ageing population (Public Health England, 2017).

The main problem of the elderly is always the same anywhere in the world: to live the maximum time with the maximum quality, preserving the role that gives meaning to the person's life. It can be said that a meaningful life is one that, in principle, has certain basic needs satisfied, including social ones. The three basic needs are: belonging to a group, integration into it and identification with it.

Among the many problems that older people face, loneliness is one of the most painful. Although loneliness affects people of any age, it is the group of older adults that it affects most chronically. Many older people experience loneliness daily. For many, it represents a constant reality in life. This state results in the loss of self-esteem and personal value. A person can be in a crowd or live with many people, but if there is no intimacy or emotional bonds with those who are close, that person will feel alone and socially isolated.

Loneliness is a feeling that, experienced during old age, can come to represent important social, functional, and cognitive dependencies and/or trigger health problems that can cause difficulties in daily life.

2. Statistics on the ageing population

Globally, between 2015 and 2030 the population aged 60 and over will rise from 900 million to more than 1.4 billion people. This represents an increase of 64% in just 15 years, being the age group that grows the most. In relative terms, the percentage of the population aged 60 and over will go from 12.3% in 2015 to 16.4% in 2030 (Huenchuan, 2018).

According to the NHS (2022), over 1 in 5 people in England is over 60, and the number is expected to increase from 14.9 million in 2014 to 18.5 million in 2025.

According to data from the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, there are almost 47 million people who live in Spain and of these, more than 8 million are over 65 years of age. The UN places Spain as the third oldest country on the planet in 2050, behind Japan and Italy. In addition, almost two million elderly people live alone in their homes. The main reason is widowhood, but almost 80% of them have descendants or close relatives. There are more and more cases in which older people in a situation of isolation or loneliness have died alone in their homes while their families remained oblivious to their state of health or way of life (González Úbeda, 2018).

According to the data consulted, more than half of the elderly cared for in Spain by the Red Cross are below the poverty line. For this reason, they have problems with their home: they cannot pay for the services, they are late in the mortgage payment, or they cannot maintain their good condition (Cruz Roja, 2022). This section includes the information as of December 31, 2020, on Social Services for the elderly in Spain. As of that date, the population to which these services are directed, that is, people aged 65 and over, amounts to 9,307,511 and represents 19.65% of the total (Imsero, 2021).

3. Theories of loneliness and isolation

Exploration of relevant concepts associated with loneliness is alluded to in literature. Loneliness and social isolation are different, but they are related. Loneliness is the disheartening feeling of being alone or apart. Social isolation is a lack of social contacts and having few people you can interact with regularly. You may live alone and not feel lonely or socially isolated, or conversely, you may feel lonely while with other people.

Older adults are at increased risk of social isolation and loneliness due to changes in health and social connections that can occur with ageing, as well as hearing, vision, and memory loss, disability, mobility problems, or loss from family and friends (NIH, 2022).

A model that explains the emergence and development of loneliness would be found in the attachment theory, proposed by John Bowlby. This line proposes that the affective ties of attachment, when they are close, positive, and strong from childhood, originate in positive interpersonal relationships in later life stages. According to this line, during the first stages of the socialization process, the individual tends to seek a close relationship with the people who protect him. Bowlby considers that "attachment is a property of the relationship, not of the person", and it is the strength and maintenance of that attachment that operates directly in the formation of self-confidence, in the development of good mental health, psychological stability and the ability to know how to manage certain difficult situations throughout their lives. Although from this perspective it is not ruled out that conjunctural events can cause feelings of loneliness, according to this theoretical model, there is a clear relationship between the

emergence of these emotions when there has been no secure attachment during the first periods of the vital stage (Nicolás Díez and Morenos Páez, 2015).

The main contributions to this concept were made by the social scientist Robert Weiss, considered the loneliness theorist par excellence, who points out that loneliness is "a response to the absence of a provision for a particular relationship." Weiss also established the differentiation between emotional loneliness and social loneliness.

The analysis of the survey "Isolation and Relationship Life of The Elderly" shows how this isolation can give rise to a feeling of loneliness, which is sometimes the origin of an illness. This directs the clues of action against loneliness towards the location of the parameters that cause isolation, to prevent loneliness. It should be noted, however, that the survey, which focused on the determinants of isolation, contributes to creating these results since it is possible to find situations where the fact of living alone aggravates loneliness and causes mechanisms of isolation (Weiss, 2005).

The different factors found at the origin of loneliness have been the subject of numerous studies. Weiss (2005) differentiates loneliness resulting from emotional isolation, sometimes due to the loss of a loved one, from loneliness linked to social isolation. The multicriteria analysis of the survey makes it possible to highlight a group of people who are isolated and very often feel alone. They no longer have a spouse; they have disabling health problems and they rarely leave their homes. According to the data, people aged 79 to 83 are the ones who experience the biggest changes in their life trajectory.

In addition to advanced age, the loss of a loved one (particularly the spouse) and health problems, it is found in the literature, in international experiences, as well as in the survey "Isolation and relationship life", different factors which seem to be at the origin of loneliness and in particular:

- Lack of self-esteem.
- The fact of not being able to count on anyone in case of need.
- Estrangement from family.
- A low level of economic resources.

It should be emphasized that the fact of not being able to leave your home appears as one of the essential factors that favour loneliness.

Through different possible answers, the survey gave the floor to older people about what they considered to be one of the reasons for loneliness. The loss of a loved one is most often cited (37.5 per cent), followed by estrangement from family (30.7 per cent), illness and/or handicap (27.5 per cent), or misunderstanding and lack of listening (16.9 per cent).

Peplau published her Theory of Interpersonal Relations in 1952, and in 1968, interpersonal techniques became the backbone of psychiatric nursing.

Hildegard Peplau's Theory of Interpersonal Relations emphasized the nurse-patient relationship as the basis of nursing practice. She emphasized the give and take of nurse-patient relationships that were seen by many as revolutionary. Peplau went on to form an interpersonal model that emphasizes the need for a partnership between the nurse and the patient rather than the patient passively receiving treatment and the nurse acting on the doctor's orders.

The four components of the theory are the person, who is a developing organism trying to reduce the anxiety caused by needs; environment, consisting of forces existing outside the person and placed in the context of the culture; health, which is a verbal symbol implying a forward movement of personality and nursing, which is a meaningful therapeutic interpersonal process that works in cooperation with another human process that makes possible the health of individuals in communities (Hernandez, 2022).

4. Comparison between the UK and Spain

Basically, with few exceptions, residences for the elderly in both the UK and Spain are institutions that function as a place of residence and work and where many older people in more or less the same situation live isolated from society for an appreciable period until death occurs and, in the meantime, share a formally managed daily routine. In general, the institutionalization of the elderly has detrimental effects on functional capacities and the psyche; motivations and attitudes in a context of forced institutional resocialization generate a series of habits that threaten the individual quality of life (Lorente Martínez, 2017).

An institutionalized older person loses the normative habits of the outside world, neglects his person, forgets the rules, transgresses social guidelines; somehow dehumanized. The institutionalization processes that can lead to chronicity are processes opposed to empowerment and quality of life (Coraza and Tagua, 2021).

According to the National Institute on Ageing (2022), people that are socially isolated or feel alone have a higher risk of developing high pressure, obesity, cardiovascular diseases, depression, anxiety, dementia, cognitive deterioration and even death.

The emotional pain that loneliness can cause can activate similar responses in the organism to those from stress and physical pain. When this is prolonged, it can cause chronic tissue inflammation and reduced immunity. Moreover, loneliness and isolation lead to deficient cognitive functioning and triggers the risk of developing dementia or Alzheimer's.

In Spain, the situation is like that in the United Kingdom. This was warned in 2015 by a report by a team of researchers from the Centre for Sociological, Economic and Political Analysis. Almost two million elderly people live alone in their homes. The main reason is widowhood, but almost 80% of them have descendants or close relatives. There are more and more cases

in which older people in a situation of isolation or loneliness have died alone in their homes while their families remained oblivious to their state of health or way of life.

In November 2018, the San Blas neighbourhood of Madrid experienced a terrible episode when, by order of a court, a house was evicted in which the mummified body of a 56-year-old man who had been dead for four years was found. He had died in the fall of 2013 of natural causes. Neither neighbours nor relatives noticed his absence (González Úbeda, 2018).

This case is akin to that of a 72-year-old pensioner found dead after several weeks in 2021 in Alton, UK (Napier, 2020).

In line with these facts, the type of society, increasingly individualistic and less supportive, would also partly determine the impact and rise of these situations of isolation. The transformations that the social network system has also undergone would be converging in the most developed societies. The lack of associationism, coexistence, participation in social life or collaboration with and for others are clear indications of this thought that would justify this increase. Linked to the lack of communication, empathy, or education in human and emotional values, it would be giving rise to an impoverished society plagued by loneliness (Nicolás Díez and Morenos Páez, 2015).

5. Current legislation and policies

The Care Act 2014 (GOV.UK, 2018a) requires authorities in England to ensure the right provision of services to reduce the need for care and support.

The UK government's first loneliness strategy was launched in 2018. This means that by 2023 all GPs in the UK will be able to refer patients to a range of activities to tackle loneliness among the elderly. As part of this strategy, a minister of loneliness was also appointed to tackle the issues of social isolation (GOV.UK, 2018b).

During the COVID pandemic, the government also launched several plans and campaigns to tackle loneliness. They included:

- Let's talk loneliness public campaign: that encouraged the public to be open about their struggles with loneliness.
- Support programs to help charities such as Age UK and Volunteer Responders in communities.
- The "Emerging Together" campaign: a cross-sector group of organisations brought together to tackle loneliness.

Currently, as per the Loneliness Annual Report published this year (GOV.UK, 2018a), the main awareness plans launched are:

- Every Mind Matters loneliness campaign: aimed to reduce stigma and encourages young people aged 18-24 to "Lift Someone Out of Loneliness" via small kind acts.

- Tackling loneliness network: a group of businesses, charities and public figures set out to help connect groups at risk via a digital hub.

In Spain, The Senate's Social Rights Commission has approved a negotiated text urging the Government to design and implement a National Strategy to combat the unwanted loneliness of the elderly, in agreement with the autonomous communities, local entities and with the participation of the Third Sector (65 y Más, 2020).

To detect possible situations of unwanted loneliness in the elderly, the 'Always Accompanied' program has launched the second edition of the Knock on the door action, which will take place in a total of 12 cities. The initiative, promoted in the territories where the program is deployed, was born with the desire to raise awareness about the reality of loneliness and the importance of creating links. In addition, it is open to the public to attract volunteers, detect situations of loneliness and value the work of the entities that work in the territory. The 'Always Accompanied' program considers older people as active subjects and part of their needs, interests, and abilities to help them face their situation of loneliness by fostering significant social relationships and reinforcing personal strengths.

The program is carried out in 14 cities in the Spanish territory and last year it has served more than 660 people. It has the involvement of 380 entities linked to the neighbourhoods where it is implemented and has more than 200 volunteers (El Nacional, 2021).

Imsero (2022) develops its tourism program as a complementary service to the benefits of the Spanish Social Security System, to provide the elderly with stays in coastal areas and inland tourism, thereby contributing to improving their quality of life, health, and the prevention of dependency.

6. Local, national, and global providers of services for the older person

In the UK, the charity AGE UK (2022) has a wide range of services tailored to the older population's needs. Services such as exercise classes, IT training courses, day centres, home care help and social activities; as well as assistance with managing finances, among others. In Spain, Imsero (2022) competes in matters of the elderly, incorporating, among them, those arising from the creation and implementation of the protection system for people in a situation of dependency and the development of policies and programs about the active ageing of the population. Likewise, it is responsible for the management of the complementary social services of the Social Security system and the management of the plans, programs, and services at the state level for the elderly and dependent people. Finally, Imsero is credited with drawing up proposals for basic regulations that guarantee the equality of citizens and the development of inter-territorial social cohesion policies regarding the matters listed above.

According to Imsero (2022), The Social Services aimed at the elderly in Spain can be grouped into four main categories:

- Home Care Services. Their main objective is to keep older people in their homes for as long as possible and thus avoid being uprooted from their environment. The Telecare service is the one with the highest number of users.
- Social Participation Services. Within these services, the Centres for the Elderly have been analysed, which are included in the approach of active ageing and among their purposes, the promotion of leisure and social participation stands out.
- Day Care Services. The Day Centres are Day Care Services that offer psychosocial care to elderly people in situations of dependency.
- Residential Care Services. They offer accommodation and support to older people on a permanent or temporary basis. The residential care services most in demand are the Residential Centres, whose beds constitute 97.7% of the beds analysed, and the Homes for the Elderly.

7. The prospective future of the care of the older person

According to Imsero (2022), Spain is facing a review of the care model, moving towards an inclusive scenario, one of "deinstitutionalization" and comprehensive care centred on people, which will require a great deal of knowledge to guide strategic decisions. The global reform that is proposed then has derivations towards structural changes that cover the normative, architectural, and methodological fields in the intervention.

The State Reference Centres are legitimized by developing functions linked to social innovation that are now more necessary than ever. For their part, the centres with the greatest care load face the challenge of incorporating the paradigms of the autonomous life of the people with disabilities whom they care for while joining the Network of Reference Centres.

Another important challenge is to improve the information for citizens and improving accessibility is a priority to avoid delays and inequalities in such necessary benefits that affect the most vulnerable population.

Initiatives are needed to promote the social integration of the adult population, such as the introduction of programs such as the intergenerational nursery at Nightingale House residential care home in Wandsworth, UK (Absolutely Education, 2018).

8. The use of technology

Storey (2018) discusses in her Office for National Statistics report that technology has expanded rapidly and that as many services have moved online, older people have more difficulty accessing them. However, this seems to be changing, as the percentage of over 75-

year-olds that are becoming digitally literate has doubled from 20% to 40% in recent years. The issues caused by digital exclusion are foreseen to become obsolete in the future, as our generation heavily relies on technology in our personal and professional lives.

Different studies insist on the role of the Internet as a tool capable of facilitating ties between generations. During a research seminar, the participants underlined that advanced age does not impair the hope of employing new information and communication technologies and that the elderly can learn provided they are interested (Forum Libertas, 2007).

According to the National Institute on Aging (2022), technology has the following benefits:

- Mitigate loneliness: the use of technology contributes to considerably reducing marginalization. Connecting with other elderly users through networks will allow maintaining optimal levels of social interaction to leave behind feelings such as loneliness.
- It allows communication with loved ones: especially in these times where the health situation caused by COVID-19 has increased the physical distance between people, technology allows the elderly to connect with their loved ones. Instant messages, video calls or even social networks can help bring family and friends closer together.
- Helps to stay active: on a psychological level, the use of new technologies by the elderly is a great positive reinforcement, since it makes them feel capable of learning new things and adapting to the changes that happen around them despite their age. Likewise, technologies for information and communication allow keeping the mind active by obtaining knowledge for training or leisure, acquiring new skills and, ultimately, feeling useful.
- It is a means of providing telecare: through telemedicine services, older people can always have their health under control. Tele healthcare allows them to request and receive direct help from their doctor to resolve doubts and easily consult from the comfort of their home.
- It facilitates the search for friends or a partner: the appearance of contact websites focused on the elderly allows the feeling of loneliness to be kept at bay while at the same time exercising the social and communication skills of its users.

9. Recommendations

Although Artificial Intelligence is making considerable advances in this specific field, elder care is also a social problem, to which due attention should be paid. Especially when considering the projections on the adult population. These advances must continue, and new alternatives and tools are found each time. However, human contact is an irreplaceable necessity. It is important to rescue social projects where the youth is more committed to initiatives. This became evident with the COVID-19 pandemic. The older population is unprotected. It is necessary to invest in options so that they stay active and busy and that they can feel useful. Governments, companies, and society, in general, must have active participation in this regard (Corbyn, 2021).

Ideally, the tools and technological advances in Artificial Intelligence are available to everyone. Unfortunately, they are currently not economically accessible to a large part of the population, which means that it is a solution for an exclusive part (Europa Press, 2016).

It is also important to financially, legally, and otherwise support initiatives to help the elderly. Without a doubt, helping the elderly is everyone's task. Society needs to be involved and familiar with the options available (Inteligencia-Artificial. dev, 2021).

It is also necessary to revise old paradigms and build new ones in the socio-sanitary treatment of institutionalized elderly people where it is beneficial for everyone to include the elderly residents with the outside world and with people of all ages, warding off dependency and giving opportunities for autonomy (Coraza and Tagua, 2021).

10. Conclusion

The Red Cross (2022) questions shared social responsibility. They question the extent to which society has come for there to be an elderly person in a community of neighbours and nobody cares about how they are doing, pointing to an ethical problem in society.

The opinion of older people about how they are perceived by Spanish society is sadly negative. 45.3% of the elderly believe that citizens consider them a burden to the economy and Social Security. And only 30% believe that they are considered as necessary support for children and grandchildren (González Úbeda, 2018).

According to Antonio Cano, Professor of Psychology at the Complutense University of Madrid, the United Kingdom is "years ahead" in matters related to mental health. "They have seen that it is very profitable to 'train' the population on issues related to emotions, trying to change their behaviour and their lifestyle in such a way that possible diseases in the future can be avoided,"

The involuntary isolation of the elderly is a problem that concerns the whole of society and, as such, can only be tackled through the commitment and solidarity of society, from a humanitarian approach and the defence of Human Rights. From the Red Cross, they defend that it must be a society that has to promote an improvement in the way of life of the elderly (El Español, 2018).

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