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1.0 Introduction

In today's fast-paced and increasingly interconnected world, it is easy to overlook the growing issue of loneliness and social isolation among the elderly population (Fakoya et al., 2020). As people age, they often face numerous challenges that can lead to a decline in social connections and a sense of isolation (Fakoya et al., 2020). These challenges according to Fakoya et al. (2020) may include retirement, the loss of a spouse or close friends, health issues, and limited mobility. Loneliness and social isolation not only impact the emotional well-being of older adults but also have significant consequences on their physical health and overall quality of life (Lorber et al., 2023). The elderly population is particularly vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation due to various factors (Wang et al., 2022). For instance, the natural aging process can result in sensory impairments, such as hearing loss or vision problems, which can hinder communication and social interactions (Wang et al., 2022). Additionally, the prevalence of chronic health conditions and mobility limitations among older adults can restrict their ability to participate in social activities and maintain relationships (Meek et al., 2018). Research conducted by Vrach and Tomar (2020) showed that loneliness and social isolation can have severe consequences on the health and well-being of older adults. These consequences include increased risks of depression, anxiety, cognitive decline, and even mortality (Vrach and Tomar, 2020). Furthermore, a study by Xia and Li (2018) have demonstrated that social isolation can exacerbate existing health conditions and contribute to the development of new ones, such as cardiovascular disease and weakened immune systems.

In this paper, an analysis and critical assessment will be conducted to examine the impact of loneliness and social isolation on the elderly population. The policies and state of elderly care in Finland will be presented in this section. Additionally, a comparison will be made between the policies and conditions currently in place in the United Kingdom for the care of older people. Furthermore, the paper will explore relevant theories on loneliness and isolation, and examine the concept of loneliness itself. A critical discussion of the current laws and policies will be included to shed light on their objectives, and to determine their potential effectiveness in raising awareness and reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation among the aged population.

In conclusion, a comprehensive understanding of the current challenges and potential solutions can be attained by exploring the future of elderly care. This includes examining possible interventions that can effectively combat the isolation experienced by older individuals. Furthermore, the discussion on the use of technology can greatly benefit elderly individuals who are impacted by loneliness and social isolation, and ultimately improve their overall well-being.

2.0 Aging in the UK and Finland

Before analysing the current policies and services for the care of the elderly in the UK and Finland, it is essential to comprehend the meaning of being elderly in both nations. According to Storey (2019), an individual who is over the age of 65 is generally regarded as elderly in the United Kingdom. The situation is however not different in Finland which also classifies individuals above the age of 65 years as the elderly (Viljanen et al., 2021). It can be difficult to establish a precise definition of an elderly person because people can experience different rates of biological aging (Clegg et al., 2013). As a result, a person who is 75 years old might be in better health than someone who is 60 years old. Therefore, factors such as "frailty" may have a greater impact on whether an individual requires care and support rather than simply their age (Clegg et al., 2013; Colloca et al., 2020). A discussion is set to take place regarding the concept of aging in the UK and Finland as part of an effort to enhance the quality of care for older individuals who experience loneliness and social isolation. As of 2019, senior citizens aged 65 or over accounted for approximately 19% of the UK's population, with a total of about 12.3 million people falling within this age group in the preceding year ("Population of England by age group 2021 | Statista," 2021). Over the course of the decade spanning from 2009 to 2019, the number of people in this age category increased by 23% , which is significantly higher than the 7% growth in the UK's overall population during the same period ("Population of England by age group 2021 | Statista," 2021). According to Valkama & Oulasvirta (2021), Finland has the highest rate of aging in Europe and is one of the fastest aging societies among countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In 2000, only 14.8% of the Finnish population was aged 65 and over, but by 2019, this proportion had increased to 21.8%. It is estimated that by the year 2050, 27% of the population

of Finland will be in the senior population of Finland ("Population ageing mismatches lives and Finnish society - STTK," 2020).

3.0 Relevant theories of loneliness and isolation

3.1 Giddens theory of social isolation

According to Giddens, a sense of loneliness and anxiety is prevalent in today's world. People are no longer in direct control of essential aspects of their lives, such as their food, clothing, and housing, and are no longer responsible for providing water to their families, communities, and countries (Gardiner et al., 2018). This lack of control can lead to social isolation, particularly for older individuals in developed nations (Conroy et al., 2020). Modern men are also lacking the support and protection from their neighbours that they once enjoyed (Ejiri et al., 2021). Unfortunately, the situation has not improved even though we have become a more urban and suburban society. In fact, the lack of genuine human connection has only gotten worse for people all over the world (Perissinotto and Covinsky, 2014).

3.2 Weiss' theory of loneliness

According to Beridze et al. (2020), loneliness is a fundamental aspect of human existence and can be studied from a psychological perspective. Robert Weiss' attachment theory suggests that individuals who fail to satisfy their six social needs, including attachment, social integration, verbal reassurance, loving guidance in difficult situations, and a trustworthy partnership, may experience loneliness (Beridze et al., 2020). While friendships can help alleviate loneliness, they cannot entirely replace the initiative and intimacy that come with close relationships (Blieszner et al., 2019). Loneliness can be associated with certain personality traits that lead to unhealthy behaviours when individuals have some social contact. It is also important to note that loneliness is often linked to depression, low self-esteem, social inhibition, aggression, and social anxiety (Blieszner et al., 2019).

A study has shown that older people who experience social isolation and loneliness are more likely to suffer from various medical and mental conditions (Donovan and Blazer, 2020). Gardiner et al. (2018) state that these situations can lead to diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, depression, anxiety, Alzheimer's disease, weakened immune system, and even death in older individuals. In fact, social

isolation may increase the risk of premature death more than factors such as obesity and inactivity (Donovan and Blazer, 2020). Research suggests that having a small social network raises the likelihood of dying young and is like smoking 15 cigarettes daily. Sundström et al. (2018) further suggest that social isolation is linked to a 50% increased risk of dementia in older people. When older individuals feel lonely and isolated, their sleep quality also suffers (Ren et al., 2023). According to (Conwell et al., 2011), the suicide rate for individuals aged 45–74 in Finland increased between 1999 and 2017, with white males over 85 being the most likely to commit suicide. Studies conducted by the governments of Finland and the UK indicate that elderly individuals are more likely to die prematurely if they experience loneliness and social isolation for an extended period (Brooke and Clark, 2020).

4.0 Evaluation of current legislation and policies aiming to raise awareness or reduce loneliness in elderly people

The Nations Decade of Healthy Aging 2021-2030 presents a remarkable opportunity to mitigate the risks of loneliness and social isolation among older adults. With the support of governments worldwide, social organizations, and individuals, the initiative aims to transform society (Ng et al., 2023). The UK Government's Loneliness Strategy 2020 highlights that loneliness carries a stigma, leading to further alienation and isolation due to psychological barriers.

The Care Act of 2014 introduced a new legal framework in the UK for providing assistance and care to older adults experiencing social isolation and loneliness. Loneliness is recognized as a need addressed by the act (TEW and Et, 2019). The report emphasizes that the act's preventative responsibility and well-being principles strongly advocate for action on loneliness. Barnes et al. (2017) state that the act defines well-being as encompassing aspects such as safeguarding one's dignity from abuse and neglect, maintaining physical and mental health and emotional well-being, preserving domestic family and personal relationships, enjoying a thriving social and economic life, and making a positive contribution to society. It is crucial to note that this law provides guidance on multiple strategies that can be employed to mitigate the risk and increase awareness of social isolation and loneliness among older adults (Van Orden et al., 2021).

Finland has implemented several policies and initiatives aimed at reducing loneliness and social isolation among older adults (Anttila et al., 2020). The Act on the Status and Rights of Social Welfare Clients provides a legal framework for social welfare services in Finland, including services for older adults. The act emphasizes the importance of promoting social inclusion and preventing social exclusion, which can help reduce loneliness and social isolation among older adults ("Finland - Act (812/2000) on Social Welfare Clients Status and Rights.," 2014). The National Programme for the elderly aims to improve the quality of life of older adults in Finland by promoting their participation in society and preventing social exclusion. The program includes initiatives such as promoting volunteer work, providing support for informal caregivers, and improving access to health and social services (Sirén et al., 2023). The Finnish Association for Mental Health also provides support and resources for individuals experiencing mental health issues, including loneliness and social isolation. The association offers counselling services, support groups, and educational programs to help individuals improve their mental health and well-being ("The Finnish Central Association for Mental Health | MTKL," 2023).

5.0 Evaluating and comparing older people's local, national, and global services providers align with current initiatives and policy.

In the UK, older people's local services providers are aligned with current initiatives and policies that aim to promote their well-being and independence. The government's Care Act 2014, for instance, requires local authorities to carry out an assessment of older people's needs and provide them with personalized care and support plans (Marczak, 2017). The National Health Service (NHS) also provides healthcare services for older people, including preventive and rehabilitative care, through its community health services and hospital services ("NHS England » Community mental health services," n.d.). Similarly, in Finland, older people's local services providers are aligned with current initiatives and policies that aim to promote their well-being and independence (Tiirinki et al., 2022). The country's Social Welfare Act requires municipalities to provide older people with services that support their autonomy and participation in society (Tiirinki et al., 2022). These services include home care, day care, and rehabilitation services, among others. Additionally, the country's Health and Social Services Reform aims to integrate health and social care services to improve

the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of care for older people (Araujo de Carvalho et al., 2017).

At the national and global levels, the UK and Finland are also committed to promoting older people's well-being and independence. The UK government, for instance, has developed a strategy for an ageing society, which focuses on enabling older people to remain active, healthy, and engaged in society (MacGuire, 2020). The strategy includes initiatives such as the Ageing Better programme, which supports the development of age-friendly communities, and the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, which supports research and innovation in ageing-related technologies (Centre for Ageing Better, 2019). Similarly, Finland is a member of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities, which aims to promote the development of cities and communities that are inclusive and accessible to older people (World Health Organisation, 2018). Finland has also developed a national programme for the elderly, which aims to promote the health and well-being of older people and ensure their active participation in society (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2020).

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 Legislation and actions from the government

Sandu et al. (2021) argue that it is crucial for the government to implement policies and strategies to address the issue of loneliness and social isolation. In the UK and Finland, there are various initiatives in place to tackle this problem among older adults. Nonetheless, the most important factor for the improvement of the quality of life of older individuals is the support from the government, as well as active involvement of local agencies and community members.

6.2 Foster connections with family and friends

Encouraging family involvement is a crucial step in reducing loneliness and social isolation among the elderly in both the UK and Finland (Sandu et al., 2021). According to Sandu et al. (2021), family members play a vital role in providing emotional support and companionship to their elderly relatives, and maintaining regular contact can help

seniors feel more connected and supported. In the UK, there are several initiatives aimed at promoting family involvement in the lives of elderly relatives. For example, the Age UK charity offers a befriending service that matches volunteers with lonely and isolated seniors, providing them with regular companionship and support. The charity also runs a telephone befriending service, which allows volunteers to connect with seniors over the phone and provide a listening ear (NHS Choices, 2023). In Finland, family involvement is also seen as a key factor in reducing loneliness and social isolation among the elderly. The Finnish government has implemented policies aimed at supporting family caregivers, such as providing financial assistance and respite care (Pekkarinen and Melkas, 2019). Additionally, the Finnish Red Cross runs a program called "Friendly Visiting," which matches volunteers with lonely seniors for regular visits and social activities (Pekkarinen and Melkas, 2019).

6.3 Encouraging senior citizens to participate in local communities and groups.

According to Lee et al. (2020), engaging in social activities can contribute to enhancing the lifestyle and quality of life of the elderly. One way to achieve this is by encouraging them to socialize more often with individuals they enjoy spending time with. Another strategy is to establish age-specific groups or communities that can foster a sense of belonging and provide opportunities for immediate connections with like-minded people, as suggested by (Giebel et al., 2021). Furthermore, sharing interests and thoughts with loved ones can also be an effective way for the elderly to improve their social engagement and overall well-being (Lee et al., 2020).

6.4 Closing the mental gap between the older and younger generations

To identify older adults who may be experiencing social isolation and loneliness, healthcare practitioners and providers can use validated tools that assess factors such as loss of relationships, geographical moves, and health conditions (Noone et al., 2020). For those who are currently experiencing loneliness or are at a high risk of social isolation, healthcare providers should discuss the negative health impacts associated with social exclusion and loneliness with them and their legal representatives. Efforts should be made to provide necessary social care and connect them with available health resources (Noone et al., 2020). Providers should also identify the root causes of social isolation and loneliness and utilize evidence-based

methods to address them, such as addressing hearing loss or mobility limitations (Noone et al., 2020).

7.0 Conclusion

In modern times, older adults are facing social isolation and loneliness due to various social and psychological factors. The negative impact of increased loneliness and social isolation on their health and well-being is significant, and it can also lead to psychological distress. Furthermore, early mortality is a significant contributor to the rise in social isolation and loneliness among older adults. A comparative analysis of the programs and regulations for older adults in the UK and Finland was conducted to reduce the risk of loneliness and social isolation. Effective monitoring and preventative interventions can help older adults overcome loneliness and social isolation. Creating clubs and communities specifically for older adults can be beneficial, as it allows them to pursue their interests and engage in discussions with individuals of their age. Spending time with peers can also help them reminisce about their childhood and youth with more excitement and peace of mind.

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