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Introduction

In this written report will be discussed what it means to be an elderly person in the UK and Italy; what is loneliness and social isolation; how loneliness and social isolation affect the elderly populations of both nations; relevant theories of loneliness and isolation; current legislations and policies that address these issues or seek to increase public awareness of them or lessen their prevalence among the elderly population, and how loneliness and isolation affect an elderly person residing in a care facility.

Loneliness and isolation have impacted not just the senior populations of the United Kingdom and Italy, but also the whole global older population. This report will also explore and analyse global legislation and policies, as well as how effective technology has been in addressing loneliness and social isolation. Recommendations will be given.

Meaning of being an elderly person in the UK and in Italy

As the term "elderly" has varied connotations in various civilizations and historical eras, it is impossible to define in absolute terms. It frequently coincides with retirement, becoming a grandparent, or losing a job, however, according to NHS England (2022), an older person is often someone who is over the age of 65. Therefore, it is difficult to apply a rigorous definition because people age biologically at various rates; as a result, a person who is 75 years old can be in better health than a person who is 60 years old.

The effects of population ageing on the economy, public services, and society as a whole make measuring it crucial. It presents opportunities as well as challenges. Longer lives, from an economic and social perspective, imply people can continue to contribute for longer, whether through extended professional careers, volunteer work, or possibly caring for family members like grandkids. For people, it might imply the chance to spend more time with friends and family, pursue personal interests, and have more free time. The difficulties arise from the fact that an ageing population increases the need for health and adult social services as well as the amount of money spent by the government on state pensions (Office for National Statistics 2019).

The population of the UK is ageing dramatically. Currently, there are approximately 11 million seniors, and in ten years, there will be 13 million older persons, or 22% of the population and as people age, an increasing percentage of them experience poverty, discrimination, and bad health (Centre for Ageing Better, 2022).

In contrast to the UK, the National Congress of the Italian Society of Gerontology and Geriatrics (SIGG) have decided that citizens of Italy is now considered 'elderly' after 75 (Fiorentino and Montero, 2018). According to statistical studies, women in Italy can expect to live an average of 85 years, compared to 82 to 83 years for men. This is older than the 79-year-old average for Europe.

Statistics on the ageing population and its changes over the years

Due to the fact that 65 was the legal retirement age for men in the UK and the age at which they may begin receiving their state pension, this age has traditionally been seen as the beginning of old age.

The UK's population was expected to be 66.4 million at mid-2018. In the UK, there will likely be 8.2 million more individuals 65 and older in 50 years, which is equivalent to the population of London now (Says, 2019).

According to MHA (2021), a limiting long-term sickness or disability affects approximately 4 million older individuals (or 40% of those aged 65 and over), and it's predicted that number would reach over 6 million older people by the year 2030. However, males in England can anticipate living an additional 8.9 years in good health on average, while women can anticipate an additional 9.8 years in good health at age 65, or slightly under half of their anticipated remaining life span. 2.5% of the population of the UK, or 1.7 million people, will be over the age of 85 by the middle of the 2020s. This is anticipated to nearly treble to 3.1 million by mid-2045, making up 4.3% of the UK population (ONS, 2022).

Unlike the UK, the elderly population of Italy is the third-oldest population. Italians made up 24 percent of the population as of 2022, which was only slightly less than Monaco and Japan. In fact, Monaco boasts the world's oldest population, with 36% of the population being 65 years of age or older. It is anticipated that the average age of the Italian population, currently 46.4 years old, would continue to rise in the ensuing decades (Statista Research Department, 2023). Italy is the nation with the fastest population ageing, with 37 persons over the age of 65 for every 100 people in working age (15–64) in 2022, and that number will climb to 65 by 2050. The percentage of people over 80 is anticipated to rise from 3.7% to 7.5 within the same time frame (ISPI, 2023).

The reasons for ageing population of Italy are twofold: high life expectancy and a low birth rate. As a result, people are living longer lives, but birth rates are decreasing. Indeed, Italy has one of the greatest birth-age life expectancies in the world. It reached 85 years for females and 80 years for males. Furthermore, it is one of the countries with the lowest fertility rates in the world.

The percentage of Italians 65 and older will increase from 23.5% in 2021 to 34.9% in 2050, while the average age will increase from 45.9 to 50.6 during that time. In the worst situation, the population loss by 2070 might reach 18 million, while the best case scenario predicts a decline of only 4.2 million.

Italy's population would decrease from 59.2 million in 2021 to 54.2 million in 2050 and 47.7 million in 2070, according to a baseline scenario (Reuters, 2022).

The impact of loneliness and isolation on an older person living within a care setting and theories

Every day, millions of people experience loneliness regardless of their age, ethnicity, background, gender or, status. As a personal, subjective emotion related to the absence of fulfilling human connections, loneliness has been characterised. Being lonely is a distressing symptom that one's social network is insufficient in some significant ways (Numbisi and Chepkirui, 2015). Social isolation is a measure of people's level of contact that is objective. Social isolation and loneliness are two distinct yet connected ideas. Both loneliness and social isolation have a direct causal relationship. The two can also happen simultaneously (Age UK, 2022).

According to NHS (2022), in addition to having a negative impact on health, older adults are particularly susceptible to loneliness and social isolation. In the UK, especially among those over 75, hundreds of thousands of old individuals live isolated and lonely lives.

In England, over 2 million people over the age of 75 live alone, and more than a million senior citizens report going more than a month without talking to a friend, neighbour, or family member. A person may become socially isolated for a number of reasons, including growing older or less robust, losing their role as the head of their family, quitting their job, the passing of spouses and friends, or due to a disability or sickness. Other causes include being physically or mentally disabled.

Though many of them are lonely, residents at care homes are not as isolated as elderly persons in the community. The rate of 'severe loneliness' reported by those living in a care home (22-42%) is more than double that of community residents (10%). Over 80% of senior care home residents with mental health issues reported feeling lonely in their care home, and this may be alleviated if staff could spend more time with them (The Good Care Group, 2020). Boredom also contributes to the high incidence of loneliness in care homes; many patients have traded in an active, independent lifestyle for one in which they are always dependent on care home employees for stimulation and activity. An individual's emotional stability and mental acuity may suffer as a result of this abrupt transformation. Being cut off from familiar surroundings is one of the main causes of loneliness. When their nurses or caretakers are overburdened and unable to spend time just providing them with companionship, care home residents also experience loneliness. Someone who feels ignored can benefit much from even a little bit of periodic small chat, yet care home staff frequently adhere to strict schedules and have too much to accomplish in too little time (Helping Hands Home Care, n.d.).

Almost a quarter of Italians over the age of 65 live alone, with an additional 1.3 million lacking access to a social network (Pietromarchi, 2020).

The nursing home has a significant negative impact on seniors' day-to-day lives as well as their connections to family and friends, isolating them from society and increasing their risk of loneliness and depressive symptoms. In a study on nursing home residents, it was discovered that 20% of them had had suicide thoughts. Loneliness and sadness were identified to be risk factors for suicidal ideation (Melchiorre et al., 2022). Therefore, there is great reverence for ageing family members. Grandparents and senior family members are devoted to their offspring. Their children are expected to support and help them as they get older, which is why they are being cared for. Among older first-generation Italian migrants, this idea is particularly prevalent. If a family has no other choice except to use residential care, it is avoided. Even still, nursing institutions are frequently seen badly, and old people in Italy sometimes avoid being placed in one by putting moral pressure and guilt on their offspring (Evason, 2017).

The disengagement theory asserts that older people restrict their social life areas in reaction to social constraints and in order to get ready for the end of their lives. Older people gradually disappear from the social structure where they once had a significant influence (Zhang and Lin, 2021).

As stated Mchugh Power et al. (2016), depend on how it affects cognitive and behavioural characteristics, social disengagement or low levels of social engagement may cause loneliness. Conversely, low levels of social engagement or social disengagement are likely to cause loneliness later on.

Legislation and policies

Loneliness and social connections are very personal experiences. The government understands that everyone experiences loneliness from time to time. People who are constantly lonely, on the other hand, are more prone to suffer from serious illness and other undesirable repercussions. This technique focuses on keeping people from feeling lonely all of the time or most of the time.

The UK's government has three goals to work on loneliness: in order to better understand what causes loneliness, how it affects people, and how to combat it, it is important to first improve the evidence base. It is also important to embed loneliness into government policy by acknowledging the variety of factors that can exacerbate loneliness and promote people's social wellbeing and resilience. Finally, it is important to create a national dialogue about loneliness in order to increase awareness of its effects and to help combat it (HM Government, 2018).

Many organisations such as Age UK, British Red Cross, U3A (University of the Third Age), Independent Age, Mind, NHS, local authorities, help lines, work with the government to guarantee that the law is effectively implemented and not weakened, and to urge service providers to take a proactive approach to the promotion and preservation of older people's rights (Age UK, 2017).

A wide range of instruments are available to address violations of older people's fundamental rights to freedom, respect, equality, dignity, and autonomy under the Human Rights Act of 1998 and the Equality Act of 2010. A number of significant local actors now have a clear obligation to intervene to combat loneliness and isolation thanks to the Care Act of 2014. Meeting the additional prevention responsibilities as well as the care and support needs that were discovered during assessments are part of this. How authorities should comply with their new obligations is explained in the Statutory Guidance that is included with the Care Act 2014.

The "well-being principle" is also established by the Care Act 2014, making it the primary goal of local authorities' performance of their care and support responsibilities. It will make it easier to spot those whose wellness is in danger as a result of loneliness and social isolation. The new duty to offer assessment to everyone who appears to need care will also increase the opportunity for early intervention (Local Government Association, 2014).

The National Institute of Health and Local Health Authority offices and Regions in Italy developed a surveillance system that monitors the health of the over-65 population, measuring the three pillars identified in the World Health Organization's "Active Ageing" strategy: health,

participation, and safety. A “Viva gli Anziani!” (“Long live the Elderly!”) is a project that offers home assistance, active supervision, support and training programmes for family members caring for older relatives, and supports novel structural approaches like cohousing. This project aims to prevent older people from losing their houses even in cases of financial or logistical difficulty and, in particular, to prevent them from feeling lonely; time banks help people share activities, services, and abilities on a reciprocal basis (Enelcuore, 2020).

Local, national and global provision of services

The UK government has implemented initiatives to support digital inclusion, including the £400,000 Digital Inclusion Fund, the Future Digital Inclusion programme, and a £2.6 million fund for free Wi-Fi in libraries. Additionally, £1 million was invested in the Nesta Tech to Connect Challenge Prize to combat social isolation. The UK Government aims to include loneliness in the Inclusion Innovation Fund's £400,000 criteria for bidding. Funding was awarded to three projects in January 2019, including smart homes, an app for Down's Syndrome, and technologies for end-of-life and palliative care patients (Macdonald, 2021).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UN General Assembly's adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights form the legal basis for this strategy. WHO and UN urge Member States to view ageing within basic rights, ensuring protection regardless of prejudice (Barbabella et al., 2022).

Countries around the world implement various interventions to combat loneliness, including low-tech community-based programs, high-tech digital techniques, nurse-led care coordination models, and strong government policies. Norwegian company developed a "one-button computer" for those unfamiliar with smartphones, NHS England revealed volunteers can bring food, medications, and call socially isolated people, and Netherlands nurses use questionnaires to evaluate patients' social needs and health (Abrams et al., 2020). There is discussion about how technology may affect loneliness in elderly persons. While some contend that technology has made exclusion worse, others emphasise how important it is for preserving social ties. Technology can also deliver services and assistance that are affordable, with technology-based supply being the ideal choice when resources are few. Telecare solutions promote independent living by enabling users to stay in their homes and communities for a longer period of time and preventing loneliness brought on by relocating (Local Government Association, 2016).

Older people can reduce social isolation and loneliness through therapies like befriending, cognitive behavioural therapy, community support groups, and social skills instruction. Enhancing mobility, ICT, and built environments can build age-friendly communities and encourage robust social ties (World Health Organization, 2021).

Conclusion and recommendations

In both the UK and Italy as well as the rest of the globe, the senior population and life expectancy have dramatically grown.

In comparison to the UK, Italy has a higher than average senior population and life expectancy. Because there are a lot of senior individuals, there are also a lot of elderly people who are lonely and socially isolated, which puts a lot of strain on governments. These developed initiatives, regulations, and policies to address and address this problem with the assistance of local authorities and the community. Additionally, social isolation and loneliness have benefited from technological innovation.

Government programmes to combat loneliness must include money for supplemental neighbourhood assistance and services, such as social events. Along with national government financing, local commissioners like authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups should pay for these services. Additionally, assistance in mapping local services have to be offered. The approach should be overseen and updated by the Minister for Loneliness. For policy initiatives, the government should implement a "loneliness test" to see how they would affect available resources in the community. This admits that a variety of UK government policies, including those pertaining to business, rural affairs, policing, health, social care, transport, housing, and rural affairs, may affect the social and physical infrastructure for lasting partnerships to prevent loneliness.

It is important to emphasize addressing age discrimination in employment, discouraging mandatory retirement, and promoting the retention and hiring of older workers. It also calls for enhancing participation in training, providing employment assistance, targeting those at risk of long-term unemployment, and improving working conditions to enhance job quality for workers of all ages.

Italy's population is ageing in both the "ageing from above" and "ageing from the bottom" directions, which is why it is still becoming older. Rising lifespan and low birth rates are two factors that contribute to this trend; migration has little effect on it. The goal of new policies should be to support healthy ageing through measures including early preventative education, research funding, addressing the needs of the aged, and lowering financial burdens on the elderly and vulnerable.

The Italian welfare system has weaknesses, but they are fixable if numerous institutions work together to support a strategy that not only respects the freedom and dignity of older

individuals but also minimizes unnecessary spending and optimises the allocation of existing resources.

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