

East Tennessee State University

Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University

Appalachian Student Research Forum

2023 ASRF Schedule

Apr 25th, 9:40 AM - 10:00 AM

Examining Social Isolation and Loneliness: Cross-Sectional Needs Assessment among Community-Dwelling Older Adults

Kayla B. Dodson

East Tennessee State University

Erin Mauck

East Tennessee State University

Jodi L. Southerland

East Tennessee State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.etsu.edu/asrf>

Dodson, Kayla B.; Mauck, Erin; and Southerland, Jodi L., "Examining Social Isolation and Loneliness: Cross-Sectional Needs Assessment among Community-Dwelling Older Adults" (2023). *Appalachian Student Research Forum*. 69.

<https://dc.etsu.edu/asrf/2023/schedule/69>

This Oral Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the Events at Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Appalachian Student Research Forum by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. For more information, please contact digilib@etsu.edu.

Examining Social Isolation and Loneliness:

**Cross-Sectional Needs Assessment among
Community Dwelling Older Adults**

**Appalachian Student Research Forum
Johnson City, TN
April 25, 2023**

Kayla Dodson, ETSU College of Public Health, Dept of Biostatistics & Epidemiology

Background

- **Social Isolation and Loneliness (SIL)**
 - Population aging, particularly in rural communities
 - TN is ranked 10th in nation for risk of social isolation in adults 65 and older
 - One-third of adults 60+ experience loneliness
 - SIL increases risk of premature death
 - Lack of community infrastructure to support health aging

ISOLATION

A lack of social connections and sense of community.

VS.

LONELINESS

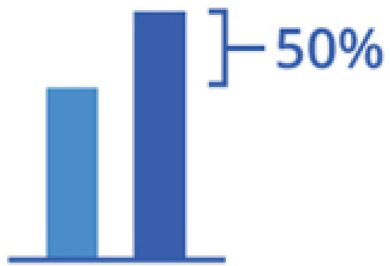
The feeling of being alone, regardless of the amount of social contact.

WHAT IS SOCIAL CONNECTION?



The subjective experience of feeling close to and a sense of belongingness with others.

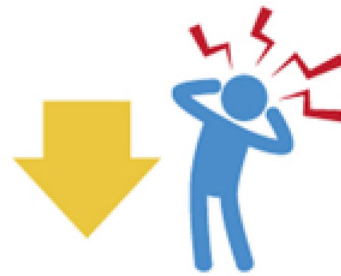
THE BENEFITS OF HIGH SOCIAL CONNECTION:



50% increased chance of longevity



stronger gene expression for immunity (research by Steve Cole, UCLA)



lower rates of anxiety and depression



Social connection creates a positive feedback loop of social, emotional, and physical well being.



higher self-esteem and empathy



better emotion regulation skills

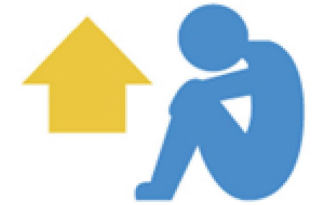
THE DANGERS OF LOW SOCIAL CONNECTION



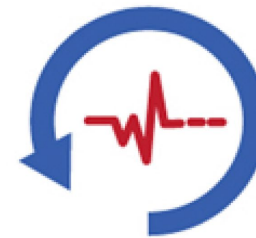
worse for health than smoking, high blood pressure or obesity



higher inflammation at the cellular level



higher susceptibility to anxiety and depression



slower recovery from disease



increased antisocial behavior and violence



suicide

HOW MUCH SOCIAL CONNECTION DO AMERICANS HAVE?



Loneliness, isolation and alienation are on the rise.



In 2004, 25 % of Americans claim that they have no one to share a personal problem with.



Loneliness is the main reason why people seek psychological counseling.

Know the Facts

1 in 2

1 in 2 over the age of 60 are at risk of social isolation.

1 in 3

As many as **1 in 3 older adults aging-in-place** experience loneliness.

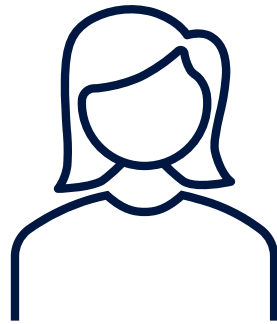
2X

Rates of loneliness among older adults are **two times higher in long-term-care settings** than in community settings.

Project Details

- Building Social Connections Needs Assessment among 82 participants
- Survey administered in Hawkins County, TN
- Project was conducted in three affordable housing complexes among individuals 62+ years of age in February and March 2023

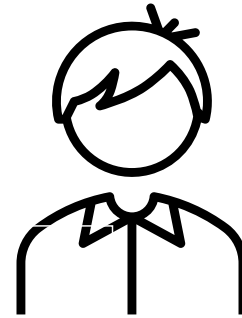
Demographic & Socioeconomic Characteristics



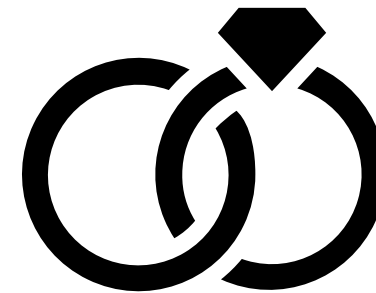
70%
Female



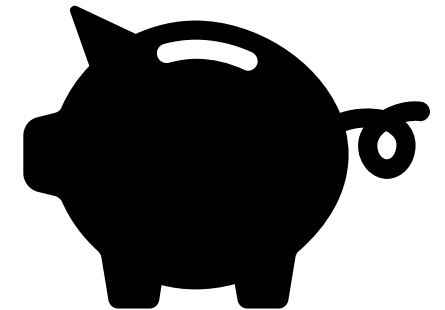
89%
retired



95%
**Non-Hispanic
White**



43%
Widowed



43%
**≤\$14,225
Annual
Income**

Key Findings

	N	%
Avoided Care Due to Cost	6	7.3
At-risk of Polypharmacy	68	84
At-risk for Falls	14	17.3
Feel Informed about Services	37	47.4
Interested in Making New Friends	43	54.4
Has Trouble Finding Transportation	23	28.4
Exercise at least Once a Week	35	46.1
Participate at Senior Centers at least Once per Month	10	12.8

Self-Reported Health & Chronic Conditions



44%

**Fair to Poor
Health**

18% of individuals report fair/poor health in Hawkins County¹



79%

**Four or more
Health Issues**

43% of Medicare enrollees report 4+ chronic conditions in Hawkins County²

Social Isolation, Loneliness, & Social Connections (SILC)

	Mean (range, SD)	N	%
Loneliness (UCLA 3-item Scale)	5.03 (3-9, 1.96)	56	70.9
Social Isolation (Lubben Social Network Scale-6)	13.35 (0-29, 6.14)	56	70.0
Social Connection (Brief Sense of Community Scale)	29.59 (7-40, 8.15)	64	78.1

SILC Correlations

	Chi Square	P-value	Odds Ratio
Lonely*Not Informed	7.99	0.005	4.53
Social Isolation*Poor/Fair Health Status	3.77	0.05	2.48
Social Isolation*Not Informed	5.70	0.017	3.13
Social Isolation*Low Sense of Community	15.82	0.001	---
Sense of Community*Not Informed	15.92	0.001	---

Strategies to Support Aging-in-Place

	N	%
Activities	21	38.2
Assistance/Other	12	21.8
Information, Referrals, Education	5	9.1
Transportation	5	9.1
Connections/Relationships	4	7.3

Implications

- Older adults feel isolated and lonely within their communities
 - Seek opportunities to connect with others in their community
 - More accessible activities would reduce boredom
 - Rural communities are aging faster than urban counterparts and supports are needed
-

Next steps



- Host a community event that brings together local officials and older adults to share findings



- Encourage older adults to advocate for more services



- Engage local organizations in addressing unmet needs for social connections



- Support rural communities with sustainable resources to combat SIL

Thank you!

Questions?

Contact information: Email: dodsonkb@etsu.edu
