



CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN
FOUNDATION

UK BRANCH

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Why is loneliness missing from the Children's Well-being Measures?

A newly published report titled *Loneliness Across the Life Course* is calling for levels of loneliness to be assessed as part of official surveys to measure children's wellbeing.

Research suggests children as young as five are able to describe feelings of loneliness, and research has connected loneliness to poor mental and physical health, as well as issues including low educational attainment. However at present very little is known about how many people in the UK experience loneliness on a regular basis, as data is only collected in relation to older adults. It is not measured in large scale national questionnaires such as Understanding Society.

"Without clear data on the stages of life people are most likely to feel lonely, and the life experiences that make people most vulnerable to loneliness, it is impossible for government or charities wanting to address this issue to know where to focus their efforts," Andrew Barnett, director of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation UK Branch says.

"There's been excellent intervention work targeting older people, but it is clear that loneliness is not only an issue for older people but can affect us at any stage of life. The experiences we have at earlier stages in life lay the foundations for our well-being down the line.

"Given the clear links between loneliness and significant and costly issues such as poor health and low educational attainment, it seems we are missing a trick in not doing more to track the extent of this problem and to understand who is most affected by it."

Loneliness Across the Life Course has uncovered evidence around the impact of life experiences from childhood, through teenage years and into early and middle adulthood on loneliness. It also sets out how the evidence around the nature and causes of loneliness might help us to identify groups which may be particularly at risk – such as looked-after children and teenagers leaving care; refugees and people experiencing multiple disadvantages.

The report calls for new national measures of loneliness to be included in large surveys for children, young people and younger adults, so that we can develop and track effective interventions to meet the needs of those most vulnerable.

“More evidence would show us if loneliness earlier in life is permanent or temporary and if those who experience it earlier in life have a greater propensity for chronic lingering loneliness throughout their life,” Mr Barnett says.

“In addressing mental health services the Government and charitable service providers need to help not only those with acute symptoms but act preventively including supporting those with low and medium level problems that risk escalating.”

STORY ENDS

Quote from Marcus Rand, Director of the Campaign to End Loneliness:

“As loneliness has become part of our society’s day to day vocabulary this is a really important and ground breaking piece of work. Now measured at over a million older people, loneliness is placing significant strains on our health and care services. Understanding how loneliness can affect different groups across the life course will significantly influence our ability as a society to prevent the onset of chronic loneliness, as well as combat it.”

Key Facts:

- *Loneliness Across the Life Course* was commissioned by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation’s UK Branch to assess the stages and situations in life people are most lonely.
- It was released to coincide with the 5th anniversary of the Campaign to End Loneliness, an organisation which works with local bodies and charities to identify and combat loneliness in older people.
- The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation UK Branch originally convened the organisations that developed the Campaign to End Loneliness and has supported its work in the five years since its launch.
- The Foundation is currently halfway through its Transitions in Later Life programme which prepares people in late middle age for potentially distressing changes getting older brings. This approach aims to prevent chronic loneliness in older age, and it stemmed from research done by the Campaign to End Loneliness into what factors lie behind loneliness in older people.
- The Foundation is working in partnership with the Centre for Ageing Better in its Transitions in Later Life work, to jointly test the effectiveness of well-known therapeutic approaches, such as mindfulness and cognitive behavioural therapy, with people preparing for retirement, as well as developing and trialling new methods of support.

Notes for Editors:

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is an international charitable foundation with cultural, educational, social and scientific interests. Based in Lisbon with branches in London and Paris, the Foundation is in a privileged position to support national and transnational work tackling contemporary issues. The purpose of the UK Branch, based in London, is to bring about long-term

improvements in wellbeing particularly for the most vulnerable, by creating connections across boundaries (national borders, communities, disciplines and sectors) which deliver social, cultural and environmental value.

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