

Social Isolation & Loneliness

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To communicate is to be **HUMAN**

Identity Needs

- How we learn who we are

Physical Needs

- Social connections positively impact health

Social Needs

- How we obtain affection & companionship

Practical Needs

- How we gain & provide information (60% medical errors due to poor communication)

Spiritual Needs

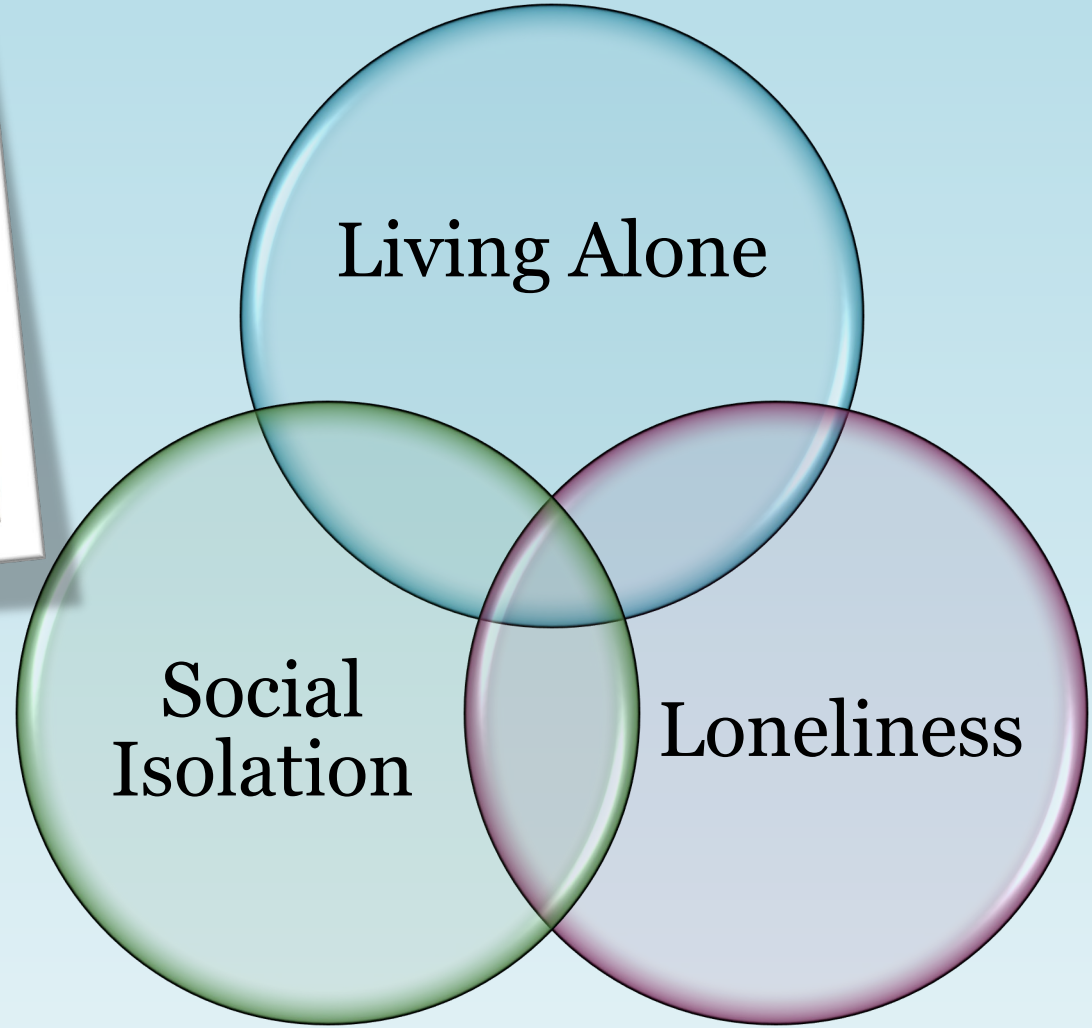
- How we clarify & share our beliefs

- Boosts mood
- Improves memory
- Boosts cognitive functioning
- Lowers blood pressure
- Reduces stress
- Sense of purpose
- Live longer



Frederick II
Holy Roman Emperor
1194 – 1250

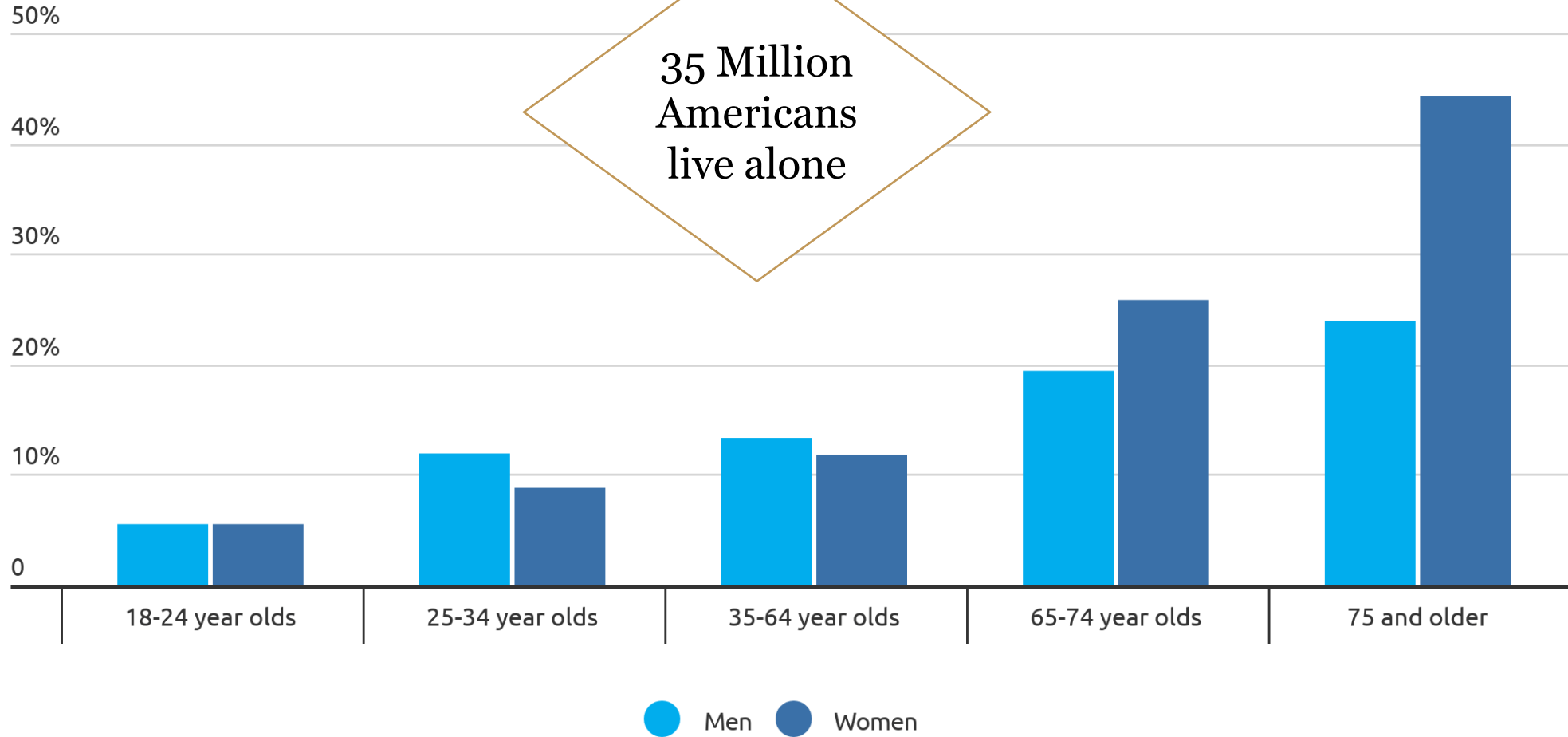
Carried out cruel
experiments on people
including the Language
Deprivation Experiment





The share of adults living alone increases with age and varies by gender

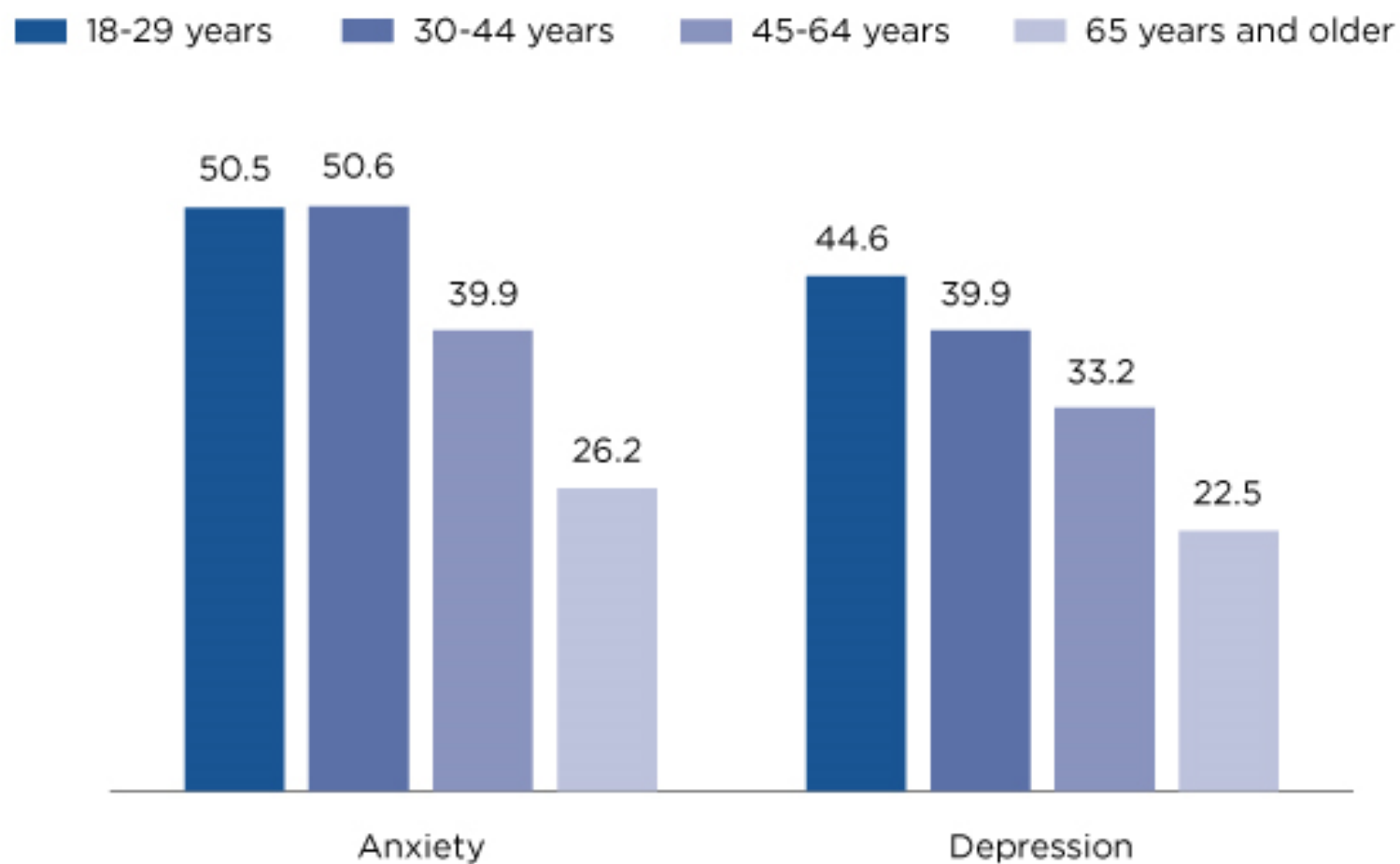
Share of adults living alone



Source: U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey

Figure 1.

Percentage of Adults Living Alone With Symptoms of Anxiety and Depression by Age



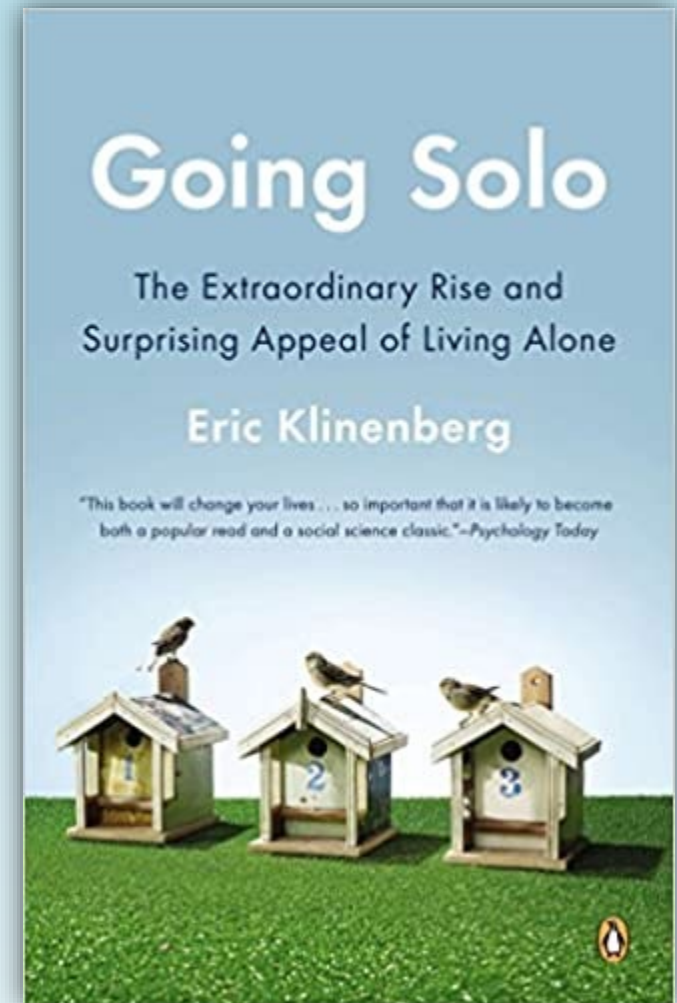
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey (Week 18: October 28-November 9).

The Appeal of Living Alone

Klinenberg conducted interviews with 300+ people

Compared to married couples, Americans who live alone:

- Spend more time with friends & neighbors
- Volunteer more often in civic organizations
- Happier
- Live more fulfilling lifestyles
- Live more environmentally friendly lifestyles



Source: Klinenberg E. (2012). *Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone*. New York, NY: The Penguin Press.

Living Alone is a Risk Factor for Older Adults

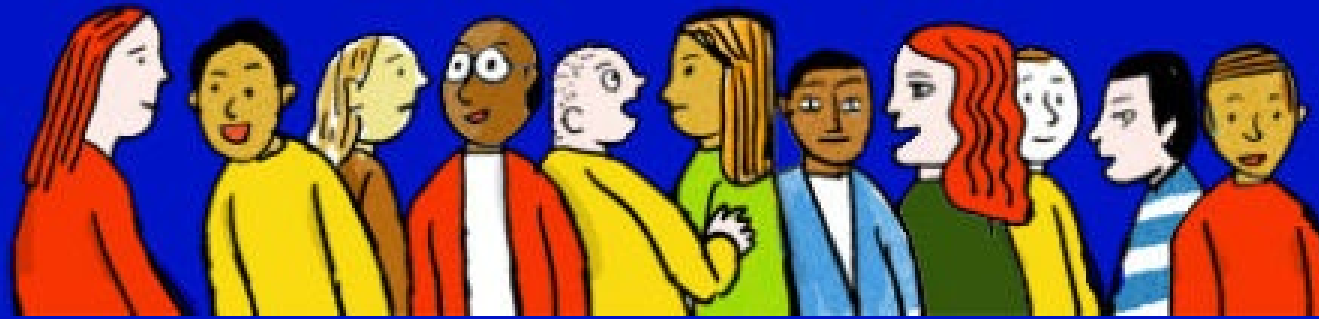
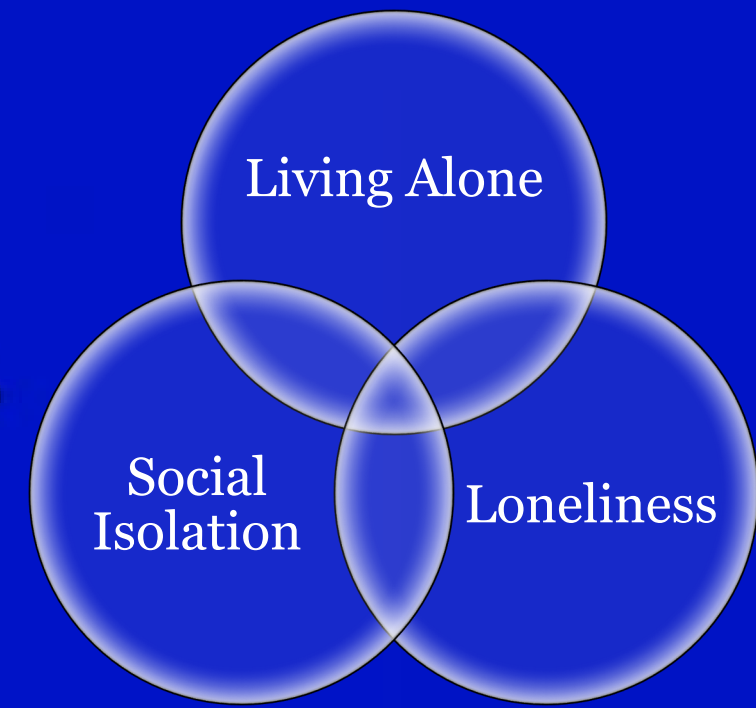
- Falls
- Heart Attack
- Stroke
- Routine medical appointments

No one is there!



Social Isolation

- Objective Measure
- Social determinant of health
- Definition: Lack of social contact with others
- May be positive or negative
 - › Length of time
 - › Choice/control



In the Short Term...



Social Isolation as Solitude

Positive feelings when chosen in the short term

“Me” time

Freedom to work, study, relax, rest, pray without being disturbed

Study outcomes: decreased stress, increased creativity, increased spirituality

In the Long Term...

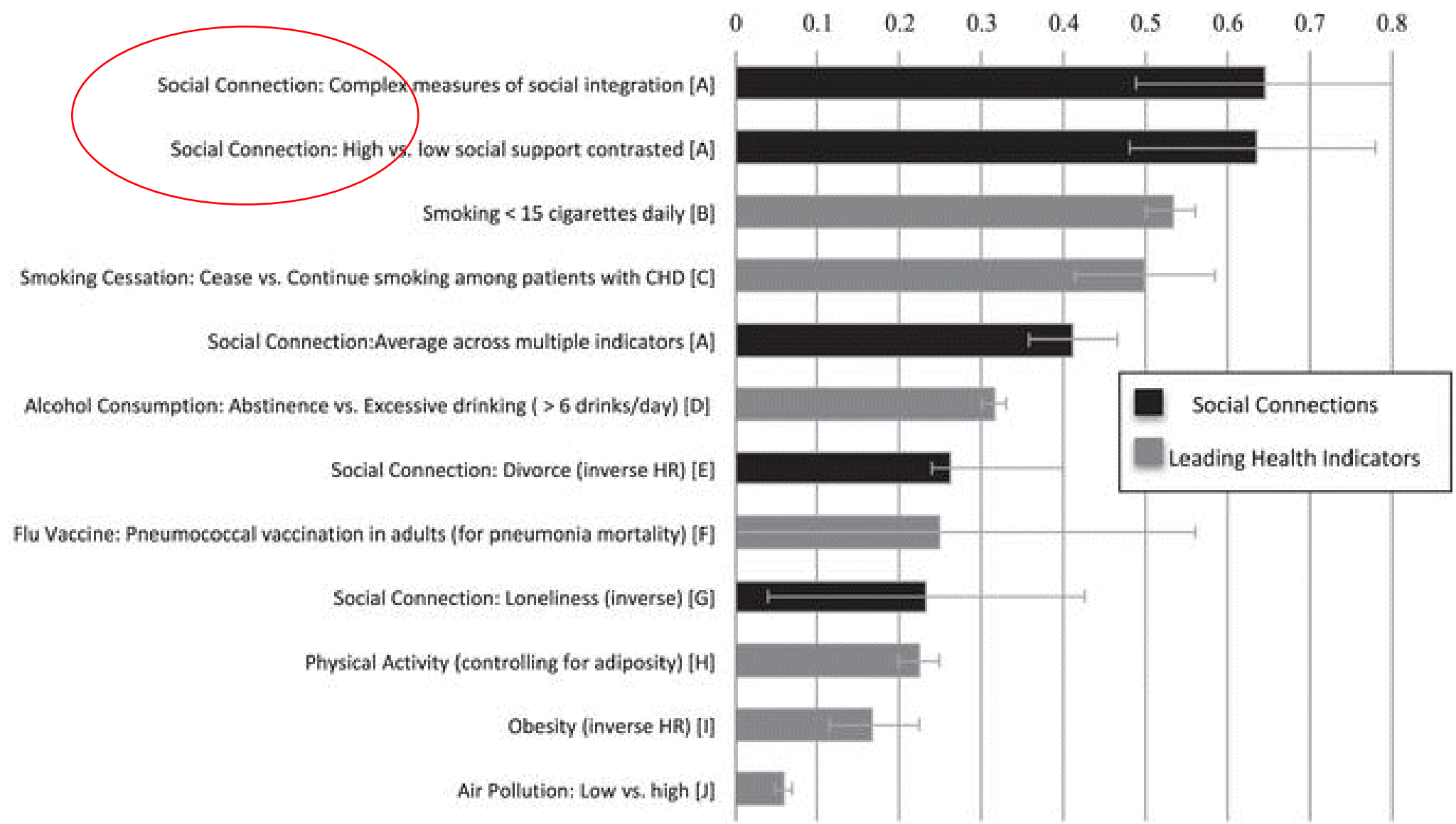
Social Isolation as Punishment

- Visual and auditory hallucinations
- Hypersensitivity to noise & touch
- Insomnia & paranoia
- Uncontrolled rage & fear
- Distortions of time & perception
- Increased risk of suicide
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)



22+ hours/day for 15+ days = torture

Comparison of Decreased Mortality across Social Connection and Leading Health Indicators



Source: Holt-Lunstad, J., Robles, T. F., & Sbarra, D. A. (2017). Advancing social connection as a public health priority in the United States. *American Psychologist*, 72(6), 517–530. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000103.supp> (Supplemental)

- Cognitive decline
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Obesity
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Alzheimer's disease
- Weakened immune system (4x more likely to get a cold)
- Premature death (2-3x more likely)



How isolation affects your body

Social Isolation May Not Be a Choice

Study of older adults living in high crime neighborhoods

Older adults want to participate in society, but structural obstacles make this difficult.

Structural Obstacles:

- Fear of being robbed
- Distrust of neighbors
- Limited availability of services
- Dilapidated surroundings
- Limited meaningful & positive relationships
- Having few friends or family members attuned to their concerns



Measurement of Social Isolation

LUBBEN SOCIAL NETWORK SCALE 6

Social Isolation

- Objective Measure
- Definition: Lack of social contact with others
- Positive or negative
- High sense of control or choice



Loneliness

- Subjective Measure
- Definition: Distressing feeling of being alone or separated from others
- Negative emotion
- Low sense of control or choice



Loneliness

more common in two groups

Loneliness can affect people at any point but more common among two key groups:

Young people
aged 15-25



Older individuals
aged 75 and above



Loneliness is at an all-time high

- COVID pandemic
- Over-reliance upon technology

How Loneliness Affects Your Body

- Fosters feelings of being threatened or mistrustful of others
- Weakens immune cells; trouble fighting off viruses & infectious diseases
- Accelerates the buildup of plaque in arteries
- Helps cancer cells grow and spread
- Promotes inflammation in the brain leading to Alzheimer's disease

Screen Time

More sleep disturbances

Poorer mental health

Greater loneliness

More depression

More suicide



Passive Use (scrolling feeds) = more negative effects
Active Use (connecting to people) = more positive effects

Sources: Twenge JM, Joiner TE, Rogers ML, Martin GN. (2018). Increases in Depressive Symptoms, Suicide-Related Outcomes, and Suicide Rates Among U.S. Adolescents After 2010 and Links to Increased New Media Screen Time. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 6(1), 3-17.

Smith, L., Jacob, L., Trott, M., Yakkundi, A., Butler, L., Barnett, Y., Armstrong, N. C., McDermott, D., Schuch, F., Meyer, J., López-Bueno, R., Sánchez, G., Bradley, D., & Tully, M. A. (2020). The association between screen time and mental health during COVID-19: A cross sectional study. *Psychiatry Research*, 292, 113333.

Ways to Feel More Connected

Have a Zoom meeting with your family

Facetime with friends

Join a sports team

Form a study group

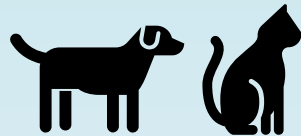


Reduce screen time

Work – Life balance

School – Life balance

Foster or adopt a pet



Move to a congregate living setting

Healthy older adults – senior centers, volunteering, grandchildren

Homebound older adults – friendly visitors, daily phone calls, family visits, Facebook

The most effective way to reduce loneliness is to make people feel connected to their community.



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