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Introduction

It is often discussed but not yet understood what causes loneliness and isolation among elderly people and how this can further impact their quality of life. Loneliness and isolation can cause a decline in their physical health and well-being as well as depression (NHS,2021). It goes without saying that loneliness and isolation in older people is one of the most important issues facing the elderly today.

To start with this report will compare what it means to be elderly in the UK and another country of choice in this report Albania will be compared. Secondly, it is important to address the statistics of the ageing population in both countries. In addition, a few ageing theories will be discussed in more detail this report will explain modernization theory and Activity theory. Another factor to consider is what elderly people face in a care setting. Legislations and policies will be discussed to reduce and raise awareness of loneliness and isolation which is the main point of this report as well as compare local, national, and global care provisions. It is also important to note how future care and technology can help combat loneliness and isolation. Lastly, recommendations will be made to improve these issues the elderly people are facing.

What it means to be an elderly individual in the UK and Albania

NHS England, 2022 argues there is no definition of age. Individuals age differently depending on their health and lifestyle. Elderly people in the UK are often seen as frail in society. Rather than being viewed as individual equal citizens who have contributed their fair share in the communities as well as taking care of their families and making a home a home (Ageing Better, 2020). Elderly people are portrayed as frail, Vulnerable, and dependent to name a few as their health declines and therefore becomes a problem for health care and families.

Men in Albania are usually considered old at 65 years old. They are considered the head of the family whereas, the wife/mother of the family is considered an important person in traditional families where their role is cooking, cleaning, taking care of their children/ grandchildren the one who keeps the family together. With this in mind usually, one child lives at home the youngest son. In traditional times the youngest son will become the head of the home when his parents are no longer able to furthermore, the son's wife will take on the responsibility to take care of the husband's parents as they show ageing. According to the International Labour Organization, 2022 a recent ILO survey showed at least 91,000 elderly people in Albania require long-term care however, there are challenges in the system

to ensure elderly individuals have access to high-quality care services due to the rapidly ageing population. Furthermore, due to Albania's public long-term care system and lack of capacity, it was also noted that older, frail individuals have no choice but to rely heavily on the intra-family long-term care system, which employs unpaid female carers. Not to mention the availability and high costs of healthcare services including medication which is required for the treatment of various chronic illnesses. Similarly, long distances to healthcare services, poor road conditions, and lack of transport in the rural and remote areas of Albania prove to be challenging among the Albanian elderly population (Ylli, 2010).

Statistics of the ageing population

There are around 11 million elderly people 65 years and over in England according to Age UK, 2023 these numbers are expected to increase by 10% in the next 5 years, for example, a 65-year-old male is expected to live another 18.5 years similarly a woman can expect to live 21 years. Age UK, 2023 also noted the age group who needs the most care from health and care services is 85 years and over, and is also expected to increase. Around 45% of this age group experience difficulties in their basic needs such as everyday daily tasks, washing, dressing, eating, and toileting. Office for National Statistics claims since 2011 the population of England and Wales has increased. Older people 65 years and over have climbed from 16.4% to 18.6% while the number of older people has increased from 9.2 million in 2011 to nearly 11 million in 2021.

Since the 19th century, a decrease in mortality has increased life expectancies in both men and women. According to Raleigh, 2022 mortality was high because of this reason individuals born in 1841 had lower life expectancy for example men were only expected to live to 40.2 years and women were to live to 42.3 years. However, due to improvements over the years in cleanliness, nutrition, housing, sanitation, and controlled illness these have decreased mortality rates.

Sh.com, 2019 noted according to INSTAT data from 2019 there are 76,413 elderly individuals over the age of 80 years living in Albania 11,606 of older individuals increased ``compared to 2015. Migration is another issue contributing to the ageing population in Albania, which also affects the conventional family support networks. Agewatch report, 2012 noted that in one in two families in Albania, at least one family member has relocated abroad to build a better life. Additionally, around 1.5 million Albanians live abroad while 3.2 million remain residents of Albania.

Theories of loneliness and isolation and the concepts associated with loneliness

According to Fakoya et al, 2020, everyone will experience isolation and loneliness at least once in their lifetime however, research has shown that older people are more vulnerable as well as at a higher risk it was noted that around 50% of elderly individuals are suffering from social isolation and one-third suffer loneliness.

Loneliness- the frequent terms of loneliness are being alone or in a state of solitude, however Verywell, 2023, acknowledged loneliness as a state of mind. Individuals who are lonely experience empty and unwelcoming feelings. Similarly, although the person wants human contact, their mental state makes building relationships difficult. In other words, a person surrounded by loved ones or social connections can still feel deeply lonely. Loneliness and social isolation can emerge at any age however, it has been noted that older people are more vulnerable to loneliness due to many factors for example living alone, death of family/friends, chronic illnesses, family living far away as well as transport issues. According to Fortune et al, 2023, individuals need a sense of belonging, however, when this is not met it can impact their physical and mental health.

Isolation- describes an absence of social interactions which can lead to feelings of loneliness. To put it more simply, social isolation can happen when an individual is excluded from social networks due to a variety of factors such as reduced mobility, health problems, lack of resources and information, community engagement, and even financial hardship (No Isolation, n.d). However, an individual may be physically able to go outside of their home but other factors are preventing the person from forming social interaction and relationships such as depression, anxiety, bereavement, or becoming a carer for someone therefore, isolating them from the world.

Modernization Theory

Modernization theory suggests that the fast pace of industrialization and the changing modernization that is happening in the world are the main causes why elderly people are losing their power and respect in society. In other words, elderly people are less respected by employers, communities, younger people, and even by their families for this reason elderly people are likely to feel socially excluded (Grossman, 2022). Additionally, in traditional times, it was common in many countries for elderly people to remain at home and their children would care for them when they were not physically able to due to illnesses that come with ageing therefore, however, in today's society individuals are less interested in prioritising the needs of their parents and are more focused on attaining their own goals and aspirations. Elderly people are seen as a burden no wonder why elderly people today feel lonely and isolated modernization and society are to blame for this.

Activity Theory

Activity theory proposes that maintaining social connections and having an active lifestyle will likely make the elderly population happier. In other words, remaining active can slow and delay ageing as well as improve the older person's quality of life. For example, after retirement elderly people may feel lost in themselves and feel like they have no purpose therefore, loneliness and social isolation can play a part in their ill health which as mentioned before can cause depression and other chronic illnesses additionally, the elderly person may be suffering from a death of their loved one or their family is too far away these can all contribute to loneliness however, Activity theory suggests that keeping active and taking on old or new hobbies such as gardening, volunteering in local communities can help their cognitive and mental and physical health. Cmi Health, 2020 noted that adding exercise into an older person's daily regime plays a role in the ageing process and, therefore, improves their physical and mental health.

Impact of loneliness and isolation on an older person living within a care setting.

Elderly individuals lived years with independence from working, caring for their families/ children and grandchildren, taking care of their homes, and caring for themselves without needing extra support. However, as the person ages their health can decline which can result in the older person needing extra support from family members and health professionals similarly becoming more dependent on people and society. Moving from their familiar home into a residential care home setting can cause the elderly person to lose their autonomy in other words, their self-independence which can cause frustration, humiliation, anger, imprisonment, unappreciated, and have no meaning to life. According to Paque et al 2018, losing autonomy and self-determination is one of the factors that cause isolation and loneliness. Additionally, a change in the elderly person's life for example a change in their usual daily activities, not seeing familiar faces, and in general missing everyday sights and smells can all contribute to feelings of loneliness and isolation not to mention their feeling of identity loss. Helping Hands, n.d noted that too often care workers in care homes are far too busy for companionship and are usually on a schedule for this reason they do not have the time to sit and talk with the elderly individual.

The sad situation of the elderly people living in the rural and remote areas of Albania many older people live alone with no family members to take care of them. What's more, it has also been noted that elderly individuals have no access to long-term care or community services furthermore, there are disadvantages to them in pensions, healthcare as well as social protection programs.

Current legislation and policies to reduce loneliness and isolation in the elderly

Campaign to End Loneliness Acknowledged legislations The Care Act 2014 addresses loneliness and isolation, especially among elderly people as an eligible need. The prevention duty and the well-being principle call for action against loneliness and social isolation. The Act creates the well-being principle which addresses well being of local governments' performance of the elderly people's care and support needs.

Many services in the UK promise to reduce loneliness and social isolation as well as improve the health and well-being of elderly people. Interventions and services such as the befriending scheme offer support, companionship, and emotional support through one-to-one contact such as home visits which greatly helps the elderly people who have chronic illnesses and can not get out of their homes as well as who are portrayed as frail and vulnerable. This group of volunteers attends to elderly people in a friendly manner and offers companionship, support at medical appointments, and friendly chats which can reduce loneliness and isolation greatly.

In addition, Group Services run by national charity schemes run day centers and social group schemes which are aimed at increasing the elderly people's social networks. Group Services offers a range of activities such as creative and social activities, and tea parties for small groups of people aged 75, and over who live alone with no friends or family nearby in their local communities. The elderly people also have an opportunity to volunteer their skills and talents at the community centers (Scie, 2012).

Albania has made some progress in the care of elderly people the Law On the Mandatory Provision of the HealthCare in the Republic of Albania protects the rights and dignity as well as independence for the elderly residents which has been made a national need for many years. In addition, the aim is to early detection on ill health as well as individual health and well-being to increase the quality of life furthermore, containing medical costs to make it as affordable as possible (Jorgoni, 2010).

Local, national, and global provision of services for the older person

NHS England works with other partners across health and social care to support and offer the elderly people who are finding every day difficult to visit the elderly to check their health and safety in their homes. Also to reduce time spent in ill health through early interventions by offering advice on self-management for healthy ageing. NHS England also offers tools for GPs and other health professionals to use such as the ToolKit for General Practice in supporting elderly people living with frailty. The idea of these practices is for services to work together to better support the elderly person involved.

The Albanian Relief Service established the Old is Gold program for the elderly people in Albania for those who are suffering from isolation and loneliness and without support from their families or the government. The program is run by young volunteers and works alongside local businesses and the government to raise awareness of the issues older people face as well as spreading their concern of the importance of offering free advice and care support. young volunteers provide daily healthcare, engage the elderly in activities with other members, and are taught new skills. This not only helps them to interact and socialize in society but also to make the elderly feel valued and wanted in the modern world (Watson, 2017).

Future care of older people and Technology

Communication technology such as mobile phones has become popular around the world it helps to stay connected with friends and family across the world via voice calls, and video calls using platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook to even doing online shopping are just a few of its benefits. Many of us are quite digital experts in using such devices, however, studies have shown new technologies can prove to be challenging for older people due to their age these can include; poor vision, hearing, or cognitive illnesses or simply they just do not know how to use new technology. However, Cisco, n.d argues that the right support and assistance such as the Race Online, 2012 campaign which inspires and educates older people in the UK to use and have access to the internet can offer solutions to reduce loneliness and isolation as well as social exclusion. In theory, mobile phones have many benefits it can help elderly people have social contact, social engagement and participate in community events another key thing new technology can also improve their confidence and improve their quality of life as well as feel like they have something in common with the younger generation.

Elderly people living in a care home have limited contact with family members, during COVID-19 this was almost impossible for this reason, the elderly people are more at risk of feeling lonely. However, technological interventions such as mobile phones and iPads give the elderly a chance to connect with family members through face-to-face contact through video calls. With that said Zamir et al, 2018, noted that face-to-face contact through video calls is better than phone conversations and written communication.

Recommendations

The Local authority's duty is to provide care and support for the individual in this case this would be the older person by acting and promoting the wellness of the older person in need of care and support in addition all factors need to be considered on how best to fulfil the requirements of older people (Department of Health and Social Care, 2023). During the

assessment process health professionals and other services involved need to adopt a flexible approach and look at all things considered as everyone's needs are different. For example, there may be an older person in need of care and support but wishes to remain in their home to be close to their family on the other hand there may be an older person who also needs care and support but lives alone. So for this reason all aspects need to be considered.

In the rural parts of England, access to hospitals is over an hour away whether that would be by public transport or walking compared to urban areas where public transport is closer to get to as well as a more frequent schedule (Age UK, 2019). So for this reason it is recommended to have more access to public transport in the rural areas of England where possible for better access and routes for older people.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this report has discussed some key elements of loneliness and isolation among elderly people in the UK and Albania and the impact it can have on their physical and mental and health well-being. It has been argued that better provision and care need addressing in elderly care, especially in the rural areas of Albania where health care and public services are poor in comparison to the UK. This report also examines some of the ageing theories and how the elderly population is perceived in today's society. It has been recommended that older people would benefit from engaging in activities that promote better health outcomes and can slow ageing decline. Also, technology and lessons would be a key factor in preventing loneliness and isolation as this can keep older people connected with family, friends, and social networks as well as keep track of their health and be part of today's society to make them included.

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