Organizers

Dr. Mary Mwanyika Sando at Africa Academy for Public Health

Prof. Dr. Maya Adam at Stanford University

Prof. Dr. Shuyan Liu at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin

Representatives of Adolescent and Youth Voices in Africa

Amani Masaule, Tanzania

Hiwot Daniel Sime, Ethiopia

Representatives for Students and Early Career Scientists

MD, MSc, Innocent Yusufu at Africa Academy for Public Health

PhD candidate, Samia Akhter Khan at King's College London and Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin

PhD candidate, Sphindile Cynthia Machanyangwa at University of KwaZulu-Natal

Coordinators

Carla Duffek and Luis Franz Schneiderhan at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin

Graphic Designer

Alazar Lemma, Ethiopia

Summary in English Loneliness among young people in Africa is a pressing issue, driven by a limited understanding of the concept, high prevalence rates, socio-economic challenges, cultural stigma, and insufficient mental health resources. Understanding and mitigating loneliness in Africa is essential for fostering healthier and more resilient young people. This symposium, leveraging the established Africa Research, Implementation Science, and Education (ARISE) Network — which includes seven African countries focused on young people's health — aims to explore the cultural and social dimensions of loneliness, assess its prevalence, and identify risk and protective factors. It will also develop culturally relevant prevention and early intervention strategies. By bringing together diverse interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary participants, the event will promote collaborative solutions tailored to the unique challenges faced by young people in Africa. Participants will discuss effective methods for fostering social connections and resilience, ultimately creating a supportive network that empowers young people and enhances their quality of life.

The proposed symposium aims to:

1) Determine the cross-cultural and social understanding of loneliness and its prevalence,
2) Identify risk and protective factors influencing loneliness among adolescents and youth across Africa, and
3) Elucidate culturally adapted strategies for prevention, early intervention, and promotion targeting identified risk and protective factors, leveraging the established ARISE Network.

Program

Day 1 - June 11, 2025

Day and Time	Seminar room 4 (50 pax)	Seminar room 3 (15 pax)	Seminar room 2 (15 pax)
8:30am-09:30am	Registration, welcome coffee		
9:30am-10:00am	**Auditorium**: Requested events for all four funded symposia Welcome, get-together		
10:00am-10:45am	**Auditorium:** Presentation of the four symposia		
11:00am-11:30am	**Auditorium**: Requested event for all four funded symposia: **Keynote**: Pamela Qualter		
11:30am-12:00pm	**Auditorium:** Requested event for all four funded symposia: **Keynote**: Dan Joseph Stein, University of Cape Town, "Researching loneliness: Do we need a paradigm shift?"		
12:00pm-1:00pm	**Festsaal: Lunch** *Salatbar aus deutschen Landen, Tomatensuppe, Lunch 7 (Reispfanne mit Erbsen, Tomaten, Safran, Vegetarische Klopse in Rahmsauce, Marktgemüse, Kartoffeln), Dessert* **German salad bar, tomato soup, lunch 7: (rice pan with peas, tomatoes, saffron, vegetarian meatballs in cream sauce, vegetables, potatoes), dessert**		
1:00pm-1:30pm	**Introduction to symposium:** Program overview, introduction of organizers and research networks, anticipated outcomes (Shuyan Liu, Mary Sando, Maya Adam, Innocent Yusufu, Samia Akhter Khan, Sphindile Cynthia Machanyangwa)		

1:30pm-2:00pm	**Mini panel discussion** 1: How do you understand loneliness among adolescents and youth beyond cultural and contextual boundaries, particularly with examples from Africa? *A moderator guides the discussion with three experts from different countries and disciplines, asking questions, facilitating conversation, and opening the floor to audience participation at the end.* - **Christine Neumann (Chair)** - Doron Amsalem - Hiwot Daniel Sime - Sonia Kanekatoua		
2:00pm-2:30pm	Coffee Break		
2:30pm-3:30pm	**Group 1 discussion:** How do you define loneliness in the context of Africa? What are the risk and protective factors associated with loneliness in relation to NCDs in Africa?	**Group 2 discussion:** What determinants affect loneliness and its health implications among adolescents and youth in Africa?	**Group 3 discussion**: What makes loneliness a structural and healthcare ecosystem issue in Africa?
3:30pm-4:15pm	15-minute summary of each group discussion (8-minute summary presentation followed by 7 minutes for Q&A.)		
4:15pm-4:30pm	Recap of Day 1 by Maya Adam		

4:30pm-6:00pm	**Free time**
6:00pm-8:00pm	**Festsaal: Dinner** German: Buffet 1 (Ravioli mit Ratatouille-Füllung, Bärlauchrahm, Zucchini und Auberginen gegrillt, Tomatensugo, Langkornreis statt Polenta), Dessert English: Buffet 1 (Ravioli with ratatouille filling, wild garlic cream, grilled zucchini and eggplant, tomato sauce, long-grain rice instead of polenta), dessert

Group discussions of day 1

Group 1 discussion: Seminar room 4 (50 pax)

How do you define loneliness in the context of Africa?

What are the risk and protective factors associated with loneliness in relation to NCDs in Africa?

Participants

1. Alec Sam Cali
2. Ali Sié
3. Anja Langness
4. Anna Maria Carthaus
5. Angela Chukwu
6. **Dan Joseph Stein (moderator)**
7. Doron Amsalem
8. Fikirte Girma Bayouh
9. Innocent Sabbas Yusufu
10. **Irene Brandt (Notetaker and transcriptionist)**
11. Mary Mwanyika Sando
12. Mashavu Haroub Yussuf
13. Samia C. Akhter-Khan
14. Samuel Adjorlolo
15. Shuyan Liu
16. Sphindile Machanyangwa
17. Yemane Berhane Tsehay

Group 2 discussion: Seminar room 3 (15 pax)

What determinants affect loneliness and its health implications among adolescents and youth in Africa?

Participants

18. Adi Lukas
19. Adom Manu
20. Amani Masaule
21. Carla Duffek
22. Caroline Birungi
23. Christine Neumann
24. **Daniel Bromberg (Notetaker and transcriptionist)**
25. Dorothy Peter Mushi
26. Yawe David Guwatudde
27. Heidi Wiley
28. Hiwot Daniel Sime
29. Justine Nnakate Bukenya
30. Luzia Cassis Heu
31. Matthias Robert Kern
32. Maya Adam
33. **Palmira Fortunato dos Santos (Moderator)**
34. Sonia Kanekatoua
35. Stefanie Niewiem

Group 3 discussion: Seminar room 2 (15 pax)

What makes loneliness a structural and healthcare ecosystem issue in Africa?

Participants

36. Frederick Altice
37. **Hanna Christiansen (moderator)**
38. Hanna Gulema Bedada
39. Jaekyung Shin
40. Jibril Omuya Abdulmalik
41. Julianne Holt-Lunstad
42. Laura Coll Planas
43. Luis Schneiderhan
44. Madlen Roesch
45. **Matthias Haucke (Notetaker and transcriptionist)**
46. Sharany Mosalakanti
47. Sourabié Oumar
48. Tamara Vukičević

ARISE
AFRICA RESEARCH,
IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE &
EDUCATION NETWORK

Day and Time	Seminar room 4 (50 pax)	Seminar room 3 (15 pax)	Seminar room 2 (15 pax)
9:00am-09:45am	Welcome coffee		
9:45am-10:30am	**Mini panel discussion 2:** What is the current status of global measures and interventions for addressing loneliness and their applicability in Africa? *A moderator guides the discussion with three experts from different countries and disciplines, asking questions, facilitating conversation, and opening the floor to audience* participation at the end. **Maya Adam (Chair)** - Amani Masuale - Laura Coll-Planas - Jibril Omuya Abdulmalik		
10:30am-10:40am	Coffee Break		
10:40am-12:10 pm	**Lightning talks** Multiple speakers will give short, focused presentations, each lasting approximately 3 minutes. The session will be divided into three thematic blocks. Each block will last 25 minutes, consisting of 15 minutes for five speaker presentations (3 minutes each), followed by 10 minutes of audience Q&A and panel-style discussion.		

10:40am–10:45am	Introduction by **Mary Mwanyika – Sando**	
Block 1	Lived Experiences and Cultural Perspectives on Loneliness Focus: Personal narratives, cultural interpretations, and local understandings of loneliness.	
10:46am-10:48am	**1**	**Amani Masaule:** How to address loneliness among young people of Africa in their local context
10:49am–10:51am	**2**	**Angela Chukwu:** The silent epidemic: Loneliness, youth and the rising tide of NCDs in Africa
10:52am–10:54am	**3**	**Hiwot Daniel Sime:** My experience/journey with loneliness
10:55am–10:57am	**4**	**Jibril Omuya Abdulmalik:** Evolving family dynamics, emotional wellness and youth loneliness in Africa
10:58am–11:00am	**5**	**Luzia Cassis Heu:** Definitions and perceived causes of loneliness among young adults in Egypt and Nigeria
11:00am–11:10am	**Time for Questions**	
Block 2	Health, Policy & Structural Implications of Loneliness Focus: Epidemiological data, health frameworks, public health and social justice implications.	
11:14am–11:16am	**6**	**Christine Neumann:** Health literacy and loneliness
11:17am–11:19am	7	**Hanna Gulema Bedada:** Prevalence of loneliness and associated factors among Adolescents and Youth in Yeka Sub city, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia
11:20am–11:22am	8	**Laura Coll Planas:** Is loneliness a public health or a social justice issue? The risks of medicalizing loneliness
11:23am–11:25am	9	**Samia C. Akhter-Khan:** Social Relationship Expectations: An approach to understanding loneliness in diverse contexts
11:25am–11:35am	**Time for questions**	

Block 3	Interventions and Creative Approaches to Alleviate Loneliness Focus: Innovative interventions, social connection, digital and artistic responses to loneliness.	
11:36am-11:38am	10	**Alec Sam Cali:** Connecting communities: Loneliness, embeddedness and fostering belonging
11:39am-11:41am	11	**Doron Amsalem:** Brief video intervention to reduce loneliness among youth
11:42am-11:44am	12	**Heidi Wiley:** Theatre - an artform and a place to overcome loneliness
11:45am-11:47am	13	**Maya Adam:** Digital storytelling to convey cross-cultural coping mechanisms
11:48am-11:50am	14	**Sharany Mosalakanti:** Building a global social connection index from crosscultural ethnographic insights
11:51am-12:00pm	**Time for questions**	
12:10pm-1:00pm	**Festsaal: Lunch** *Salatbar Klassisch, Grüne Erbsensuppe, Lunch 8: (Gemüsefrikadellen, Ratatouille, Langkornreis, Gnocchi mit Wirsing-Möhren-Gemüse), Dessert* Classic Salad Bar, Green Pea Soup, Lunch 8: (Vegetable patties, ratatouille, long-grain rice, gnocchi with savoy cabbage and carrot vegetables), dessert	
1:00pm-1:30pm	**Mini panel discussion 3:** What is the policy landscape and potential for prioritizing loneliness within African health agendas? *A moderator guides the discussion with three experts from different countries and disciplines, asking questions, facilitating conversation, and opening the floor to audience participation at the end.* • **Angela Chukwu (Chair)** • Alec Sam Cali • Caroline Birungi • Innocent Sabbas Yusufu	
1:30pm-1:45pm	*Coffee Break*	

1:45pm-2:45pm	**Group 4 discussion:** What strategies can individuals use to cope with loneliness on their own in Africa?	**Group 5 discussion:** What types of infrastructure in schools and communities, such as the Friendship Bench model, can help reduce loneliness in Africa?	**Group 6 discussion:** How can we create inclusive and connected societies across Africa?
2:45pm-3:30pm	15-minute summary of each group discussion (8-minute summary presentation followed by 7 minutes for Q&A.)		
3:30pm-3:45pm	Recap of Day 2 by Shuyan Liu		
4:00pm-6:00pm	Requested events for all four funded symposiums: Joint activity and public event on loneliness and social isolation **Welcoming speech** (4:00 – 4:15 p.m.) - MP Hendrik Wüst (online) - Dr Georg Schütte, CEO, Volkswagen Foundation **Panel discussion:** Political measures against loneliness (4:15 – 5:15 p.m.) - Dr Andreas Philippi, Minister of Social Affairs, Lower Saxony - Serdar Yüksel, Serdar Yüksel, Member of the German Parliament - Britta Oellers, Member of the North Rhine-Westphalia Parliament - Kai Lanz, co-founder and CEO of Krisenchat - Dr. Sven-Olaf Obst, Deputy Head of Department 3, BMBFSFJ **Market of Opportunities:** Poster Session and presentation of Symposia for Theme week 2 (5:30 – 6:00 Uhr p.m.)		
6:00pm-8:00pm	**Foyer: Dinner** **Vegan Buffet with Flying Fingerfood**		
7:00pm	**Film screening** of the South Korean documentary "Hug Me Tight: A Robot Story", produced by Heesun Shin and Chihyung Jeon (with English subtitles), followed by expert discussions, at the Auditorium.		

Group discussions of day 2

Group 4 discussion: Seminar room 4 (50 pax)
What strategies can individuals use to cope with loneliness on their own in Africa?

Participants

1. Amani Masaule
2. Angela Chukwu
3. Anna Maria Carthaus
4. **Carla Duffek (Notetaker and transcriptionist)**
5. Christine Neumann
6. Daniel Bromberg
7. Doron Amsalem
8. Frederick Altice
9. Hanna Gulema
10. Irene Brandt
11. Luzia Cassis Heu
12. Matthias Hauke
13. Mary Mwanyika-Sando
14. Maya Adam
15. Samuel Adjorlolo
16. Sharany Mosalakanti
17. Sonia Kanekatoua
18. Sourabié Oumar
19. **Yemane Berhane (Moderator)**

Group 5 discussion: Seminar room 3 (15 pax)
What types of infrastructure in schools and communities, such as the Friendship Bench model, can help reduce loneliness in Africa?

Participants

20. Adi Lukas
21. Adom Manu
22. Ali Sié
23. Dan Joseph Stein
24. **Dorothy Peter Mushi (Moderator)**
25. Fikirte Girma Bayouh
26. Hanna Christiansen
27. Heidi Wiley
28. Hiwot Daniel Sime
29. Innocent Sabbas Yusufu
30. Jaekyung Shin
31. Jibril Omuya Abdulmalik
32. Justine Nnakate Bukenva
33. **Luis Schneiderhan (Notetaker and transcriptionist)**
34. Madlen Roesch
35. Matthias Robert Kern
36. Palmira Fortunato Dos Santos
37. Samia C. Akhter-Khan
38. Yawe David Guwatudde

Group 6 discussion: Seminar room 2 (15 pax)
How can we create inclusive and connected societies across Africa?

Participants

39. **Alec Sam Cali (Notetaker and transcriptionist)**
40. Anja Langness
41. Caroline Birungi (Moderator)
42. Julianne Holt-Lunstad
43. Laura Coll Planas
44. Mashavu Haroub Yussuf
45. Shuyan Liu
46. **Sphindile Machanyangwa (Moderator)**
47. Stefanie Niewiem
48. Tamra Vukičević

Program

Day 3 - June 13, 2025

Day and Time	Seminar room 4 (50 pax)	Seminar room 3 (15 pax)	Seminar room 2 (15 pax)
9:00am-09:45am	Welcome coffee		
9:45am-10:00am	**Introduction** by Samia Akhter Khan: What is the World Café? *Participants engage in multiple rounds of discussion on specific topics, moving to different groups after each round of discussion (usually 15-20 minutes) to share ideas from the previous group with them. At the end, a summary of key themes and insights is shared with the entire group.*		
10:00am-11:00am	**World Café 1:** Participatory priority setting: **Research in Africa**	**World Café 2:** Participatory priority setting**: Community engagement** in Africa	**World Café 3:** Participatory priority setting: **Policies** and networks in Africa
11:00am-11:45am	**Summary of each World Café** **(8-minute summary presentation followed by 7 minutes for Q&A.)**		

11:45am-12:00pm	Recap of Day 3 and closing session by Mary Mwanyika Sando		
12:00pm-1:00pm	Requested events for all four funded symposiums: **European perspectives:** Evelyn Regner, Member of the European Parliament **Roundtable:** Sachiko Horiguchi (Japan), Julianne Holt-Lunstad (USA), and Mary Mwanyika Sando (Tanzania) "International perspectives on loneliness"		
1pm-2pm	**Festsaal:** Lunch *Salatbar Mare Nostrum, Toskanische Linsensuppe, Lunch 1: (Rigatoni und Gnocchi mit Tomaten-, Spinat oder Gorgonzolasauce), Dessert Extra: Broccoli und Romanesco, vegetarisch zubereitet* Mare Nostrum Salad Bar, Tuscan Lentil Soup, Lunch 1: (Rigatoni and gnocchi with tomato, spinach, or gorgonzola sauce), dessert Extra: Broccoli and Romanesco, prepared vegetarian		

World Cafe - Day 3

World Café 1: Seminar room 4 (50 pax)
Participatory priority setting: **Research** in Africa

Participants

1. Amani Masaule
2. Anna Maria Carthaus
3. Christine Neumann
4. Dan Joseph Stein
5. Dorothy Peter Mushi
6. Frederick Altice
7. Hiwot Daniel Sime
8. Innocent Sabbas Yusufu
9. Irene Brandt
10. Madlen Roesch
11. Mary Mwanyika Sando
12. **Mashavu Haroub Yussuf (Moderator)**
13. Sharany Mosalakanti
14. Shuyan Liu
15. Sourabié Oumar
16. **Stefanie Niewiem (Note taker)**
17. Yemane Berhane
18. Julianne Holt-Lunstad

World Café 2: Seminar room 3 (15 pax)
Participatory priority setting: **Community engagement** in Africa

Participants

19. Adom Manu
20. Adi Lukas Kurniawan
21. Ali Sié
22. Anja Langness
23. Carla Duffek
24. Hanna Christiansen
25. Heidi Wiley
26. **Laura Coll Planas (Moderator)**
27. Luzia Cassis Heu
28. Matthias Haucke
29. **Matthias Robert Kern (Note taker)**
30. Palmira Fortunato dos Santos
31. Sonia Kanekatoua
32. Sphindile Machanyangwa
33. Tamara Vukičević
34. Yawe David Guwatudde

World Café 3: Seminar room 2 (15 pax)
Participatory priority setting: **Policies** and networks in Africa

Participants

35. Alec Sam Cali
36. Angela Chukwu
37. Caroline Birungi
38. Daniel Bromberg
39. Doron Amsalem
40. Fikirte Girma Bayouh
41. Hanna Gulema Bedada
42. Jaekyung Shin
43. Jibril Omuya Abdulmalik
44. **Justine Nnakate Bukenya (Moderator)**
45. Luis Schneiderhan
46. Maya Adam
47. **Samia C. Akhter-Khan (Note taker)**
48. Samuel Adjorlolo

PARTICIPANTS

Adi Lukas Kurniawan
University of Bonn, Germany
Heidelberg Institute of Global Health (HIGH), Germany

Dr. Lukas Kurniawan is a Postdoctoral Researcher at Heidelberg Institute of Global Health and Senior Researcher at Center for Development Research (ZEF), University of Bonn. He is a nutrition epidemiologist with more than five years of experience in utilizing data-driven insights to improve population health outcomes and drive evidence-based policies. His research topics include dietary pattern analysis – dimension reduction technique, quasi-experimental design, nutrition and planetary health, nutrition and climate change adaptation strategies, and children and adolescent health.

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Adom Manu
University of Ghana (UG), Ghana

Dr. Adom Manu is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health at the School of Public Health at the University of Ghana. His main area of teaching and research is Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) issues. He has over 20 years' experience in field research and has served as Principal or Co-Investigator of several projects. Dr. Manu has extensive experience in training the younger generation of public health specialists with a focus on adolescent health. He serves as the Postgraduate Training Director for the WHO/HRP Alliance Hub postgraduate scholarship for capacity strengthening in SRH in Anglophone Africa. His research interests include adolescent SRH, HIV-related risk behaviors and child marriage. Currently, he is a Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence at Ohio University, with the Global Health Initiative.

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Alazar Lemma
Graphic designer, Ethiopia

Alazar Lemma is a recent graduate in International Relations and a current Economics student at Addis Ababa University. He is a passionate advocate for youth mental health, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and meaningful youth engagement. As a youth council member at TaYA and a contributor to mental health research with Grassroot Soccer, Alazar brings a grounded perspective on the emotional and social challenges faced by young Africans. His strong communication skills and interdisciplinary training make him a committed voice for youth-centered solutions.

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Alec Sam Cali

Heidelberg Institute of Global Health (HIGH), Germany

Alec Cali is an early career scholar at the Heidelberg Institute for Global Health. They study the link between health and political behavior, and how these are influenced by beliefs, structural factors, and geopolitical factors. They use medical decision making and policy preferences as a foil to better understand how the structural issues of rising inequality, climate change, gender and sexual discrimination, racial oppression, welfare state transformations, and political corruption impact health behavior and institutional support. Alec is a mixed methodologist with experience in interview research, experimental survey methods, and comparative policy analysis.

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Ali Sié

Nouna Health Research Centre (CRSN), Burkina Faso

Ali Sié, MD, PhD is a senior scientist, epidemiologist and technical director and team leader on disease control at the Nouna Health Research Centre (CRSN). He obtained his medical degree from the University of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso and PhD in Clinical Epidemiology at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. He began his career in 1999 as a clinician at the Banfora Regional Hospital in Burkina Faso and transferred to CRSN in 2004 as a research fellow in clinical research development. He was appointed head of the research and training unit for two years before heading the CRSN as director in 2006. Dr. Sié is an international expert in public health/epidemiology in the field of disease surveillance, with over 20 years' experience. His expertise covers health systems research for health policy strengthening, infectious disease epidemiology and the evaluation of health projects and programs. He is also a research associate at the Joseph Ki Zerbo University in Ouagadougou, the University of Heidelberg and the University of California San Francisco (UCSF). He is/was principal investigator of several clinical/health system research projects and has authored/coauthored over 150 articles in peer-reviewed journals and serves on numerous scientific and management boards.

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Amani Masaule

ARISE Adolescent and Youth Advisory Board, Tanzania

Amani Masaule is a recent Bachelor of Science in Nursing graduate from the University of Dodoma and a passionate mental health advocate. Currently, he is completing his internship at Muhimbili National Hospital. Amani serves as Tanzania's representative for the Adolescents and Youth Advisory Board (AYAB) under the ARISE network, contributing to youth health research. He is the Co-founder of Tunasikiliza Platform, promoting mental health awareness, and also serves as Mental Health Lead at TSL and Program Coordinator at Cancer Fight Tanzania. His work focuses on mental health, chronic illness, and youth well-being across Africa.

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Anna Maria Carthaus
Deutsche Welle, Germany

Anna is a medical doctor and journalist. She enjoys reporting on everything that touches us as human beings – preferably when it has something to do with science. 2019 to 2021 traineeship at Deutsche Welle with stations in Bonn, Berlin and Washington. She currently works as a freelance author for Deutsche Welle, ZEIT ONLINE and Spektrum der Wissenschaft, among others. She loves listening to other people's stories. If she wouldn't work as a journalist, she would probably be a psychiatrist.

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Angela Chukwu
University of Ibadan (UI), Nigeria

Professor Angela Chukwu's research focuses on the development and integration of innovative statistical approaches to understand and enhance the applications in Public Health, clinical research, and the life sciences. Prof. Chukwu is highly involved in research and project collaborations with leaders at national and international partner institutions on a broad range of applications of Statistics and implementation interventions for public health and the life sciences. She is currently a visiting scholar at the World Bank sponsored African Center of Excellence in Data Science at the University of Rwanda, and a fellow of the McGoldrick funded initiative at the Harvard T. Chan School of Public Health. Prof. Chukwu is the functional head of the University of Ibadan Research Foundation (UI-Research Foundation), where she provides technical context and contents on projects and initiatives.

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Anja Langness
Bertelsmann Stiftung, Germany

Anja is a Senior Project Manager and Project Lead at the Bertelsmann Foundation with nearly 20 years of experience in public health and social development. She holds a Doctorate in Public Health from Bielefeld University and a Master's in International Public Health from Maastricht University. Her work focuses on youth participation, sustainable development, and translating research into practice. At the Bertelsmann Foundation, she leads the project "Empowering Youth for a Sustainable Future." Her expertise includes educational governance, health promotion, social inequalities, and fostering collaboration with stakeholders from politics, civil society, and academia.

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Carla Duffek
Charité – Berlin University Medicine, affiliated with Humboldt University and the Free University of Berlin, Germany

Carla Duffek is currently completing her bachelor's degree in psychology at Freie Universität Berlin. She is part of the AG Umwelt und Psychische Gesundheit at Charité, where she contributes to organizing and finalizing the symposium. Throughout her studies, she developed a strong interest in child development psychology and is particularly eager to explore current research on the mechanisms underlying loneliness among young people. She is especially interested in the work and findings of the ARISE Network and the studies conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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Caroline Birungi

Makerere University College of Health Sciences (MakCHS), Uganda

Caroline Birungi, MBChB, MMED (PSYCH), PhD student who is investigating risky sexual behavior among patients with severe mental illness and a Lecturer/ Psychiatrist, Department of Psychiatry, College of Health Sciences at Makerere University. She has experience in managing HIV-associated psychiatric disorders in children, adults and the elderly. She is part of the trainers in the HIV stripe inter-professional course which teaches professionals on how to manage HIV patients at their facilities in Uganda. She has 12 years' experience teaching both under and post-graduate students, conducting research in HIV in Uganda and supervising twelve graduate students' research at the Department of Psychiatry and at the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatics.

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Christine Neumann

Heidelberg Institute of Global Health (HIGH), Germany

Christine Neumann is a science manager and leader at Heidelberg Institute of Global Health. Her current work focusses on health promotion and prevention. She manages large research and implementation projects on adolescent health in Africa and multimorbidity in Europe. With almost 20 years of working experience in various positions in Europe, her passion lies in exploring health literacy and behavioral science in the global context. With a background in international management, her skill set includes leading, evaluating, and supporting global innovation and entrepreneurial projects, communication and public affairs, as well as sustainability, global health, prevention and patient support programs.

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Dan Joseph Stein

University of Cape town, South Africa
Aarhus University, Denmark

Dan J. Stein is Professor and Chair of the Dept of Psychiatry at the University of Cape Town, and Director of the South African Medical Research Council's Unit on Risk & Resilience in Mental Disorders. Dan's training includes doctoral degrees in clinical neuroscience and in philosophy, and a post-doctoral fellowship in psychopharmacology. He is a clinician-scientist whose work has long focused on anxiety and related disorders, including obsessive-compulsive spectrum conditions and posttraumatic stress disorder. He has also mentored a range of other research, with publications spanning basic neuroscience, through clinical research, and on to public mental health.

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Daniel Jesse Bromberg
Yale University, United States
Heidelberg Institute of Global Health (HIGH), Germany
Charité – Berlin University Medicine, affiliated with Humboldt University and the Free University of Berlin, Germany

Dr. Daniel J. Bromberg's research focuses on HIV, substance use, war, displacement, and criminalization in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. A Fogarty fellow in Ukraine in 2021-2022, his work with HIV and substance use was redirected to the refugee crisis in Europe when the war began. He uses qualitative, quantitative, and implementation science approaches to improve healthcare service delivery and health equity.

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Doron Amsalem
Columbia University, New York City, United States

Doron Amsalem, MD, is a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist and Associate Professor of Clinical Psychiatry at Columbia University and the New York State Psychiatric Institute. His research focuses on reducing mental health stigma—particularly around psychosis and depression in youth—using brief, social contact-based videos. These videos feature personal stories from individuals with lived experience to foster identification and emotional connection, thereby reducing stigma and promoting treatment engagement. Dr. Amsalem's work aims to develop and implement scalable interventions that reach at-risk youth earlier, helping them access care and improving mental health outcomes in diverse communities.

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Dorothy Peter Mushi
Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences, Tanzania

Dr Dorothy Mushi, Lecturer and Psychiatrist at the Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences, Dar es Salaam Tanzania. Special interest in integrating mental health and substance use disorders in other non-communicable diseases, HIV and primary health care.

E-Mail: dorrymush@yahoo.com

Fikirte Girma Bayouh

Addis Ababa University (AAU), Ethiopia

I am a child and adolescent psychiatrist from Ethiopia, assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry, Addis Ababa University. I run a child and adolescent psychiatry clinic at Zewditu Memorial Hospital. Additionally, I teach both undergraduate and postgraduate students in general and child and adolescent psychiatry. My research interests include child development and developmental disorders, maternal and child mental health, adolescent mental health, and community mental health care. My goal is to advance research and education in child and adolescent psychiatry, ultimately contributing to better mental health outcomes for young people in Ethiopia.

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Frederick Lewis Altice

Yale University School of Medicine and School of Public Health, United States

Dr. Altice is a Professor of Medicine, Epidemiology and Public Health at Yale University where he serves as the Director of Clinical and Community Research. His research training is in implementation science, decision science, behavioral interventions with expertise on intervention adaptation implementation science, including development and adaption of HIV prevention and treatment interventions and expanding evidence-based practices into real-world community settings. He is interested in the creation of novel prevention and treatment programs for the treatment of HIV, viral hepatitis, tuberculosis, and substance use disorders in vulnerable populations. Dr. Altice currently leads studies in Ukraine, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Peru, and the United States.

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Hanna Christiansen

University of Marburg, Germany

Hanna Christiansen is a professor of clinical child and adolescent psychology at Philipps University Marburg, Germany. She is a licensed child and adolescent as well as adult psychotherapist and supervisor. She is the director of the psychotherapeutic outpatient clinic for children and adolescents as well as for ADHD over the lifespan, and families under pressure at Marburg university, as well as the director of the psychotherapy training institute. In her research she focuses on mental disorders of children and adolescents, especially ADHD and children of parents with a mental disorder. A further focus is on how to implement and disseminate evidence based interventions into practice (translation) and to back-translate clinical knowledge into research. She is part of the new German Center for Mental Health (DZPG) at the site Bochum/Marburg and responsible for the core infrastructure youth mental health that focuses on improving mental health in school and childcare settings. A focus of her work is participation and a youth council as well as parent and school council were set up at her working group.

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Hanna Gulema Bedada
Addis Continental Institute of Public Health (ACIPH), Ethiopia

Hanna Gulema (PhD) is a Public Health researcher and Assistant Professor at Addis Continental Institute of Public Health, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She has developed expertise in disease surveillance, project management, training facilitation, and adolescent health interventions, drawing from her extensive experience in public health. Her research interests and passion lie in adolescent health, particularly mental well-being, nutrition, and sexual and reproductive health (SRH). She has contributed to various research projects focusing on communicable and non-communicable diseases, maternal and child health, adolescent nutrition, SRH, education, and mental health.

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Heidi Wiley
European Theatre Convention (ETC), Germany

Heidi Wiley has been Executive Director of the European Theatre Convention (ETC) since 2009. Under her leadership, ETC has become an established European cultural network with an international programme of artistic collaboration, professional development and advocacy for Europe's public theatres, spanning over 30 countries. She led ETC to become a strategic partner of the European Commission and the recipient of several prestigious prizes, including the 2022 Art Explora – Académie des Beaux-Arts European Award for innovation in access to culture; and European prizes for outstanding achievement in the fields of audience development and cultural heritage. Heidi is a sought after moderator and speaker at European events and conferences. In 2022, Speaker at the 8th Culture & RTBF Meeting; 2021, Consultant for European cultural policy agencies KEA (Brussels) and PPMI (Vilnius); 2020, Co-initiator of the 1st European Theatre Forum of the European Commission and the German EU Council Presidency; 2019, Author for the European Expert Network on Culture and Audiovisual (EENCA). Heidi started her career as international producer and touring manager for artists Victoria Chaplin and the Tiger Lillies, touring around Europe and Asia at major festivals and theatre venues. A studied cultural manager with degrees from La Sorbonne and Leuphana University, she lived and worked over the last 25 years in the UK, US, France and Germany.

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Hiwot Daniel Sime
ARISE Adolescent and Youth Advisory Board, Ethiopia

Passionate about improving healthcare through the lens of clinical pharmacy and psychology, Hiwot is currently a 4th-year clinical pharmacy student at Africa Medical College and a 3rd-year psychology student at Addis Ababa University, pursuing a dual degree. As the leader of the Youth Mental Health Team at Serve Global, she had actively contributed to initiatives that empower young people to prioritize their mental health. Her experience as an online mentor with the Mentor Youth Volunteer Network has further solidified her dedication to guiding and uplifting youth. Currently, she proudly represents Ethiopia as an active member of the ARISE Network Adolescent and Youth Advisory Board, focusing on youth engagement and health initiatives.

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Innocent Sabbas Yusufu

Africa Academy for Public Health (AAPH), Tanzania

Dr. Innocent Yusufu is a medical doctor and researcher in public health and health services outcomes. He is committed to advancing public health priorities in Sub-Saharan Africa through innovative research, training, capacity building, and knowledge translation. In his capacity as a research program officer at the Africa Academy for Public Health (AAPH), Dr. Yusufu has been instrumental in driving positive change within and beyond the region through collaborative networks particularly in the areas of mental health, sexual and reproductive health, and nutrition.

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Irene Brandt

Heidelberg Institute of Global Health (HIGH), Germany
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Irene Brandt is a current Doctoral student at Charité and grant manager at HIGH whose experience includes grant management, qualitative and quantitative data analysis, mixed methods, program evaluation, survey creation and validation, visual executive summaries and infographics, stakeholder engagement, grant management, and teaching various Psychology courses. Her Masters degree is in Social Psychology with a co-concentration in Evaluation from Claremont Graduate University. Her research interests are focused on mental health interventions in applied settings.

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Jaekyung Shin

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Jaekyung Shin is a master's student in Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy at Humboldt University of Berlin. Her academic interests focus on loneliness, digital mental health, and real-time assessment methods. She is currently working on her master's thesis, investigating predictors of loneliness using Ecological Momentary Assessment and Digital Phenotyping to understand how loneliness unfolds in everyday life. By combining psychological theory with digital tools, her research aims to contribute to early detection and prevention strategies. She is particularly interested in how loneliness affects young people globally. Jaekyung looks forward to learning from interdisciplinary perspectives on loneliness and mental health at the symposium.

Jibril Omuya Abdulmalik
College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Dr. Jibril Omuya Abdulmalik is an Associate Professor of Psychiatry & Psychiatrist with the Department of Psychiatry, University of Ibadan & the University College Hospital, Ibadan. He is the Founder of Asido Foundation, a Not-for-Profit mental health advocacy organization (www.asidofoundation.com). His interest is in public mental health, including mental health advocacy and stigma reduction, as well as the successful integration of mental health into primary care. He is active in promoting mental health reforms and youth mental health. Dr Abdulmalik contributes a weekly column, 'Your Mental Health & You' for a national daily, The Nigerian Tribune on Thursdays, since 2016.

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Julianne Holt-Lunstad
Social Connection & Health Lab, Brigham Young University (BYU), United States

Julianne Holt-Lunstad is a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Brigham Young University, and director of the Social Connections Lab. She is also the founding scientific chair and board member for the U.S. Foundation for Social Connection and the Global Initiative on Loneliness and Connection.

A globally recognized expert on social connection and health, Dr. Holt-Lunstad's research has been pivotal in identifying social isolation and loneliness as risk factors for early mortality. As the lead scientific editor for a US Surgeon General's Advisory and National Strategy to advance social connection, and an advisor to the World Health Organization, she translates evidence into practice and policy. As an in-demand scientific advisor, she consults for organizations across sectors, including providing expert testimony in a US Congressional Hearing, serving on multiple National Academy of Sciences consensus committees,the UK Cross-departmental Loneliness Team, and providing expertise to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Gravity Project, United Nations, and other major international organizations. She has garnered numerous professional accolades, and is highly sought to communicate the science including a TEDx talk. She is regularly featured in major media outlets, including the New York Times, CNN, BBC, Scientific American, and many more.

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Justine Nnakate Bukenya
Makerere University School of Public Health (MakSPH), Uganda

Dr. Justine N. Bukenya is a medical doctor and a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Community Health and Behavioural Sciences at Makerere University School of Public Health. She has medical training from Makerere University Medical School, Public Health training from the University of Melbourne, Australia and a PhD from Makerere University. She has extensive experience in clinical medicine and public health. In terms of health service management, she has rich experience in planning, implementing, supervising, coordinating, monitoring and evaluating of Health Care services/ activities at community, district and national levels. Justine has been involved in conducting research among vulnerable populations, including adolescents and refugees. She has made numerous presentations at International scientific meetings and is peer reviewer for numerous journals.

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Laura Coll-Planas
Universitat de Vic- Universitat Central de Catalunya (UVic-UCC), Spain

Laura Coll-Planas is a medical doctor with a PhD in Public Health on loneliness, social support and participation among older people from a health perspective. Her interests evolved from geriatrics to healthy ageing with a focus on the psychosocial aspects of ageing. In the last years, her research has been centered on loneliness interventions promoting peer support and social participation (i.e., social prescribing) in adulthood and older adults. From a methodological perspective, her expertise is on complex interventions and process evaluation using mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative procedures). She has leading roles in European projects such as Join4joy (enjoyment and inclusion in physical activity) and RECETAS (nature-based social prescribing to alleviate loneliness). She coordinates the first ever Postgraduate Training Course on Loneliness in Spanish, held at UVic-UCC, and she recently launched the Podcast "In search of loneliness" (original language in Catalan).

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Luis Franz Schneiderhan
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Luis Franz Schneiderhan is a student assistant in the Environment and Mental Health Research Group at Charité Berlin, Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy. In this role, he supports research and administrative tasks, including responsibilities within the ARISE NUTRINT and DASH research projects. Luis Franz Schneiderhan is currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Psychology at Humboldt-University of Berlin. He is particularly interested in the psychology of sexual and gender diversity and aims to apply these skills in a career as a psychotherapist.

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Luzia Cassis Heu
Utrecht University (UU), Netherlands

Luzia Heu works as an assistant professor in Interdisciplinary Social Science at Utrecht University. As a cultural psychologist, she has studied meanings, causes and coping strategies for loneliness across cultures, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. She has developed theorizing about how cultural norms can influence the prevalence and predictive strength of risk factors for loneliness and, in recent years, studied the loneliness that results from not fitting in with social norms, and characteristics and development of chronic loneliness in young adults' lived experiences. To communicate her findings to non-scientists, she uses blog posts (e.g., Psychology Today), video (loneliness-across-cultures.com), and a podcast (Connected by Loneliness – The Loneliness Podcast; in preparation).

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Madlen Rösch
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Madlen Roesch is the Global Social Impact Lead at NIVEA, where she leads NIVEA CONNECT - Beiersdorf's global initiative to address loneliness and social isolation. The program spans research, expert partnerships, educational tools, communication, and on-the-ground projects across all continents that foster connection and belonging. With a strong background in brand and strategic communications, she is particularly passionate about exploring how different stakeholders - from NGOs to businesses - can work together to create systemic solutions to loneliness and build more connected communities.

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M**ary Mwanyika-Sando**
Africa Academy for Public Health (AAPH), Tanzania

Dr. Mary Mwanyika Sando is the chief executive officer of the Africa Academy for Public Health (AAPH, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania). She has extensive experience in the design and implementation of maternal, child health, and nutrition programs through her work with different institutions, including UNICEF and Management and Development for Health (MDH). At AAPH, Dr. Mwanyika Sando is leading efforts to advance the implementation of scientific research, research training, and capacity building, as well as the translation of scientific evidence into policy and practice. Dr. Mwanyika Sando is an advocate for the improvement of women's health, including the promotion of dignified and respectful care during childbirth. She is an active member and the current president-elect of the Medical Women Association of Tanzania (MEWATA). Dr. Mwanyika Sando completed her medical training at the University of Dar es Salaam and obtained her M.P.H. in global health and population at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health (USA).

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Mashavu Haroub Yussuf
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Dr. Mashavu Yussuf is an Epidemiologist working as a Senior Research and Programs Manager at the Africa Academy for Public Health (AAPH). She has a background in dental surgery and experience in clinical management of patients and public health and implementation science research. Dr. Mashavu's research areas of interest include nutrition, Maternal, Child and adolescent health, HIV/AIDs as well as non-communicable diseases. She is well experienced in proposal development; designing and implementing data collection; data management and analysis; report write-up and dissemination of research findings. At AAPH, she manages implementation of numerous programs including activities related to data quality assessments, service delivery audits, and evaluations. Having worked as both a dental clinician and public health scientist, she hopes to continue conducting research and evaluations aimed to address key public health priority areas especially for Adolescents.

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Matthias Haucke
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Dr. Matthias Haucke, Junior Researcher (PhD in Clinical Psychology at Freie Universität Berlin), is a highly trained and experienced junior researcher with a PhD-level qualification. He investigates the mechanisms, trajectories, and interventions of drug intake. He is an expert in digital phenotyping, which is the assessment of present mental states via smartphone and mobile sensing encompassing mobile phone activity, sleep patterns, and physical activity. Moreover, he has experience in measuring the biological underpinnings of mental states, including cortisol levels, electrodermal activity, electrocardiography, and fMRI imaging. His has experience in methodological questions, specifically surrounding just-in-time interventions utilizing smartphones. Moreover, he is an expert in time-series modeling and dynamic network modeling. His primary focus lies in investigating mental processes contributing to loneliness or arising from it. Outside of research, he has gathered clinical experience, working in a trauma-specialized clinic. He is currently training to become a psychotherapist, thus showing a multifaceted approach to understanding and addressing mental health challenges.

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Matthias Robert Kern
Heidelberg Institute of Global Health (HIGH), Germany

Matthias Kern is a social epidemiologist with a special focus on social determinants of mental health and well-being among adolescents, currently working as a postdoctoral researcher at the Heidelberg Institute of Global Health (HIGH). After completion of his MSc in sociology at the London School of Economics, he obtained a PhD in social sciences from the University of Luxembourg with a dissertation examining the influence of various micro-, meso-, and macro-level factors on health and health behavior of adolescents in a number of high- as well as upper and lower middle income countries utilizing data from the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) study. At the HIGH he works on a project which seeks to develop, deliver and evaluate interventions aiming to improve (mental) health literacy, behaviors and outcomes among adolescents in different Sub Saharan African countries.

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Maya Adam

Stanford University, California, United States

Dr. Adam is the Director of Health Media Innovation and a Clinical Associate Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at Stanford School of Medicine. Her research focuses on measuring the impact of innovative, video-based entertainment-education approaches to global health communication. She is the Faculty Lead for the Global Child Health Media Initiative and Associate Director of the Center for Digital Health at Stanford. Her research is conducted in collaboration with the Heidelberg Institute of Global Health in Heidelberg, Germany.

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Palmira Fortunato dos Santos

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Dr. Palmira Fortunato dos Santos is a clinical psychologist and researcher. She coordinates the Mental Health, Trauma and Violence Program at the National Institute of Health of Mozambique. Her research focuses on integrating mental health into communities and primary health care using task shifting/sharing strategies. Specifically, she is co-leading research projects in the area of Intimate Partner Violence, Adolescent Mental Health, Validation of Mental Health Screening Tools, the National Survey of Non Communicable Diseases risk factors (STEPS 2024) and MHPSS in emergencies.

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Samia C. Akhter-Khan

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Samia Akhter-Khan is a PhD candidate in Health Service and Population Research at the IoPPN at King's College London. She obtained her BA and MA degree in psychology from the Humboldt University Berlin, Germany. Her main research interest lies in ensuring older people's well-being in the context of rapid global population ageing and long-term care challenges. In 2018/19, she lived and worked in Myeik, Myanmar, on reducing and preventing loneliness in older adults. Next to her research, she also worked for HelpAge International in Myanmar and Thailand on policies for long-term care and healthy ageing in Asia. During her year at Duke University in 2019/20, she joined an interdisciplinary international project on rethinking care economies. Currently, Samia investigates possible benefits of care provision by older adults for intergenerational care settings, as well as the overlap of new technologies and care, using 'precision health' - person-centered and integrated care - to prevent mental and physical health problems. Samia's research includes interdisciplinary perspectives and mixed-method approaches to tackle older people's global mental health and well-being from various angles.

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Samuel Adjorlolo
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Samuel Adjorlolo (PhD) is an Associate Professor in Adolescent and Maternal Mental Health and the Head of Department of Mental Health Nursing, University of Ghana. Professor Adjorlolo obtained a PhD from the City University of Hong Kong, bachelor's and master's degree from the University of Ghana and the UiT-Arctic University of Norway. He is a research scientist with a strong multi-disciplinary training and expertise in health sciences, psychology, mental health, research ethics and integrity, implementation research. His research focuses cross-cutting health issues affecting young people, and women, including those in the perinatal period. His research has been funded by local and international organizations, including CIHR, WHO-Alliance, Anesvad Foundation. He has published extensively in peer-reviewed journals and co-edited the African mental health and criminal justice system book, published by Palgrave Macmillan. He was a fellow of the ACHIEVE and Research Integrity Program funded by National Institute of Health. He is a Fellow of the POSSIBLE-Africa Fellowship program hosted and funded by Science for Africa Foundation. Professor. Adjorlolo features on major news outlets in Ghana on mental health and related topics.

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Sharanya Mosalakanti
Annecy Behavioral Science Lab, Annecy, France

Sharanya Mosalakanti is a Junior Researcher at Annecy Behavioral Science Lab, working on the development and analysis of personalized tools designed to better understand the nuances of social connection and human experience. She is especially interested in advanced psychometric methods that offer deeper insight into individuals and inform evidence-based interventions. Sharanya holds an M.A. with a specialization in Industrial-Organizational Psychology and has previously worked on developing new-age assessments to measure potential in organizational contexts. She is committed to person-centered, data-informed research with applications in well-being, education, and organizations.

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Shuyan Liu

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Shuyan Liu is Junior Professor of Global Mental Health at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin and Brain City Ambassador in Berlin. Her research is concerned with the complex interactions between the environment and mental health, at a global level. She is particularly interested in understanding the ubiquity of loneliness and its impact.

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Sonia Kanékatoua Epse Agbolo-Noamessi

University Hospital Center Campus of Lomé, Togo

Sonia Kanekatoua is one of two psychiatrists in the Psychiatry and Medical Psychology Clinic at the University Hospital Center Campus. She leads patient care (all populations: children, adolescents, adults and the elderly), supervises internship students and participates in scientific research. She is also a psychiatrist at the integrated addiction care center of Kodjoviakopé, a risk reduction center for HIV, viral hepatitis and tuberculosis. She is a trainer for the WHOPEN protocol in Togo and a local trainer for the Universal Prevention Curricula (UPC) of Plan Colombo's drug addiction counseling program.

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Sourabié Oumar

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Sourabié Oumar holds a Doctorate in Medicine as well as a Diploma of Specialized Studies in Psychiatry. He is currently working as an Assistant in Psychiatry at the Institut Supérieur des Sciences de la Santé (INSSA) at Université Nazi Boni in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso. In addition to his academic role, he serves as a Psychiatrist at Sourô Sanou University Hospital in Bobo-Dioulasso. He is also affiliated with the Nouna Research Center in Nouna, Burkina Faso, where he contributes as an Associate Researcher. His research activities focus on public mental health, with recent publications including a 2025 study co-authored with Brandt et al., evaluating the effectiveness of a comic book intervention on mental health literacy among adolescents and youth in Burkina Faso, published in BMC Public Health. In 2024, he also contributed to a cross-sectional survey on the adherence of hemodialysis patients to physical barrier measures during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, published with colleagues in a national clinical context.

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Sphindile Machanyangwa

University of Kwazulu-Natal (UKZN), South Africa

Trained as a counseling psychologist, Sphindile is an experienced Study Coordinator having worked in various adolescent-focused studies. She is currently a researcher on the ARISE Network whose aim is to promote adolescent health and nutrition interventions in Sub-Saharan countries. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. degree in the School of Nursing and Public Health with a key interest in adolescent Sexual and Reproductive health and mental health issues.

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Stefanie Niewiem

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Stefanie is a Master's student in Psychology at Humboldt University of Berlin and works as a student assistant for the Berlin-Nairobi Global HEART program at Charité, which focuses on global health exchange, research, and training. Her Master's thesis explores climate emotions among nursing students in Kenya, including how these emotions relate to experiences of loneliness and psychological distress. She has lived in Tanzania while volunteering at a climate action NGO and recently returned from her research stay in Kenya. Stefanie is interested in interdisciplinary and decolonial approaches to Global Health and aims to pursue a career as a Clinical Psychologist with a global perspective. She is active in queer community organizing.

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Tamara Vukičević

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Dr. Tamara Vukičević earned her Doctor of Medicine degree in 2022 from the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Medicine, with a thesis focused on the topic of orthorexia. She is currently a Research Fellow in the Environment and Mental Health research group at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, where her work centers on the psychological impacts of climate change, particularly climate anxiety. In addition to her academic work, she serves as a socio-pedagogical caregiver for adults on the autism spectrum at ZuB Wohnhaus gGmbH in Berlin. She is also a member of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Furthermore, she is the founder of International Secularist, an initiative dedicated to promoting secular values and advancing freedom of thought, conscience, and religion on a global scale.

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David Guwatudde is a professor of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at the School of Public Health, Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda; where he has been teaching for over 32 years. Over the past 10 years his research interest has been in the area of non-communicable diseases (NCD), focusing on characterizing their epidemiology, and evaluation of the effectiveness of context-relevant interventions for prevention and control of high burden NCDs. His primary interest in adolescent and young adults research is motivated by the increasing evidence that risk factors for NCDs are adapted early during adolescence and youth, leading to the development of the NCDs later in life.

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Yemane Berhane
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Dr. Yemane Berhane is a Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health and the Director of ACIPH. Prof Berhane is a Founding Fellow of the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences. He is a senior epidemiologist with extensive experience in research and training, collaborating with many research teams nationally and internationally. Dr. Berhane has a wide range of research interests in public health, including maternal and child health, infectious diseases, and noncommunicable diseases.

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ARISE
AFRICA RESEARCH,
IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE &
EDUCATION NETWORK

if you are lonely

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Theme Week "(Tackling) Loneliness"

by the Volkswagen Foundation

The Next Big Questions on Loneliness: Integrating National and International Perspectives on Research and Policy Priorities

June 11 to 13, 2025

Symposium organized by

Maike Luhmann (Ruhr University Bochum)

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Overview

Time	Wednesday, June 11, 2025	Thursday, June 12, 2025	Friday, June 13, 2025
8:00		Arrival and coffee	
8:30	Registration and coffee	Talks: Measuring and monitoring loneliness	Arrival and coffee
9:00			Workshop 3: Prioritizing research topics
9:30	Joint welcome session with keynote	Talks: Risk groups and risk factors	
10:00			Coffee break
10:30		Coffee break	Fireside chat: Political perspectives on priorities for research and policy
		Talks: Impacts of loneliness on individuals and societies	
11:00			
11:30		Talks: Reducing loneliness effectively	Closing remarks
12:00	Lunch	Lunch	Break
12:30			Joint closing session
13:00	Welcome and introduction of symposium	Introduction to workshops	Lunch
13:30	Talks: Conceptualization and prevalence of loneliness	Workshops Round 1	
14:00			Departure
14:30	Coffee break	Coffee break	
15:00	Panel discussion: Loneliness as a policy issue	Workshops Round 2	
15:30		Workshop results	
16:00	Poster session with drinks	Break	
16:30		Joint session	
17:00			
17:30	Break		
18:00	Dinner	Dinner	
18:30			
19:00			

Detailed Symposium Program

This program only includes details on our symposium. In addition, joint sessions are scheduled for Wednesday morning, Thursday afternoon and Friday noon.

Wednesday, June 11, 13:00-17:30 h: Introducing the problem

Time	Topic	Presenters
13:00 – 13:30 h	**Welcome**	Maike Luhmann
13:30 – 14:30 h	**Conceptualization and prevalence of loneliness**	
	Mapping loneliness in Europe: Key insights and some open questions	Béatrice d'Hombres
	Exploring loneliness in Germany: Who are the lonely people	Pauline Kleinschlömer
	Conceptualising and defining loneliness: Implications and next questions	Joanna McHugh Power
14:30 – 15:00 h	**Coffee break**	
15:00 – 16:00 h	**Loneliness as a policy issue** Panel discussion	Sina Breitenbruch-Tiedtke Benjamin Landes Herlind Megges Judith Merkies (Moderator: Maike Luhmann)
16:00 – 17:30 h	**Poster session**	For a list of all posters, see below

Joint dinner at 18 h

Thursday, June 12, 8:30-12:00 h: The current state of research

Time	Topic	Presenters
8:30 – 9:15 h	**Measuring and monitoring loneliness**	
	Building a global index of social connection across nine countries	Hans Rocha IJzerman
	Measuring loneliness and social isolation in surveys: Methodological challenges and prospects	Cristiano Vezzoni
	Causal modeling in loneliness research	Patrizia Catellani
9:15 – 10:15 h	**Risk groups and risk factors**	
	Understanding risk and risk factors for loneliness: UK insights for policy and practice	Pamela Qualter
	Different norms, different risk factors: How social norms may influence prevalence and predictive strength of loneliness risks	Luzia Heu
	Social network dynamics in the context of age: An empirical investigation	Katarzyna Growiec
10:15 – 10:30 h	Coffee break	
10:30 – 11:15 h	**Impacts of loneliness on individuals and societies**	
	Health outcomes associated with loneliness: Consequences or correlates?	Louise Hawkley
	Loneliness and political attitude formation	Alexander Langenkamp
	Current research trends in macro-level perspectives on loneliness in older adults	Fredrica Nyqvist
11:15 – 12:00 h	**Reducing loneliness effectively**	
	Are loneliness interventions effective for reducing loneliness? A meta-analytic review of 280 studies	Mathias Lasgaard
	Loneliness in children in international comparison: The role of sports clubs	Claus Wendt
	How are governments responding to loneliness?	Nina Goldman

Lunch break from 12 to 13 h

Thursday, June 12, 13:00-16:00 h: Identifying the next big questions

Time	Topic	Presenters
13:00 – 13:30 h	Introducing the workshop format	Maike Luhmann
13:30 – 14:15 h	Identifying important research topics: Round 1	All participants
14:15 – 14:45 h	Coffee break	
14:45 – 15:30 h	Identifying important research topics: Round 2	All participants
15:30 – 16:00 h	Workshop results	Workshop moderators

The joint session starts at 16:15 h.

Joint dinner at 18 h

Friday, June 13, 9:00-12:00 h: Setting priorities for research and policy

Time	Topic	Presenters
9:00-10:00 h	Prioritizing research topics	All participants
10:00-10:15 h	Coffee break	
10:15-11:15 h	Fireside chat: Political perspectives on priorities for research and policy	Evelyn Regner MEP Judith Merkies
11:15-12:00 h	Closing remarks	Judith Merkies Maike Luhmann

The joint closing session starts at 12:15 h.

Speakers

Sina Breitenbruch-Tiedtke, State Chancellery of North Rhine-Westphalia

Sina Breitenbruch-Tiedtke has been the Head of the Unit for Combating Loneliness at the State Chancellery of North Rhine-Westphalia since 2022. The unit holds a strategic and coordinating role in addressing loneliness across the state. The issue of loneliness was officially included in the coalition agreement, underlining its political and social relevance.

Patrizia Catellani, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano

Patrizia Catellani is full professor of social psychology at the Catholic University of Milan and director of the research center PsyLab (Psychology, Law and Policy Lab). Her research focuses on reasoning, decision-making and the impact of communication in various areas of social, political and public relevance. She is particularly concerned with how to use new technologies and artificial intelligence algorithms to promote behaviors consistent with health, well-being and environmental sustainability at scale. She is the author of about one hundred and thirty international and national publications, including journal articles, book chapters and volumes. The detailed profile and all activities can be found at www.patriziacatellani.com.

Béatrice d'Hombres, Joint Research Centre, European Commission

Béatrice d'Hombres leads the Survey Methods and Analysis Centre at the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission. She has coordinated the European Parliament Pilot Project on Loneliness, which aimed to support evidence-based policymaking through the collection of pan-European data on loneliness, a comprehensive review of existing evidence, the identification of knowledge gaps, and the mapping of loneliness interventions. Béatrice is one of the authors of the recent Springer book Loneliness in Europe: Determinants, Risks and Interventions (https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-66582-0). Her research has been published in international journals, including Social Science & Medicine, European Economic Review, Eastern Economic Journal, Health Economics, The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy, and Social Indicators Research. More information on the Loneliness Project can be found at https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/projects-and-activities/survey-methods-and-analysis-centre/loneliness_en.

Nina Goldman, The University of Southern Denmark

Dr. Nina Goldman is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Southern Denmark and an honorary researcher at the University of Manchester. She specialises in the spatial and political dimensions of loneliness and social isolation. In 2022 she was awarded a Swiss National Science Foundation fellowship, during which she led studies on national and global policy responses to loneliness, including a forthcoming contribution to the WHO Commission on Social Connection Report. Since April 2025, she has started a new project funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark, exploring how local approaches to loneliness can be improved in both Denmark and the UK.

Katarzyna Growiec, SWPS University

Associate Professor of Psychology at SWPS University in Warsaw, Poland. Her primary area of expertise is an interdisciplinary research at the intersection of psychology and economics. She has published several dozen papers on the link between social capital and economic performance both on the individual and societal level. She has had the opportunity to collaborate on several international research projects, including the Global Social Norms study, which spans 57 countries, International Study on Unity and Division led by University of Illinois and a Polish-German project on personal values and economic performance, conducted in collaboration with the Faculty of Economics at Ruhr University Bochum.

Louise Hawkley, NORC at the University of Chicago

Louise Hawkley is a nationally recognized expert on loneliness and health during aging. At NORC (National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago), she is a co-investigator on the National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project, an ongoing panel study of health and social factors among older adults in the United States that is funded by National Institute on Aging. Her research includes identification of factors that increase risk for loneliness, health outcomes associated with loneliness, and physiological and psychological mechanisms for the health effects of loneliness. She consults for local, regional, and national organizations, is a member of the International Loneliness and Isolation Research Network, and served as a member of the Scientific Advisory Committee for the national (U.S.) Foundation for Social Connection.

Luzia Heu, Department of Interdisciplinary Social Science, Utrecht University

Dr. Luzia Heu is an assistant professor at the Department of Interdisciplinary Social Science in Utrecht, The Netherlands. She studies cross-cultural similarities and differences in loneliness, experiences of not fitting in with social norms and loneliness, and the origins of chronic loneliness. She also communicates her insights through videos on www.loneliness-across-cultures.com, in blog posts (e.g., on Psychology Today), and a podcast (Connected by Loneliness – The Loneliness Podcast, in development).

Pauline Kleinschlömer, Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB)

Pauline Kleinschlömer is a Senior Researcher at the Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB) in Wiesbaden. She obtained her PhD in 2024 at the University of Mannheim, focusing on child well-being in post-separation families. In her current role, she continues her research in the field of family sociology, with a particular focus on loneliness among young and middle-aged individuals in Germany.

Benjamin Landes, Kompetenznetz Einsamkeit - ISS e.V.

Benjamin Landes, Institute for Social Work and Social Education – ISS, works as a researcher and counsellor for welfare organisations, local and federal authorities. As co-project manager of the 'Loneliness Network (KNE)', he supported the German federal government in the development of the loneliness strategy. He is particularly interested in supporting socially vulnerable groups such

as those affected by poverty, single parents or people with disabilities through targeted loneliness policies.

Alexander Langenkamp, Goethe University Frankfurt

Dr. Alexander Langenkamp works as research associate at the Goethe University Frankfurt at the chair for quantitative empirical social science. Among other subjects, his work explores the causes and consequences of social exclusion and loneliness. In particular, he investigates the impact of loneliness and exclusion on political attitude formation and behaviour with an special emphasis on trust, cohesion and electoral decision making.

Mathias Lasgaard, The University of Southern Denmark

Professor of Community Psychology at the University of Southern Denmark and Senior Scientist at DEFACTUM, Central Denmark Region. Head of the Centre for Community Psychology, University of Southern Denmark and the research programme Loneliness in Public Health, focusing on social epidemiology and intervention research. Aims to generate practice-oriented knowledge to improve services and reduce loneliness at the population level.

Maike Luhmann, Ruhr University Bochum

Maike Luhmann is a professor of psychology at Ruhr University Bochum, Germany. Her research focuses on the prevalence, predictors, and outcomes of loneliness across the lifespan and on how loneliness is shaped by the greater physical and sociocultural context. She regularly consults policymakers and decision makers on loneliness. Since February 2025, she coordinates the project LONELY-EU with partners from multiple European countries, funded by the European Union. Since June 2025, she additionally leads the project "Loneliness across time and space" (LOTIS), funded through an ERC Consolidator Grant by the European Union.

Joanna McHugh Power, Maynooth University

Dr Joanna McHugh Power is Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Maynooth University, Ireland. She is widely published on the topic of loneliness, particularly in ageing cohorts, and uses a range of mostly quantitative methodologies to explore predictors and outcomes associated with loneliness in later life.

Herlind Megges, Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ)

Since 2020 Herlind Megges is working as a Policy Advisor in the Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ). Her focus is on strategies to prevent and combat loneliness in all age groups. Therefore she accompanied the process of the elaboration and implementation of the federal strategy to counter loneliness. Herlind Megges has a professional background in Social Work (B. A.), Gerontology (M. Sc.) and Medical Sciences (Dr. rer. medic.). Her research and management experience she gained in both in- and outpatient clinical

contexts via her work on geriatric wards, as well as in a specialized translational research center. LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/herlind-megges/.

Judith Merkies, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Judith Merkies is policy lead within the Horizon Europe-funded LONELY-EU consortium, based at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. As a former Member of the European Parliament, she initiated the Parliament's first Pilot Project on Loneliness. She now works at the intersection of science, policy and public engagement; combining her work on loneliness with a PhD in organisational studies, leadership teaching and international speaking engagements.

Fredrica Nyqvist, Åbo Akademi University

Fredrica Nyqvist is an Associate Professor of Social Policy at Åbo Akademi University in Finland. Her research focuses on loneliness, civic engagement, social inclusion and exclusion, and active ageing. She currently co-leads the Gerontological Regional Database (GERDA) study in Finland and Sweden, which collects data on loneliness among younger and very old adults, enabling longitudinal and time-trend analyses.

Pamela Qualter, University of Manchester

Pamela Qualter specializes in child and adolescent loneliness. Her research focuses on the developmental trajectories and outcomes of loneliness in young people. She has published extensively in peer-reviewed journals and collaborates internationally to develop interventions addressing youth loneliness. Passionate about social change, she advocates for a contextualized understanding of how disparities in loneliness emerge and how they can be addressed through structural interventions; in relation to youth, she advocates for changes to school systems so they are more inclusive.

Evelyn Regner, Member of the European Parliament

Evelyn Regner is a Member of the European Parliament for the Social Democratic Party of Austria and has long championed social justice, workers' rights, and gender equality. Her background in trade union work and social policy deeply informs her political priorities. In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, she has focused increasingly on the societal impact of loneliness. Evelyn Regner views loneliness as an underestimated challenge with serious consequences for mental health, social inclusion, and democracy itself. That is why she advocates for a comprehensive European approach to better understand and address its root causes as well as long-term effects.

Hans Rocha IJzerman, Annecy Behavioral Science Lab

Dr Hans Rocha IJzerman is a psychological scientist and CEO of the Annecy Behavioral Science Lab in France. He is internationally recognized for his work on social connection and open science, co-founding global initiatives such as the Psychological Science Accelerator. His current projects include a Templeton-funded initiative to develop a Global Index of Social Connection, grounded in over 450 interviews across nine countries—Brazil, India, Zimbabwe, Morocco, the Philippines,

Turkey, China, the United States, and several EU member states. He also contributes to the LONELY-EU consortium, where his team is developing a monitoring framework for loneliness across the European Union. His work aims to advance theory, measurement, and policy in the domain of social connection.

Cristiano Vezzoni, University of Milan

Cristiano Vezzoni is Professor of Political Sociology at the University of Milan, where he teaches survey methods and public opinion research. His research focuses on survey methodology, political attitudes, and social well-being. He leads the spsTREND lab, which promotes the development of research infrastructures in the social sciences, and serves as President of the Italian National Election Study (ITANES). He is also a member of the LONELY-EU project, contributing in particular to the measurement of loneliness and social isolation.

Claus Wendt, Siegen University

Claus Wendt, M.A., Ph.D., a 2008-09 Harkness/Bosch Fellow of Health Policy & Practice at Harvard School of Public Health and J. F. Kennedy Fellow at Harvard's Center for European Studies, is Professor of Sociology of Health and Healthcare systems at Siegen University. Wendt's research interests include international comparisons of welfare states and healthcare systems, health policy, demographic change, the sociology of health, and loneliness. He has published fourteen books and edited volumes and has written more than 90 peer-reviewed journal articles and handbook chapters.

Abstracts

Conceptualization and prevalence of loneliness

Mapping loneliness in Europe: Key insights and some open questions (Béatrice d'Hombres)

Loneliness has come to the forefront as a significant public health issue, earning the label of the "epidemic of the 21st century." Until recently, efforts to fully understand its scope in Europe were hampered by the lack of comparable cross-national data. To address this, within the framework of the European Parliament Pilot Project, the European Commission launched the first EU-wide survey on loneliness at the end of 2022, providing a unique opportunity to explore its prevalence, underlying factors, and associated risks across Member States. This presentation will provide an overview of the survey and discuss key challenges related to measuring loneliness. It will present findings on the prevalence of loneliness across European countries and demographic groups, and highlight important evidence gaps, pointing to areas where further research is needed.

Exploring loneliness in Germany: Who are the lonely people (Pauline Kleinschlömer)

Loneliness is a cross-cutting issue that affects individuals across the entire life course - but what does it look like in Germany? Who are the people experiencing loneliness in Germany? By integrating multiple data sources - including the German Family Sociological Panel (FReDA), SOEP, the Loneliness Barometer, and the German Ageing Survey - this presentation provides an overview of loneliness prevalence in Germany, focusing on overall, social, and emotional loneliness. By examining various socio-demographic variables (e.g. age, gender, migration background, partnership status), the presentation identifies specific risk groups who are more likely to experience loneliness than others. This broader perspective offers a more comprehensive understanding of the landscape of loneliness in Germany and sets the stage for the subsequent discussion on strategies to mitigate its consequences across the life course.

Conceptualising and defining loneliness: Implications and next questions
(Joanna McHugh Power)

While loneliness has been a topic of interest across many disciplines for decades, a fundamental issue of poor conceptualisation persists. Specifically, loneliness conceptualisations and definitions are often vague, and fail to acknowledge the multidimensional nature of loneliness. Furthermore, there is a lack of consensus in the field regarding the correct definition of loneliness. Such a situation does not lead to clear targets or strategies for loneliness intervention, and these issues are likely to have detrimentally impacted the effectiveness of such interventions to date. In this talk, I will present a synthesis of existing definitions of loneliness, attempts to improve its conceptualisation, and empirical efforts to refine its definition. I will discuss the need to consider cultural context in defining loneliness, meaning that German definitions of loneliness may deviate from those in other cultures. I will also consider the ramifications for these improvements in terms of preventing or alleviating loneliness.

Measuring and monitoring loneliness

Building a global index of social connection across nine countries (Hans Rocha IJzerman)

How do people across the world define and experience social connection, loneliness, and isolation? To answer this question, our team is conducting 450 in-depth interviews across nine countries—Brazil, India, Zimbabwe, Morocco, the Philippines, Turkey, China, the United States, and several EU countries—as part of a Templeton-funded effort to build a Global Index of Social Connection. This talk shares early insights from our qualitative phase, which uses a combined inductive and deductive approach to uncover culturally embedded understandings of social connection. These insights feed into the development of new metrics and challenge assumptions embedded in Global North–centric tools. I will discuss how the qualitative work interfaces with a systematic review of existing measures and outline a path toward cross-culturally valid tools that are relevant for both research and policy. The findings also contribute to broader efforts—such as LONELY-EU—to monitor and address loneliness in a globally inclusive way.

Measuring loneliness and social isolation in surveys: Methodological challenges and prospects (Cristiano Vezzoni)

This talk examines key methodological challenges in measuring loneliness and social isolation through survey research. Drawing on evidence from both large-scale multipurpose surveys and more focused studies, I discuss commonly used instruments for capturing these concepts and assess how question wording, survey mode, and cultural context influence the validity and comparability of self-reported measures. Particular attention is given to the strengths and limitations of existing measures, as well as the potential of longitudinal data to explore the role of loneliness within broader assessments of individual well-being. The presentation aims to support ongoing efforts to enhance the quality and relevance of survey-based indicators of well-being across Europe.

Causal modeling in loneliness research (Patrizia Catellani)

Research has said a lot about the psychological, sociological and economic factors of loneliness. However, we know less about how these factors are linked through cause-effect relationships and how targeted interventions can lead to a reduction in perceived loneliness. The use of methods that combine the explanatory power of theory-based structural equation modeling with the predictive power of machine and deep reinforcement learning is essential to make progress in this direction. In this way, it is possible to: a) understand the causal relationships between macro- and micro-phenomena, including indirect and less obvious causal links; b) simulate the effects of policy interventions and thus assess their potential impact in advance; c) adapt intervention models according to the emergence of new factors or changes in the relevance of the factors under consideration. The result is the ability to provide policy makers with evidence for the adoption of targeted and effective intervention measures.

Risk groups and risk factors

Understanding risk and risk factors for loneliness: UK insights for policy and practice (Pamela Qualter)

Loneliness has emerged as a critical public health concern in the UK, prompting government action through initiatives such as the DCMS Tackling Loneliness Strategy. This presentation offers a focused review of what we currently know about the risk and risk factors for loneliness, particularly from a UK perspective. Drawing on findings from government-commissioned research, longitudinal studies, and my own work on developmental and social determinants of loneliness, I will highlight how risk differs across the life course and among population groups. I will evaluate the scope and quality of the evidence base, noting recent progress in measurement and data linkage—yet also pointing to persistent gaps, especially around intersectional vulnerabilities, contextual risk factors (e.g. schooling, digital exclusion), and the influence of social policy environments. I will argue that while we have a solid foundation for identifying individual and demographic correlates of loneliness, theoretical and empirical gaps remain in understanding dynamic and structural drivers of risk. Finally, I propose three priority areas for future research: (1) mapping cumulative and compounding risk pathways across time and systems; (2) improving the identification of modifiable risk factors in policy-relevant domains; and (3) embedding lived experience and longitudinal qualitative methods to shape preventative interventions. Those steps are essential for designing targeted, evidence-informed policies to reduce loneliness and its impact across UK society.

Different norms, different risk factors: How social norms may influence prevalence and predictive strength of loneliness risks (Luzia Heu)

While people across cultures seem to feel lonely for a similar range of risk factors, cultural norms can influence how common loneliness risks are and which risks most strongly predict loneliness. For instance, the more common one-person households are, the more prevalent the loneliness risk of social isolation is. Furthermore, social norms can determine which characteristics people are socially sanctioned for (e.g., homosexuality, shyness), or which relationship characteristics they feel dissatisfied with, influencing the predictive strength of loneliness risks. I will summarize theorizing in the field, suggesting a need for context-specific rather than one-size-fits-all interventions. Nevertheless, the existing empirical evidence is still scarce. To more systematically study the various influences of social norms on loneliness, multi-sample studies with direct measurements of social norms or longitudinal studies will be needed.

Social network dynamics in the context of age: An empirical investigation (Katarzyna Growiec)

Presentation explores patterns and motivations for social tie formation and dissolution in the context of age. It provides empirical tests of the social convoy model, socioemotional selectivity theory, and the differential investment of resources (DIRe) model. Data comes from a survey administered face-to-face to a large, representative sample of the population of Poland (n = 1000). Controlling for between-tie and between-ego differences, it is found that the intensity of forming and dropping new ties is a decreasing function of age, but the relationship becomes weaker among people aged 40 and older. Young women, but not men, tend to form fewer ties if they are married. Both expressive and instrumental motivations for social tie formation are relatively most active in middle adulthood.

The data reveal a "rich get richer" effect: people with relatively high degree and a more central position in a social network tend to improve their position in the social network over time.

Impacts of loneliness on individuals and societies

Health outcomes associated with loneliness: Consequences or correlates? (Louise Hawkley)

Loneliness has been associated with premature mortality and several chronic health conditions, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cognitive impairment and dementia. However, the question of whether loneliness causes poor health outcomes remains unresolved. This is attributable in part to inconsistent conceptualization and operationalization of loneliness, limitations of observational and cross-sectional studies, and the impracticality of "manipulating" loneliness as required in randomized controlled trials. To understand its causal role, studies should incorporate temporal dimensions of loneliness (early life, acute, chronic), conceptual and experiential dimensions (personal, relational, collective), and physiological and psychological pathways that plausibly explain how loneliness affects health. Moreover, a lifespan approach is needed to identify the root causes of loneliness and its health effects. Health effects of loneliness may be idiosyncratic and require a nuanced approach to policy to accommodate age at onset of loneliness, its duration and chronicity, its experiential dimension, and the specific health outcome of interest.

Loneliness and political attitude formation (Alexander Langenkamp)

Recent empirical evidence links loneliness to several political behavioural and cognitive outcomes such as voter turnout, participation, or political distrust. Furthermore, initial case studies suggest that loneliness plays a role in the radicalization histories of extremist individuals. However, the related literature is small, predominantly based on cross-sectional data, and limited to a general measure of loneliness. To understand the role of loneliness for democracies, upcoming studies need to decompose 1) subdimensions of loneliness 2) study the conditionality between loneliness and its political correlates (moderating variables) 3) identify the specific mechanisms through which loneliness exerts its influence (mediating variables).

Current research trends in macro-level perspectives on loneliness in older adults (Fredrica Nyqvist)

In my presentation I synthesize recent evidence exploring loneliness in older adults from a macro-level perspective. I provide insights into current research trends and propose future research directions. I categorize recent studies into three types: observational studies, intervention studies, and conceptual papers. Observational studies often analyze loneliness using large European datasets like SHARE, employing both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs. However, macro-level intervention studies are less common and primarily focus on the negative impact of COVID-19 restrictive policies on loneliness. Conceptual papers emphasize the need for macro-level perspectives and the importance of integrating these approaches into future research to better identify factors shaping loneliness. Despite theoretical recognition of macro-level causes, more empirical evidence is needed to confirm their role.

Reducing loneliness effectively

Are loneliness interventions effective for reducing loneliness? A meta-analytic review of 280 studies (Mathias Lasgaard,)

Loneliness is increasingly recognised as a critical public health concern, with growing evidence of the effectiveness of interventions to reduce loneliness. This preregistered meta-analysis evaluated the effectiveness of loneliness interventions across 280 studies. Using random-effects models, a small to moderate short-term effect on loneliness (up to 4 weeks after the intervention) was observed (122 randomised controlled trials; SMD = −0.51, 95% CI [−0.61, −0.40]; 33 multi-cohort studies; SMD = −0.52, [−0.69, −0.35]; 118 single-arm cohort studies; SMD = −0.38, [−0.46, −0.30]). Confidence in the estimates was assessed using the GRADE system and graded as low or very low. Psychological interventions appeared to be the most effective intervention strategy for reducing loneliness, demonstrating a moderate effect. Given methodological limitations, it remains unclear whom the interventions could help the most. Overall, there is a need for rigorous development and further evaluation of interventions for loneliness.

Loneliness in children in international comparison: The role of sports clubs (Claus Wendt)

Sports clubs play a central role in the development of social structures and the promotion of the common good. They provide opportunities for building social relationships, encourage volunteerism and civic engagement, and offer activities that form an essential part of social life. This presentation focuses on children, both with and without participation in sports clubs, and discusses the extent to which social integration through such involvement may protect against experiences of loneliness later in life. It also discusses the varying structures and organizational models of sports clubs across European countries and their respective impacts on social integration and loneliness. Despite the importance of this topic, international comparative research on the role of sports clubs in reducing loneliness and fostering social networks remains limited. The presentation also explores available data and methodological approaches for analyzing the relationship between sports club participation and loneliness among young people.

How are governments responding to loneliness? (Nina Goldman)

Loneliness and social isolation have gained increased recognition as public health priorities by the European Commission and the World Health Organization, with national governments increasingly addressing these issues. This talk examines national policy responses to loneliness, identifying ten countries with published strategies, action plans, or advisories. Our analysis reveals that such policies frequently emerge through diverse pathways, including grassroots activism, government-led initiatives, or major research programmes. While the policies vary in structure and focus, most emphasise the need for cross-sectoral collaboration, public awareness, integrated government action, and community-based approaches. The examined policies adopt a holistic approach, recognising that loneliness has far-reaching consequences that extend beyond health, encompassing economic, social, and cultural aspects. National policies play a vital role in the global effort to reduce loneliness and social isolation, complementing other interventions to create lasting impact at the population level.

Posters

Presenter	Title
Yeeun Archer Lee Trinity Western University	Global Trends and Disparities in Social Support
Matilde Brunetti Sapienza University of Rome	Risk factors for the development of loneliness: a latent profile analysis of motivations for social withdrawal, experiences of solitude, and individual dispositions in late childhood and early adolescence
Luke Burns University of Leeds	Using existing data to predict and measure loneliness among older populations at the neighbourhood level in England
Theresia Ell GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences	Loneliness and Anti-Feminist Attitudes: Insights from the Leipzig Authoritarianism Study (LAS)
Barbara Hernandez Gaitan IE School of Architecture and Design	You Belong Here: vernacular solutions against urban loneliness in the city of Madrid.
Martin Jensen Defactum - Public Health Research	Loneliness, social isolation, and all-cause mortality among 7,712 individuals with type 2 diabetes: A 5.9-year Danish population-based cohort study
Carmela Kärr Åbo Akademi University	Loneliness among Finnish- and Swedish speaking older adults in Finland – A socioenvironmental longitudinal perspective
Anja Kistenich Technische Universität Dortmund	Does the validity of different instruments for measuring loneliness differ?
Julia Krasko Ruhr University Bochum	The Dynamic Interplay of Loneliness and Attachment Orientations Over Time
Phoebe McKenna-Plumley Queen's University Belfast	What measurement misses: Why we should measure existential loneliness and how we can
Aziz Mensah Mälardalen University & Karolinska Institutet	Sense of loneliness at work in relation to lifestyle factors and health in a sample of the working population in Sweden
Peter Mohr Ruhr University Bochum	Exploring the Influence of Multidimensional Loneliness and Locus of Control on Voting Behavior

Nayan Parlikar Norwegian University of Science and Technology	Trends and Associations of Adolescent Loneliness in Norway: A Three-Decade Analysis of the Young-HUNT Study
Libor Potočár PROMENTA Research Center, Deprtment of Psychology, University of Oslo	The dynamic interplay between loneliness and health behaviors from adolescence to midlife: a population-based prospective cohort study
Eric Schoenmakers Fontys University of Applied Sciences	Where do lonely emerging adults go to? A photo elicitation study exploring the relationship between built environment and loneliness
Yixin Tang Ruhr University Bochum	Exploring Socioeconomic Correlates of Loneliness: A Community-Augmented Meta-Analysis
Lena Marie Uhlmann TU Dresden	Changes in Loneliness during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Longitudinal Studies
Pauline van den Berg Fontys University of Applied Sciences	Pathways linking built environment and loneliness. Systematic literature review and conceptual model
Christiane Wenhart University Siegen	Relatedness Is More Than a Connection: On the Design of Unconventional Technologies to Feel Close over Distance
Asrin Yenihayat Catholic University of Milan	The Power of Words: How Framing Loneliness Shapes Psychological Processes in Young Adults
Simone Zasso University of Trento	Predictors of loneliness at school: An Explainable Artificial Intelligence approach on a large-scale cross-cultural assessment

Practical Information

Hotel

All participants stay at the Grand Palace Hotel (Lavesstraße 77, 30159 Hannover), located within walking distance from Hannover main station ("Hannover Hbf"). The accommodation will be paid by the organizers directly.

Event venue

The symposium takes place at the Xplanatorium Herrenhausen (Herrenhäuser Str. 5, 30419 Hannover). From the hotel, walk to the metro station "Kröpke" (see screenshot) and take U4 or U5 to "Herrenhäuser Gärten". The venue is about 200 m from the metro station.

Make sure you take some time for a stroll in the adjacent Royal Gardens of Herrenhausen. Your name tag gives you free entrance.

Tickets for local transportation

We have purchased special tickets that can be used on the local busses and metro on the three conference days (June 11 to June 13). You will receive the tickets upon checking in at the hotel.

Reimbursement of travel costs

To get your travel costs reimbursed, please email the digitally signed reimbursement form together with your tickets and other documentation (e.g., boarding passes, receipts) to loneliness-week@rub.de (**deadline: July 15**).

Team members

Chair: Maike Luhmann

Workshop moderators: Debora Brickau and Johanna Röttsches

Administration and general support: Robin John and Stephanie Hedtfeld

Social media coverage and photos: Rob Blaauboer

Contact

For general inquiries regarding the symposium, please contact us at loneliness-week@rub.de.

Schedule Symposium "Loneliness in Democracy"

Wednesday, June 11

09:30 - 13:00	**Welcome**, Interactive Get Together, Presentation of the Symposia, incl. Lunch
13:00	**Internal Welcome** and Start of the "Loneliness in Democracy" Symposium
13:00 - 14:00	**Opening Keynote on "Democracy and a Critical Political Economy of Loneliness"** by Prof. Dr. Christopher Swader, Lund University
14:00 - 14:30	*Coffee Break*
14:30 - 16:00	**Second Keynote on "Loneliness and Support for the Populist Radical Right"** by Delaney Peterson, University of Amsterdam
16:00 - 16:30	*Coffee Break*
16:30 - 17:30	**Third Keynote on "Loneliness in Democracy: Evidence Gaps and Needs for Future Research"** by Dr. Janosch Schobin, University of Göttingen
17:30 - 18:00	**Closing the Day** & Looking Ahead to the Next Day

Thursday, June 12

09:00 - 12:00	**"Science meets Practice" – Workshops**

1. **"Loneliness as a Subject of Political Education - Insights into the Kollekt and gemEINSAM gegen RECHTS Projects"**, Paul Lachmann & Nikola Poitzmann
2. **"The Role of Organised Sport for Social and Democratic Participation"**, Viola Kaets & Christoph Wenz, German Olympic Sports Confederation [*in German*]
3. **""Telephone Angels" Tackling Loneliness - Practical Insights and the Development of a Low-Threshold Support Project"**, Adrian Landwehr, RETLA / Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt

10:30 - 11:00	*(individually) Coffee Break*
12:00 - 13:00	**Lunch**

13:00 - 14:00   **Exchange about Current Research**
- **"Collective Loneliness: Ukrainian Displacement and Beyond"** by Dr. Jonna Rock, DeZIM
- **"Perceived social deprivation and anti-feminist attitudes"** by Dr. Alexander Langenkamp, Goethe University Frankfurt

14:00 - 14:30   Coffee Break

14:30 - 15:30   **A Conversation about the Crisis of Loneliness Among Young People** with Kai Lanz, krisenchat

15:30 - 15:45   **Closing the Day** & Looking Ahead to the Next Day

Starting 16:00   Joint Activity with the other Symposia, Dinner, and Public Event on Loneliness

Friday, June 13

09:00 - 10:30   **Fishbowl Discussion** on Loneliness in Democracy
with Dr. Alma-Sophia Merscher (LMU), Prof. Dr. Berthold Vogel (SOFI Göttingen), Prof. Dr. Luzia Heu (Utrecht University)

10:30 - 11:00   Coffee Break

11:00 - 11:45   **Closing Recap** with Lessons Learned and Future Research

12:00 - 13:00   **Joint Closing** and Farewell Lunch

Schedule "Loneliness as a Social Phenomenon: Cross-Cultural Approaches to a Human Condition" **Venue: [Xplanatorium Herrenhausen](#)** **Herrenhäuser Str. 5, 30419 Hannover**	
Wednesday, June 11	
09:30 – 13:00	Volkswagen Foundation: Joint Program and Lunch
13:00-13:15	**Introduction: Differentiating Loneliness and Social Isolation – Interdisciplinary Approaches** Aaron Hames, Sachiko Horiguchi, Carolin Fleischer-Heininger, Celia Spoden
13:15 – 14:45	**First Session: Conceptual Perspectives on Loneliness** **Chair: Wolfram Manzenreiter** 1. Chikako Ozawa-de Silva "The Anatomy of Loneliness and the Phenomenon of a Lonely Society" 2. Zohar Lederman "Ethics of Loneliness" 3. Carolin Fleischer-Heininger "Encountering Loneliness in Contemporary Japanese Literature"
14:45 – 15:15	Coffee Break

15:15 – 16:45	**Second Session: Technological Solutions to Loneliness and Social Isolation** **Chair: Felix Spremberg** 1. Daniel White & Hirofumi Katsuno (presenter) "Modelling Loneliness in Japan: Companion Robot Experiments in Artificial Emotional Intelligence" 2. Marit Haldar & Maja Nordtug "Tackling Loneliness Amongst Older People and Homebound Students with Telepresence Technology in Norway" 3. Celia Spoden "Avatar Robots as a Solution to Loneliness? Technological Approaches to Overcome Social Isolation from Japan and Germany"
16:45 – 17:00	Coffee Break
17:00 – 19:00	**Third Session: Loneliness and Social Isolation in Old Age** **Chair: Felix Spremberg** 1. Heesun Shin and Chihyung Jeon "'Grandma, Hug Me Tight': Living with a 'Robot Grandchild' in South Korea" 2. Cordula Endter "Together Not Alone in Old Age – Digital Innovations for Caring Communities in Rural Areas in Germany" 3. Aaron Hames "The Virtues of Analog: Social Life for Older People in Japan" 4. Iza Kavedžija "The Spectre of Loneliness: Communities of care and engaged aging in Japan"
19:00	Dinner

Thursday, June 12	
08:30 – 10:00	**Fourth Session: Perspectives on Loneliness and Social Isolation from Disability Studies, Psychosocial and Healthcare** **Chair: Evelyn Schulz** 1. Jan Steffens and Thomas Hoffmann "Isolation, Social Development and Disability: A Cultural-historical Approach" 2. Sachiko Horiguchi "How Social Workers in Japan, Germany, UK and Sweden Have Been Tackling Social Isolation: Exploring the Relationships Between the Experiences of Social Isolation and Welfare Policies" 3. Sebastian Hofstetter "Digital Health Literacy for Burnout and Workplace-Related Social Isolation in Japan: Evaluating Online Resources Using MAPPinfo"
10:00 – 10:30	Coffee Break
10:30 – 12:00	**Fifth Session: Bridging Scholarship and Practice – Addressing Loneliness and Social Isolation from a Practitioners Perspectives** Workshop by Birgit Redlich on "TOGETHER Against the RIGHT. Experiences of Loneliness as a Catalyst for Democratic Distance and Authoritarian Attitudes at Vocational Schools in Germany?", a project to empower young people from diverse educational or migrational backgrounds in structurally weak areas, who experienced discrimination and loneliness during the coronavirus pandemic. The project is funded as part of the program "Demokratie leben!" by the BMFSFJ, in cooperation between the Adam von Trott Foundation and the Chair of Sociology of Rural Areas at Georg-August-University Göttingen.
12:00 – 13:00	Volkswagen Foundation: Joint Lunch

13:00 – 16:00	**Field Trip "Growing Older in the Midst of it All – Active On-Site", Arbeiterwohlfahrt Hannover e.V. List Nord Ost and Anderten** Introduction by Silke Oppenhausen, team leader social work for older people at the Arbeiterwohlfahrt Hannover e.V. to „Mittendrin älter werden – aktiv vor Ort" / "Growing Older in the Midst of it All – Active On-Site", a project addressing loneliness amongst older adults threatened or affected by exclusion from the labor market. The project is funded under the BMFSFJ-program "Strengthening the Participation of Older People – Against Loneliness and Social Isolation" and the European Social Fund Plus
After 16:00	**Volkswagen Foundation: Joint Activity, Dinner, and Public Event on Loneliness and Social Isolation** **16:00-17:00 Panel discussion** **17:00-18:00 Exhibition of/by the symposia from the second theme week** **18:00-19:00 Dinner** **19:00-20:30 Film Screening** "Hug Me Tight: A Robot Story", produced by Heesun Shin and Chihyung Jeon with support from the National Research Foundation of South Korea Introduction by Heesun Shin and Chihyung Jeon

Friday, June 13	
09:00 – 09:30	Comments by Chairs (10 minutes each)
09:30 – 10:30	Working Groups: How Can Societies Become More Inclusive and Reduce Loneliness and Social Isolation? 1) Identifying social structures that lead to exclusion, social isolation, and feelings of loneliness; how to build inclusive social structures that foster meaningful connections, mutual social support, and a sense of belonging; 2) Loneliness and social isolation in different age groups and specific challenges; 3) The roles of science, technology, civil society, and politics, and their connections in addressing social isolation and loneliness
10:30 – 12:00	Roundtable Discussion: Further Cooperation and Dissemination of Results (joint grant proposal, edited volume, online platform with teaching materials)
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Volkswagen Foundation Thematic Week "Tackling Loneliness" Juni 11-13, 2025 – Four Parallel Symposia

1. Tackling Loneliness among young People in Africa, Prof. Dr. Shuyan Liu, Charité Universitätsmedizin Berlin

2. Loneliness as a Social Phenomenon: Cross-cultural Approaches to a Human Condition, Dr. Celia Spoden & Dr. Carolin Fleischer-Heininger DIJ, Sachiko Horiguchi (Temple University, Japan Campus), Aaron Hames (The Chinese University Hong Kong)

3. The next big Questions on Loneliness: Integrating National and International Perspectives on Research and Policy Priorities, Prof. Dr. Maike Luhmann, Universität Bochum

4. Loneliness in Democracy, Priv.-Doz. Dr. Janosch Schobin, Universität Kassel

Abstracts

First Session: Conceptual Perspectives on Loneliness

"The Anatomy of Loneliness and the Phenomenon of a Lonely Society"

Chikako Ozawa-de Silva

What is loneliness? It's crucial to distinguish between social isolation (being physically apart) and perceived isolation (the subjective experience of loneliness). One can experience solitude without distress, or conversely, feel profoundly lonely even when surrounded by people.

Furthermore, loneliness is more than just a personal feeling. Recent research suggests it stems not primarily from an individual's disposition, but from not being seen and valued by others. In this view, loneliness is less a symptom of individual ailment and more a consequence of a fractured society—one that actively produces loneliness through social structures that diminish compassion and kindness.

Recognized by global leaders and health institutions as a public health epidemic, loneliness is associated with rising rates of suicide, social anxiety, and violence. Its roots lie less in individuals themselves and more in societies that prioritize instrumental value (competition, productivity) over intrinsic value (care, self-worth). Loneliness, therefore, arises from a deficit of social connection, empathy, and the feeling of being cared for and understood.

I use the phrase "the lonely society," which is intentionally paradoxical, to describe this. While society implies togetherness and social engagement—the antithesis of physical separation—it does not preclude the internal experience of isolation. This presentation will also discuss the social conditions that foster this "lonely society" that is based on my long-term ethnographic research in Japan.

"The Ethics of Loneliness"

Zohar Lederman

Is loneliness an ethical problem? By an "ethical problem" I mean: is it something that third-party individuals (who are not related) should be concerned and do something about? A related question is whether this is a public health problem, meaning—should public health agencies or governments do something about it?

These questions encapsulate, in essence, the ethics of loneliness. Surprisingly, while philosophers of mind, social scientists, neuroscientists, and public health experts have studied and highlighted loneliness as a significant concern for roughly six decades, the ethics of loneliness has largely been neglected as an area of philosophical inquiry. Often, it is either assumed that loneliness is a personal problem that requires personal efforts, or that it is a public health problem that requires systematic solutions, but no normative argument to support either assumption is provided. In this talk I will delineate the scope of, and motivation for a systematic, normative assessment of loneliness, describing challenges on the one hand along with opportunities on the other. I will argue that from an ethical perspective, the kinds of loneliness we should worry about are the kinds that negatively affect what we as a society and/or third-party individuals care about. These may be health, wellbeing, and capabilities.

"Encountering Loneliness in Contemporary Japanese Literature"

Carolin Fleischer-Heininger

Loneliness is an experience inherent to human lives, and in so being it is an abiding motif of literature. Since the Meiji era, in the literature of Japan this motif is most visible in interplay with dynamics of modernization and individualization. During the last 30 years it significantly gained topicality and impact. Depicting their characters subjective, mostly – but not entirely – negative experiences of feeling lonely in a world ever more disabling social connectedness, a vast number of literary works acknowledge loneliness as a new human condition. This results from fundamental social and technological transformations, experiences of crisis, sustained neoliberal policies, and not least social norms; and it has the most significant impact on vulnerable and marginalized groups.

In my paper I analyze the motif of loneliness in works of contemporary literature. I show that – besides prevalence – by portraying varied experiences of loneliness, these works enable readers to perceive, feel, and understand loneliness as a diverse and complex phenomenon that is shaped by historical, social and cultural contexts.

Second Session: Technological Solutions to Loneliness and Social Isolation

"Modelling Loneliness in Japan: Companion Robot Experiments in Artificial Emotional Intelligence"

Daniel White and Hirofumi Katsuno

Although solitude has long been a feature of Japan's modernization processes, with both positive and negative connotations, in recent years, a concern with loneliness has captured the public imagination with alarm. Bordering on pathologization, loneliness is often understood as a consequence of economic stagnation and social estrangement, both from others and, in anthropologist Chikako Ozawa-de Silva's assessment, from a society that promises belonging based on productivity. While sociologists in Japan seek society-based diagnoses, and psychologists seek therapeutic interventions on models of interpersonal relations, technologists are adopting another approach. Based on the premise that robots can also model forms of emotional comfort, robotics engineers propose that robots may be able to heal loneliness. In contrast to some sociological perspectives that treat loneliness as a uniform problem in Japan, developers of companion robots are treating robotic platforms with various forms of artificial emotional intelligence as diagnostic devices. In this paper we analyze companion robots as experimental devices that hold the potential to generate feedback on human-robot interaction through a robotic platform of data collection on loneliness that is both affective and digital. We propose that companion robots may serve as ethnographic diagnostic devices that hold the potential to challenge traditional, overly uniform, or exclusively psychological diagnoses of loneliness in Japan.

"Tackling Loneliness Amongst Older People and Homebound Students with Telepresence Technology in Norway"

Marit Haldar & Maja Nordtug

In this presentation, we wish to explore the use of telepresence technologies to tackle loneliness in Norway. Specifically, we explore the use of the telepresence robot avatar AV1 to tackle loneliness amongst homebound students and the use of KOMP, a "simple and safe technology for photo sharing, text messaging and video calling for everyone" (Rasmussen, Askheim, Oppedal & Haldar, Marit 2021), to tackle loneliness amongst old people with low technological skills. The use of digital technology for social contact and for tackling loneliness depends on a variety of factors (Nordtug & Johannessen, 2023). In this presentation, we will explore under what circumstances these specific telepresence technologies can advantageously be used to tackle

loneliness, as well as the pitfalls related to the use. The findings are based on two large-scale projects in Norway exploring "virtual presence" and "the metaphysics of presence", respectively – especially investigating the evolving relationship between technology and loneliness, considering how societal perceptions shaped technological solutions and vice versa.

"Avatar Robots for Hospitalized Children and People with Disabilities: Comparing Technological Approaches to Loneliness and Social Isolation from Japan and Germany"

Celia Spoden

People who face difficulties leaving their home or hospital room due to mobility impairments, illness, a need to avoid infections or social anxiety are prone to social isolation and experiencing loneliness. Loneliness is associated with feelings of not contributing to society, feeling unneeded, or perceiving life as meaningless. In addition, people with disabilities often have fewer choices regarding work and planning their future. Over the last decade, avatar robots have been introduced at schools and workplaces to provide opportunities for social inclusion and to counteract isolation and feelings of loneliness. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, I will present the social practices in which the avatar robots OriHime in Japan and AV1 in Germany are embedded. Avatar robots are implemented in German and Japanese classrooms to connect students with prolonged childhood illnesses with their peers at school, enabling social and educational participation and easing their return to school. In Germany, AV1 is restricted to temporary use for students undergoing cancer treatment or with chronic fatigue syndrome. In Japan, however, OriHime is also used to help children with physical, mental, and developmental disabilities. Furthermore, the Japanese developer Ory Laboratory has opened a café where adults who face difficulties leaving their homes for various reasons can work remotely and serve customers via OriHime. In cooperation with special needs schools, Ory Lab also established an internship program, where experienced OriHime pilots teach children with disabilities how to serve customers and act as their mentors. By presenting my interlocutor's perceptions of social participation, work, and disability, I demonstrate how avatar robots open up new opportunities for meaningful interactions, foster feelings of independence and belonging, and help adopt a positive attitude toward the future. However, I also show that these experiences are highly contingent upon how avatar robots are integrated into social practices.

Third Session: Loneliness and Social Isolation in Old Age

"'Grandma, Hug Me Tight': Living with a 'Robot Grandchild' in South Korea"

Heesun Shin and Chihyung Jeon

South Korea is the most rapidly aging country in the world, with a particularly high proportion of older adults living alone. In response to the diverse social challenges posed by this demographic shift, the South Korean government has turned to technological interventions, including the public distribution of care robots. This presentation explores how a robot developed to tackle the "absolute isolation" of older adults operates. We focus on Hyodol, a stuffed doll-shaped talking robot designed to resemble a grandchild. It offers various features to support healthier and more structured daily routines, such as medication reminders and prompts to take a walk. Programmed to speak these phrases at random moments in the voice and manner of a young child, Hyodol is intended to serve as a cute and reliable companion for older adults living alone.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork at the robot company, regional welfare institutions, and the homes of older adults, we show how the robotic care program relies on and reshapes existing networks of people and institutions. The introduction of robots neither automated eldercare nor replaced human caregivers. Rather, the robot, together with its monitoring system, older adults, institutional managers, caregivers, company staff, and family members, formed an extended network of care. It created new tasks, displaced existing ones, and redistributed responsibilities. This reconfigures everyday caregiving into a dynamic and collaborative process shaped by the interplay between humans, technological systems, and interpretive practices.

"Together Not Alone in Old Age – Digital Innovations for Caring Communities in Rural Areas in Germany"

Cordula Endter

In my presentation, I investigate the interplay between aging, social innovation, and digital technology within the framework of a research project conducted in the German-Polish border region. This area faces a dual challenge characterized by demographic shifts and structural transformations resulting from the coal phase-out. As the population ages, it is imperative to cultivate environments that empower older adults to realize their potential as social innovators.

By taking into account the region's socio-economic context and the long confrontation with societal change I try to explain the prevailing fatigue associated with transformation and how it influences discourses and practices of innovation in the context of health and care. I will illustrate how collaborative research with older adults can lead to the establishment of new ideas of caring communities that not only support older adults but also promote intergenerational relationships and resilience in rural settings. Central for this approach is a co-creative research design that give older adults as co-researchers a lot of opportunities to take part in the research process. The presentation will also discuss this kind of involvement and how such an approach effects this deficit-oriented discourses of age on the one hand and structural change on the other. Therefore, I advocate for a paradigm shift that recognizes older individuals not merely as passive recipients of care, but as active contributors to the social fabric of their communities and as agents of innovation.

"The Virtues of Analog: Social Life for Older People in Japan"

Aaron Hames

Japan is experiencing population aging at an unprecedented level. Individuals aged 65 and older make up nearly 1/3 of the population. Concurrent with society's aging has been a decline in household size. Whereas older people in contemporary Japan routinely grew up in multigeneration households, most now live alone or with a spouse. The social role of grandparent is often unavailable. In this context, social isolation and loneliness both appear to be on the rise. Dotting the news are sensational cases of "lonely death" (*kodokushi*), in which an individual passes away alone and unnoticed. While the Japanese state continues to implement a variety of programs to develop novel technologies, encourage social integration, and prevent lonely death, these efforts can neglect the perspectives of older people. This paper examines how older people work through medical cooperatives to cultivate social life for themselves as well as aging peers in their neighborhoods. Rather than adopt contemporary technologies, such as smartphones and email, older cooperative members favor the analog world and face-to-face interaction. By setting aside notions of efficiency in favor of time-extensive, collective activities, I argue, older cooperative members enable the development of social life. The ostensible purposes of activities become secondary to the social integration they foster.

"The Spectre of Loneliness: Communities of care and engaged aging in Japan"

Iza Kavedžija

The spectre of loneliness is pervasive in contemporary Japanese society, which has increasingly been described as muen shakai, a society without social ties or an alienated society. In this paper, I describe multiple ways in which people try to ward off loneliness and create communities of care, craft relationships of support, and remain engaged in older age. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in a community organization in downtown Osaka, I examine multiple ways in which people sustain circulation of care to keep their communities alive. I explore some ways in which people make their lives liveable when their support networks fray and wither, for instance, by cultivating relationships with more-than-human entities and focusing on self-cultivation. Based on recent fieldwork, I discuss the working lives of the elderly, engaged in paid and unpaid employment, and the ways in which working in older age—while not always actively desired and sought after by elders—often inadvertently provides opportunities for involvement and maintaining social ties. Having in my work over the years focused on meaning making, care, connection, and wellbeing, by reading my ethnography in inverse, I trace the affective and moral work performed by loneliness as a moral sentiment that orients people's actions.

Fourth Session: Perspectives on Loneliness and Social Isolation from Disability Studies, Psychosocial and Healthcare

"Isolation, Social Development and Disability: A Cultural-historical Approach"

Jan Steffens and Thomas Hoffmann

The presentation aims to give an overview of historical and current perspectives on the relationship between disability and isolation by examining traces of a theory of social isolation and development. Further, it is our goal to emphasize the significance of the link between isolation and disability for the elaboration of a theoretical framework towards a further understanding of human development. Therefore, we refer mainly to Vygotskij's cultural-historical theory of development as well as to the materialistic pedagogy of disability by Jantzen, which centers on the concept of isolation as the core of disability. In this line of tradition, disability can be understood as a multidimensional construct that is to be examined from different scientific perspectives

(biological, psychological, social), while isolation is a crucial instrument of analysis encompassing all these levels. The category of social isolation emerges in this context as a conceptual tool to reconstruct the interrelations between these levels both empirically and theoretically, thus counteracting a reductionist understanding of disability.

"How Social Workers in Japan, Germany, UK and Sweden Have Been Tackling Social Isolation: Exploring the Relationships Between the Experiences of Social Isolation and Welfare Policies"

Sachiko Horiguchi

Hikikomori has been widely discussed as a social problem since the 2000s in Japan, often referring to prolonged isolation of an adult-age child who remains dependent on their parents. The dependency is known to extend to a few decades, creating the so-called "80-50 problem" of parents in their 80s sheltering their child in their 50s, with anxieties looming about whether their child can survive after their imminent death. While much existing research on hikikomori has situated it as a "Japanese" mental health issue, our interdisciplinary research team comprised of a sociologist, social policy researchers, and an anthropologist (myself) have been attempting to examine hikikomori as primarily a social welfare issue, with an aim of uncovering the relationships between this form of isolation and the family-dependent nature of the Japanese welfare system. Since 2021, we have been collecting narratives of social workers and other professionals related to social services in Japan, the UK, Germany and Sweden, eliciting responses to a three-stage-vignette of a typical "80-50" *hikikomori* case of a socially isolated male living with his parents in Japan. This paper will contextualize these narratives from social workers in Japan vis-à-vis those in the U.K., Germany and Sweden where this form of social isolation may often be considered relatively "uncommon". Through this examination, I will highlight how social workers in these four societies make varied assumptions about the relationships between family and welfare.

"Digital Health Literacy for Burnout and Workplace-Related Social Isolation in Japan: Evaluating kokoro no mimi Using MAPPinfo"

Sebastian Hofstetter

In contemporary Japan, characterized by demographic shifts, labor shortages burnout and workplace-related social isolation have emerged as pressing public health and labor issues. In response to this growing concern, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) has initiated *kokoro no mimi*, an official burnout and mental health information website designed for working individuals. The site's target demographic encompasses a wide range of users (e.g., employees, supervisors, employers, family members, occupational health professionals). However, individuals seeking guidance online, whether patients or care providers, are often overwhelmed by an abundance of materials of varying quality.

This presentation is an extension of a previous study by Professor Oberländer of Halle University and me, published in the Japan Yearbook 2024, which has examined the phenomenon of burnout and measures of occupational reintegration. The focus of the present study is on situating *kokoro no mimi* within the broader context of digital health information and examining its potential contribution to digital health literacy (DHL). Ban (2024) defines DHL as the capacity to access, interpret, and act upon digital health content in accordance with personal health objectives.

To gain an initial sense of the quality of *kokoro no mimi* as a digital health information tool, the presentation applies MAPPinfo, a practical checklist developed by public health experts from Austria, Germany, and Norway. MAPPinfo has been developed for utilization by both non-specialists and professionals in the field. It functions as a screening instrument that is based on criteria from the guideline for evidence-based health information.

This presentation constitutes a preliminary effort to contribute to cross-cultural and interprofessional discourse on the assessment of digital health information quality, with a particular focus on that provided by *kokoro no mimi*. Given the absence of evaluation tools specific to Japan, the MAPPinfo checklist was utilized as a pragmatic framework for this preliminary analysis.

Field Trip "Growing Older in the Midst of it All – Active On-Site", Arbeiterwohlfahrt Hannover e.V. List Nord Ost and Anderten

Silke Oppenhausen, AWO

Loneliness affects people who, for very different reasons, experience obstacles and barriers to participation. In this sense, the services offered by AWO Region Hannover e.V., which are aimed at promoting participation, always also work against loneliness. This ranges from services for families with babies, children and young people, to advice and support options and services for older people. After all, loneliness affects senior citizens to a not inconsiderable extent. In the AWO's work with senior citizens, we create offers for people aged 60 and over to enable participation and community and thus counteract loneliness and isolation. In our view, neighborhoods and districts are the key approaches to countering and preventing loneliness. We have meeting places and locations in various parts of the city where people can meet, find support and get actively involved. We are also testing new approaches to neighborhood work: "street work" for older people.

Schedule Symposium "Loneliness in Democracy"

Wednesday, June 11

09:30 - 13:00   **Welcome**, Interactive Get Together, Presentation of the Symposia, incl. Lunch

13:00   **Internal Welcome** and Start of the "Loneliness in Democracy" Symposium

13:00 - 14:00   **Opening Keynote on "Democracy and a Critical Political Economy of Loneliness"**
by Prof. Dr. Christopher Swader, Lund University

14:00 - 14:30   *Coffee Break*

14:30 - 16:00   **Second Keynote on "Loneliness and Support for the Populist Radical Right"**
by Delaney Peterson, University of Amsterdam

16:00 - 16:30   *Coffee Break*

16:30 - 17:30   **Third Keynote on "Loneliness in Democracy: Evidence Gaps and Needs for Future Research"**
by Dr. Janosch Schobin, University of Göttingen

17:30 - 18:00   **Closing the Day** & Looking Ahead to the Next Day

Thursday, June 12

09:00 - 12:00   **"Science meets Practice" – Workshops**
1. **"Loneliness as a Subject of Political Education - Insights into the Kollekt and gemEINSAM gegen RECHTS Projects"**, Paul Lachmann & Nikola Poitzmann
2. **"The Role of Organised Sport for Social and Democratic Participation"**, Viola Kaets & Christoph Wenz, German Olympic Sports Confederation [*in German*]
3. **""Telephone Angels" Tackling Loneliness - Practical Insights and the Development of a Low-Threshold Support Project"**, Adrian Landwehr, RETLA / Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt

10:30 - 11:00   *(individually) Coffee Break*

12:00 - 13:00   **Lunch**

13:00 - 14:00   **Exchange about Current Research**
- **"Collective Loneliness: Ukrainian Displacement and Beyond"** by Dr. Jonna Rock, DeZIM
- **"Perceived social deprivation and anti-feminist attitudes"** by Dr. Alexander Langenkamp, Goethe University Frankfurt

14:00 - 14:30   *Coffee Break*

14:30 - 15:30   **A Conversation about the Crisis of Loneliness Among Young People** with Kai Lanz, krisenchat

15:30 - 15:45   **Closing the Day** & Looking Ahead to the Next Day

Starting 16:00   Joint Activity with the other Symposia, Dinner, and Public Event on Loneliness

Friday, June 13

09:00 - 10:30   **Fishbowl Discussion** on Loneliness in Democracy with Dr. Alma-Sophia Merscher (LMU), Prof. Dr. Berthold Vogel (SOFI Göttingen), Prof. Dr. Luzia Heu (Utrecht University)

10:30 - 11:00   *Coffee Break*

11:00 - 11:45   **Closing Recap** with Lessons Learned and Future Research

12:00 - 13:00   **Joint Closing** and Farewell Lunch

Schedule "Loneliness as a Social Phenomenon: Cross-Cultural Approaches to a Human Condition"	
Venue: [Xplanatorium Herrenhausen](#)	
Herrenhäuser Str. 5, 30419 Hannover	
Wednesday, June 11	
09:30 – 13:00	Volkswagen Foundation: Joint Program and Lunch
13:00-13:15	**Introduction: Differentiating Loneliness and Social Isolation – Interdisciplinary Approaches** Aaron Hames, Sachiko Horiguchi, Carolin Fleischer-Heininger, Celia Spoden
13:15 – 14:45	**First Session: Conceptual Perspectives on Loneliness** **Chair: Wolfram Manzenreiter** 1. Chikako Ozawa-de Silva "The Anatomy of Loneliness and the Phenomenon of a Lonely Society" 2. Zohar Lederman "Ethics of Loneliness" 3. Carolin Fleischer-Heininger "Encountering Loneliness in Contemporary Japanese Literature"
14:45 – 15:15	Coffee Break

15:15 – 16:45	**Second Session: Technological Solutions to Loneliness and Social Isolation** **Chair: Felix Spremberg** 1. Daniel White & Hirofumi Katsuno (presenter) "Modelling Loneliness in Japan: Companion Robot Experiments in Artificial Emotional Intelligence" 2. Marit Haldar & Maja Nordtug "Tackling Loneliness Amongst Older People and Homebound Students with Telepresence Technology in Norway" 3. Celia Spoden "Avatar Robots as a Solution to Loneliness? Technological Approaches to Overcome Social Isolation from Japan and Germany"
16:45 – 17:00	Coffee Break
17:00 – 19:00	**Third Session: Loneliness and Social Isolation in Old Age** **Chair: Felix Spremberg** 1. Heesun Shin and Chihyung Jeon "'Grandma, Hug Me Tight': Living with a 'Robot Grandchild' in South Korea" 2. Cordula Endter "Together Not Alone in Old Age – Digital Innovations for Caring Communities in Rural Areas in Germany" 3. Aaron Hames "The Virtues of Analog: Social Life for Older People in Japan" 4. Iza Kavedžija "The Spectre of Loneliness: Communities of care and engaged aging in Japan"
19:00	Dinner

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3. The next big Questions on Loneliness: Integrating National and International Perspectives on Research and Policy Priorities, Prof. Dr. Maike Luhmann, Universität Bochum

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First Session: Conceptual Perspectives on Loneliness

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Chikako Ozawa-de Silva

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Furthermore, loneliness is more than just a personal feeling. Recent research suggests it stems not primarily from an individual's disposition, but from not being seen and valued by others. In this view, loneliness is less a symptom of individual ailment and more a consequence of a fractured society—one that actively produces loneliness through social structures that diminish compassion and kindness.

Recognized by global leaders and health institutions as a public health epidemic, loneliness is associated with rising rates of suicide, social anxiety, and violence. Its roots lie less in individuals themselves and more in societies that prioritize instrumental value (competition, productivity) over intrinsic value (care, self-worth). Loneliness, therefore, arises from a deficit of social connection, empathy, and the feeling of being cared for and understood.

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Zohar Lederman

Is loneliness an ethical problem? By an "ethical problem" I mean: is it something that third-party individuals (who are not related) should be concerned and do something about? A related question is whether this is a public health problem, meaning—should public health agencies or governments do something about it?

These questions encapsulate, in essence, the ethics of loneliness. Surprisingly, while philosophers of mind, social scientists, neuroscientists, and public health experts have studied and highlighted loneliness as a significant concern for roughly six decades, the ethics of loneliness has largely been neglected as an area of philosophical inquiry. Often, it is either assumed that loneliness is a personal problem that requires personal efforts, or that it is a public health problem that requires systematic solutions, but no normative argument to support either assumption is provided. In this talk I will delineate the scope of, and motivation for a systematic, normative assessment of loneliness, describing challenges on the one hand along with opportunities on the other. I will argue that from an ethical perspective, the kinds of loneliness we should worry about are the kinds that negatively affect what we as a society and/or third-party individuals care about. These may be health, wellbeing, and capabilities.

"Encountering Loneliness in Contemporary Japanese Literature"

Carolin Fleischer-Heininger

Loneliness is an experience inherent to human lives, and in so being it is an abiding motif of literature. Since the Meiji era, in the literature of Japan this motif is most visible in interplay with dynamics of modernization and individualization. During the last 30 years it significantly gained topicality and impact. Depicting their characters subjective, mostly – but not entirely – negative experiences of feeling lonely in a world ever more disabling social connectedness, a vast number of literary works acknowledge loneliness as a new human condition. This results from fundamental social and technological transformations, experiences of crisis, sustained neoliberal policies, and not least social norms; and it has the most significant impact on vulnerable and marginalized groups.

In my paper I analyze the motif of loneliness in works of contemporary literature. I show that – besides prevalence – by portraying varied experiences of loneliness, these works enable readers to perceive, feel, and understand loneliness as a diverse and complex phenomenon that is shaped by historical, social and cultural contexts.

Second Session: Technological Solutions to Loneliness and Social Isolation

"Modelling Loneliness in Japan: Companion Robot Experiments in Artificial Emotional Intelligence"

Daniel White and Hirofumi Katsuno

Although solitude has long been a feature of Japan's modernization processes, with both positive and negative connotations, in recent years, a concern with loneliness has captured the public imagination with alarm. Bordering on pathologization, loneliness is often understood as a consequence of economic stagnation and social estrangement, both from others and, in anthropologist Chikako Ozawa-de Silva's assessment, from a society that promises belonging based on productivity. While sociologists in Japan seek society-based diagnoses, and psychologists seek therapeutic interventions on models of interpersonal relations, technologists are adopting another approach. Based on the premise that robots can also model forms of emotional comfort, robotics engineers propose that robots may be able to heal loneliness. In contrast to some sociological perspectives that treat loneliness as a uniform problem in Japan, developers of companion robots are treating robotic platforms with various forms of artificial emotional intelligence as diagnostic devices. In this paper we analyze companion robots as experimental devices that hold the potential to generate feedback on human-robot interaction through a robotic platform of data collection on loneliness that is both affective and digital. We propose that companion robots may serve as ethnographic diagnostic devices that hold the potential to challenge traditional, overly uniform, or exclusively psychological diagnoses of loneliness in Japan.

"Tackling Loneliness Amongst Older People and Homebound Students with Telepresence Technology in Norway"

Marit Haldar & Maja Nordtug

In this presentation, we wish to explore the use of telepresence technologies to tackle loneliness in Norway. Specifically, we explore the use of the telepresence robot avatar AV1 to tackle loneliness amongst homebound students and the use of KOMP, a "simple and safe technology for photo sharing, text messaging and video calling for everyone" (Rasmussen, Askheim, Oppedal & Haldar, Marit 2021), to tackle loneliness amongst old people with low technological skills. The use of digital technology for social contact and for tackling loneliness depends on a variety of factors (Nordtug & Johannessen, 2023). In this presentation, we will explore under what circumstances these specific telepresence technologies can advantageously be used to tackle

loneliness, as well as the pitfalls related to the use. The findings are based on two large-scale projects in Norway exploring "virtual presence" and "the metaphysics of presence", respectively – especially investigating the evolving relationship between technology and loneliness, considering how societal perceptions shaped technological solutions and vice versa.

"Avatar Robots for Hospitalized Children and People with Disabilities: Comparing Technological Approaches to Loneliness and Social Isolation from Japan and Germany"

Celia Spoden

People who face difficulties leaving their home or hospital room due to mobility impairments, illness, a need to avoid infections or social anxiety are prone to social isolation and experiencing loneliness. Loneliness is associated with feelings of not contributing to society, feeling unneeded, or perceiving life as meaningless. In addition, people with disabilities often have fewer choices regarding work and planning their future. Over the last decade, avatar robots have been introduced at schools and workplaces to provide opportunities for social inclusion and to counteract isolation and feelings of loneliness. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, I will present the social practices in which the avatar robots OriHime in Japan and AV1 in Germany are embedded. Avatar robots are implemented in German and Japanese classrooms to connect students with prolonged childhood illnesses with their peers at school, enabling social and educational participation and easing their return to school. In Germany, AV1 is restricted to temporary use for students undergoing cancer treatment or with chronic fatigue syndrome. In Japan, however, OriHime is also used to help children with physical, mental, and developmental disabilities. Furthermore, the Japanese developer Ory Laboratory has opened a café where adults who face difficulties leaving their homes for various reasons can work remotely and serve customers via OriHime. In cooperation with special needs schools, Ory Lab also established an internship program, where experienced OriHime pilots teach children with disabilities how to serve customers and act as their mentors. By presenting my interlocutor's perceptions of social participation, work, and disability, I demonstrate how avatar robots open up new opportunities for meaningful interactions, foster feelings of independence and belonging, and help adopt a positive attitude toward the future. However, I also show that these experiences are highly contingent upon how avatar robots are integrated into social practices.

Third Session: Loneliness and Social Isolation in Old Age

"'Grandma, Hug Me Tight': Living with a 'Robot Grandchild' in South Korea"

Heesun Shin and Chihyung Jeon

South Korea is the most rapidly aging country in the world, with a particularly high proportion of older adults living alone. In response to the diverse social challenges posed by this demographic shift, the South Korean government has turned to technological interventions, including the public distribution of care robots. This presentation explores how a robot developed to tackle the "absolute isolation" of older adults operates. We focus on Hyodol, a stuffed doll-shaped talking robot designed to resemble a grandchild. It offers various features to support healthier and more structured daily routines, such as medication reminders and prompts to take a walk. Programmed to speak these phrases at random moments in the voice and manner of a young child, Hyodol is intended to serve as a cute and reliable companion for older adults living alone.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork at the robot company, regional welfare institutions, and the homes of older adults, we show how the robotic care program relies on and reshapes existing networks of people and institutions. The introduction of robots neither automated eldercare nor replaced human caregivers. Rather, the robot, together with its monitoring system, older adults, institutional managers, caregivers, company staff, and family members, formed an extended network of care. It created new tasks, displaced existing ones, and redistributed responsibilities. This reconfigures everyday caregiving into a dynamic and collaborative process shaped by the interplay between humans, technological systems, and interpretive practices.

"Together Not Alone in Old Age – Digital Innovations for Caring Communities in Rural Areas in Germany"

Cordula Endter

In my presentation, I investigate the interplay between aging, social innovation, and digital technology within the framework of a research project conducted in the German-Polish border region. This area faces a dual challenge characterized by demographic shifts and structural transformations resulting from the coal phase-out. As the population ages, it is imperative to cultivate environments that empower older adults to realize their potential as social innovators.

By taking into account the region's socio-economic context and the long confrontation with societal change I try to explain the prevailing fatigue associated with transformation and how it influences discourses and practices of innovation in the context of health and care. I will illustrate how collaborative research with older adults can lead to the establishment of new ideas of caring communities that not only support older adults but also promote intergenerational relationships and resilience in rural settings. Central for this approach is a co-creative research design that give older adults as co-researchers a lot of opportunities to take part in the research process. The presentation will also discuss this kind of involvement and how such an approach effects this deficit-oriented discourses of age on the one hand and structural change on the other. Therefore, I advocate for a paradigm shift that recognizes older individuals not merely as passive recipients of care, but as active contributors to the social fabric of their communities and as agents of innovation.

"The Virtues of Analog: Social Life for Older People in Japan"

Aaron Hames

Japan is experiencing population aging at an unprecedented level. Individuals aged 65 and older make up nearly 1/3 of the population. Concurrent with society's aging has been a decline in household size. Whereas older people in contemporary Japan routinely grew up in multigeneration households, most now live alone or with a spouse. The social role of grandparent is often unavailable. In this context, social isolation and loneliness both appear to be on the rise. Dotting the news are sensational cases of "lonely death" (*kodokushi*), in which an individual passes away alone and unnoticed. While the Japanese state continues to implement a variety of programs to develop novel technologies, encourage social integration, and prevent lonely death, these efforts can neglect the perspectives of older people. This paper examines how older people work through medical cooperatives to cultivate social life for themselves as well as aging peers in their neighborhoods. Rather than adopt contemporary technologies, such as smartphones and email, older cooperative members favor the analog world and face-to-face interaction. By setting aside notions of efficiency in favor of time-extensive, collective activities, I argue, older cooperative members enable the development of social life. The ostensible purposes of activities become secondary to the social integration they foster.

"The Spectre of Loneliness: Communities of care and engaged aging in Japan"

Iza Kavedžija

The spectre of loneliness is pervasive in contemporary Japanese society, which has increasingly been described as muen shakai, a society without social ties or an alienated society. In this paper, I describe multiple ways in which people try to ward off loneliness and create communities of care, craft relationships of support, and remain engaged in older age. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in a community organization in downtown Osaka, I examine multiple ways in which people sustain circulation of care to keep their communities alive. I explore some ways in which people make their lives liveable when their support networks fray and wither, for instance, by cultivating relationships with more-than-human entities and focusing on self-cultivation. Based on recent fieldwork, I discuss the working lives of the elderly, engaged in paid and unpaid employment, and the ways in which working in older age—while not always actively desired and sought after by elders—often inadvertently provides opportunities for involvement and maintaining social ties. Having in my work over the years focused on meaning making, care, connection, and wellbeing, by reading my ethnography in inverse, I trace the affective and moral work performed by loneliness as a moral sentiment that orients people's actions.

Fourth Session: Perspectives on Loneliness and Social Isolation from Disability Studies, Psychosocial and Healthcare

"Isolation, Social Development and Disability: A Cultural-historical Approach"

Jan Steffens and Thomas Hoffmann

The presentation aims to give an overview of historical and current perspectives on the relationship between disability and isolation by examining traces of a theory of social isolation and development. Further, it is our goal to emphasize the significance of the link between isolation and disability for the elaboration of a theoretical framework towards a further understanding of human development. Therefore, we refer mainly to Vygotskij's cultural-historical theory of development as well as to the materialistic pedagogy of disability by Jantzen, which centers on the concept of isolation as the core of disability. In this line of tradition, disability can be understood as a multidimensional construct that is to be examined from different scientific perspectives

(biological, psychological, social), while isolation is a crucial instrument of analysis encompassing all these levels. The category of social isolation emerges in this context as a conceptual tool to reconstruct the interrelations between these levels both empirically and theoretically, thus counteracting a reductionist understanding of disability.

"How Social Workers in Japan, Germany, UK and Sweden Have Been Tackling Social Isolation: Exploring the Relationships Between the Experiences of Social Isolation and Welfare Policies"

Sachiko Horiguchi

Hikikomori has been widely discussed as a social problem since the 2000s in Japan, often referring to prolonged isolation of an adult-age child who remains dependent on their parents. The dependency is known to extend to a few decades, creating the so-called "80-50 problem" of parents in their 80s sheltering their child in their 50s, with anxieties looming about whether their child can survive after their imminent death. While much existing research on hikikomori has situated it as a "Japanese" mental health issue, our interdisciplinary research team comprised of a sociologist, social policy researchers, and an anthropologist (myself) have been attempting to examine hikikomori as primarily a social welfare issue, with an aim of uncovering the relationships between this form of isolation and the family-dependent nature of the Japanese welfare system. Since 2021, we have been collecting narratives of social workers and other professionals related to social services in Japan, the UK, Germany and Sweden, eliciting responses to a three-stage-vignette of a typical "80-50" *hikikomori* case of a socially isolated male living with his parents in Japan. This paper will contextualize these narratives from social workers in Japan vis-à-vis those in the U.K., Germany and Sweden where this form of social isolation may often be considered relatively "uncommon". Through this examination, I will highlight how social workers in these four societies make varied assumptions about the relationships between family and welfare.

"Digital Health Literacy for Burnout and Workplace-Related Social Isolation in Japan: Evaluating kokoro no mimi Using MAPPinfo"

Sebastian Hofstetter

In contemporary Japan, characterized by demographic shifts, labor shortages burnout and workplace-related social isolation have emerged as pressing public health and labor issues. In response to this growing concern, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) has initiated *kokoro no mimi*, an official burnout and mental health information website designed for working individuals. The site's target demographic encompasses a wide range of users (e.g., employees, supervisors, employers, family members, occupational health professionals). However, individuals seeking guidance online, whether patients or care providers, are often overwhelmed by an abundance of materials of varying quality.

This presentation is an extension of a previous study by Professor Oberländer of Halle University and me, published in the Japan Yearbook 2024, which has examined the phenomenon of burnout and measures of occupational reintegration. The focus of the present study is on situating *kokoro no mimi* within the broader context of digital health information and examining its potential contribution to digital health literacy (DHL). Ban (2024) defines DHL as the capacity to access, interpret, and act upon digital health content in accordance with personal health objectives.

To gain an initial sense of the quality of *kokoro no mimi* as a digital health information tool, the presentation applies MAPPinfo, a practical checklist developed by public health experts from Austria, Germany, and Norway. MAPPinfo has been developed for utilization by both non-specialists and professionals in the field. It functions as a screening instrument that is based on criteria from the guideline for evidence-based health information.

This presentation constitutes a preliminary effort to contribute to cross-cultural and interprofessional discourse on the assessment of digital health information quality, with a particular focus on that provided by *kokoro no mimi*. Given the absence of evaluation tools specific to Japan, the MAPPinfo checklist was utilized as a pragmatic framework for this preliminary analysis.

Field Trip "Growing Older in the Midst of it All – Active On-Site", Arbeiterwohlfahrt Hannover e.V. List Nord Ost and Anderten

Silke Oppenhausen, AWO

Loneliness affects people who, for very different reasons, experience obstacles and barriers to participation. In this sense, the services offered by AWO Region Hannover e.V., which are aimed at promoting participation, always also work against loneliness. This ranges from services for families with babies, children and young people, to advice and support options and services for older people. After all, loneliness affects senior citizens to a not inconsiderable extent. In the AWO's work with senior citizens, we create offers for people aged 60 and over to enable participation and community and thus counteract loneliness and isolation. In our view, neighborhoods and districts are the key approaches to countering and preventing loneliness. We have meeting places and locations in various parts of the city where people can meet, find support and get actively involved. We are also testing new approaches to neighborhood work: "street work" for older people.