

# Loneliness and Isolation in Women

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Sabio Health and Get Aging





# TOPICS

- Define Terms
- Discuss Risk Factors
- Not depression
- Not pathologizing while taking seriously
- Understand the medical sequelae

## Social Connection: 2 KEY REPORTS

2020 National Academy of Science and Medicine



2023 Surgeon General Advisory



# Socially Isolated Or Lonely?

Loneliness is the *subjective* feeling of being alone

“the distress that results from discrepancies between ideal and perceived social relationships.”

← Loneliness

SOCIAL ISOLATION

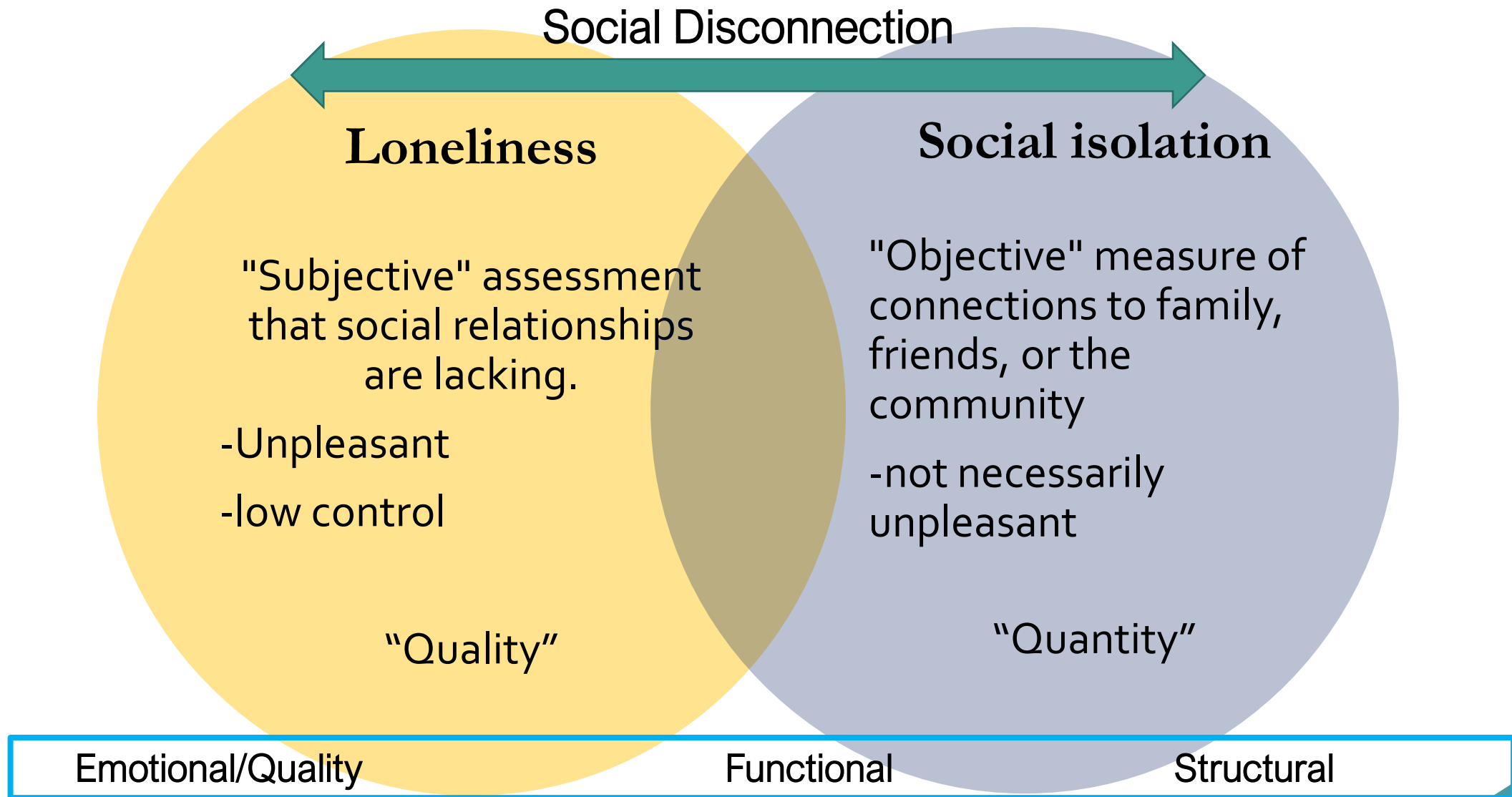


Social isolation refers to a complete or near-complete lack of contact with society



Relates to a *quantifiable* number of relationships

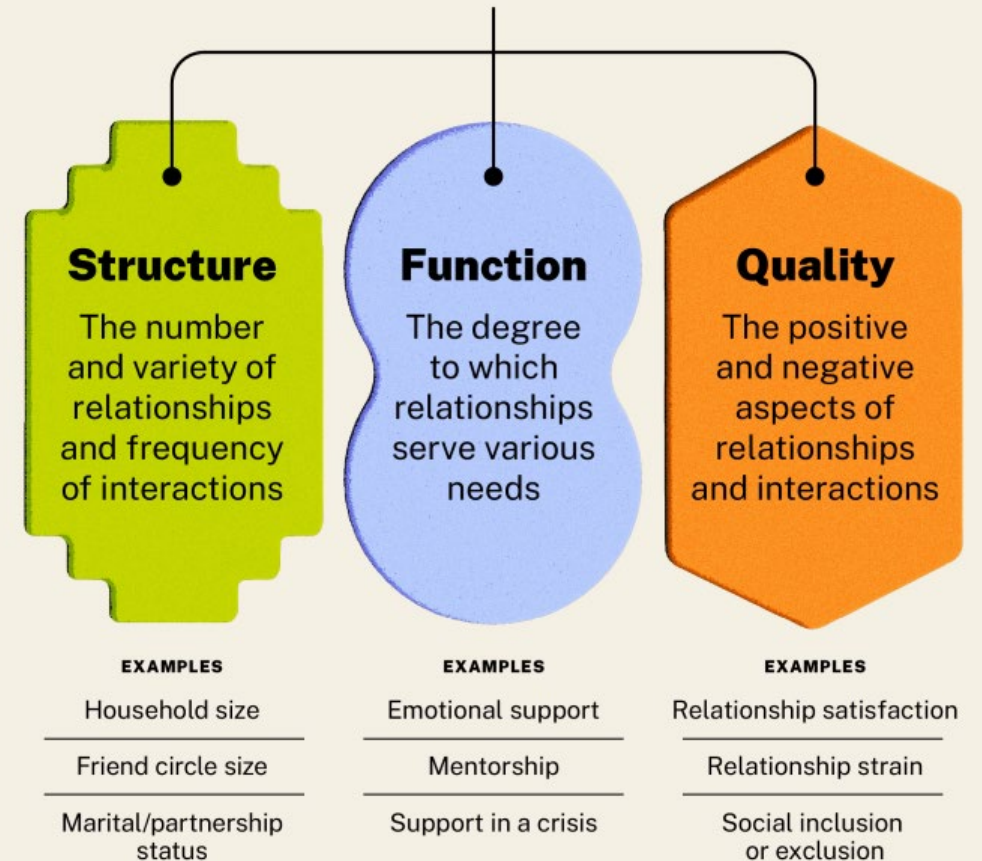
# Intersection of Loneliness, Isolation and Disconnection



# DEFINING SOCIAL CONNECTION

## The Three Vital Components of Social Connection

The extent to which an individual is socially connected depends on multiple factors, including:



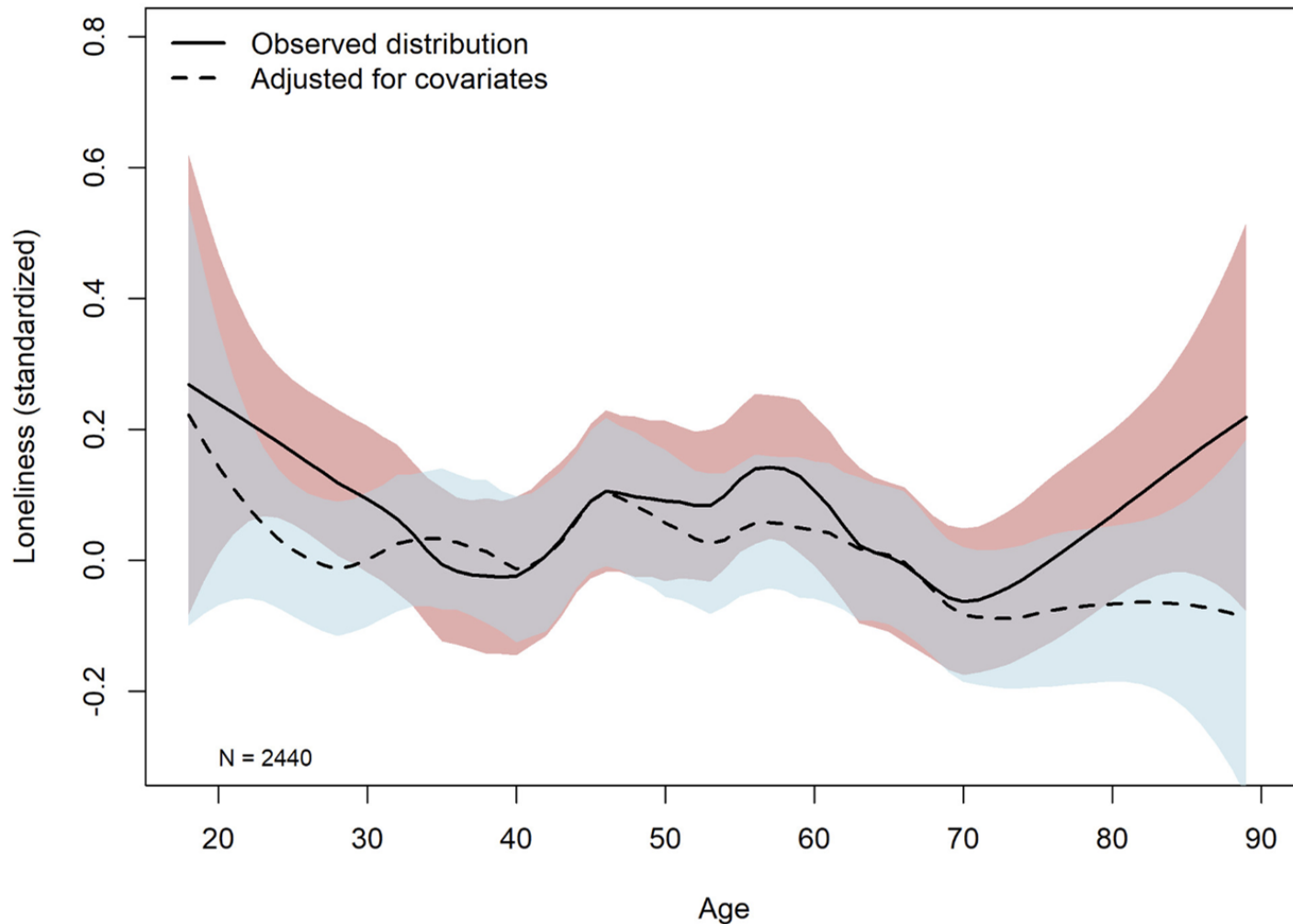
## LONELINESS & AGE

**43%** “sometimes  
Lonely” in age >60

**9%**

“ALWAYS” Lonely in UK

~25% Socially Isolated







# 2 STORIES



# Maria, 66 yo Complex, monolingual Immigrant

1



- Relatively homebound because of recurrent falls and a failed Knee surgery
- Schizophrenia
- Severe seizure disorder
- Newly diagnosis cognitive impairment
- Not in contact with family
- History of physical abuse
- Lives Alone
- Very limited English proficiency
- Lives in subsidizes housing in a semi-rural community
- > 20 medications

# Gianna, 3 yo, born in a pandemic

- Born July 2020
- Limited social contact initially
- Met family and friends to prioritize socialization
- Raised in a bilingual and multicultural family
- Day care 3 times a week
- Intergenerational home with nanny twice a week
- She has visited her family in Italy and Spain
- She “sees” her Abuelita via whatsapp
- She “writes” cards to her friends and family

2

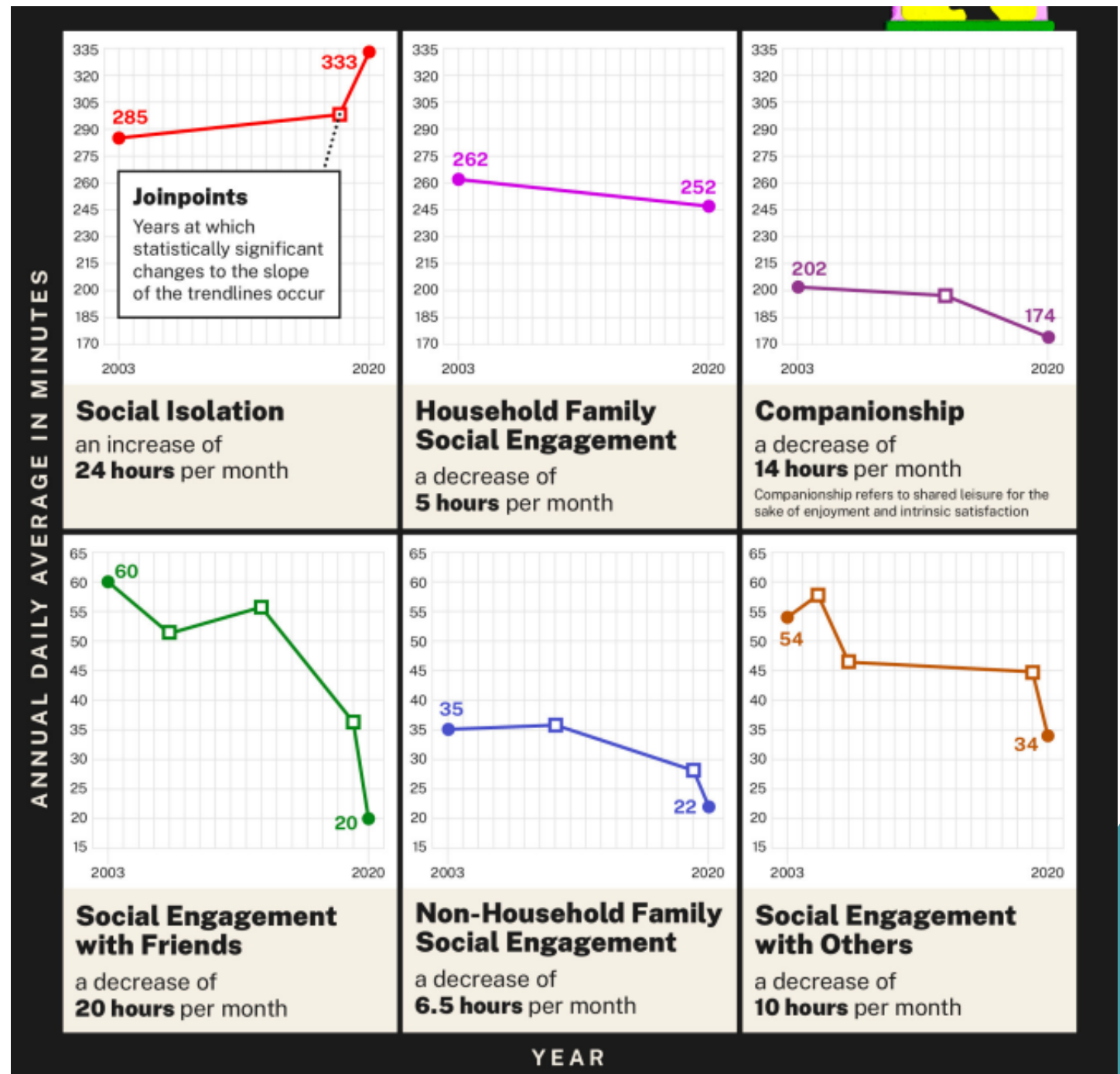




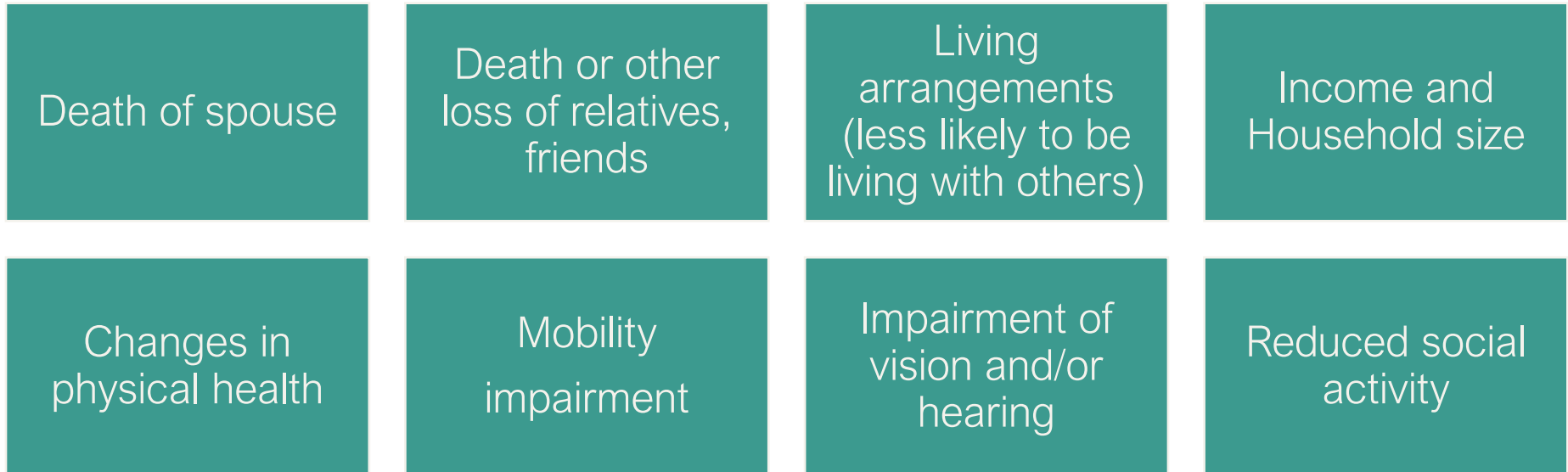
**E: Educate**  
**Estimating**  
**health RISK**

**RISK**

# TRENDS IN SOCIAL CONNECTION (2003-2020)

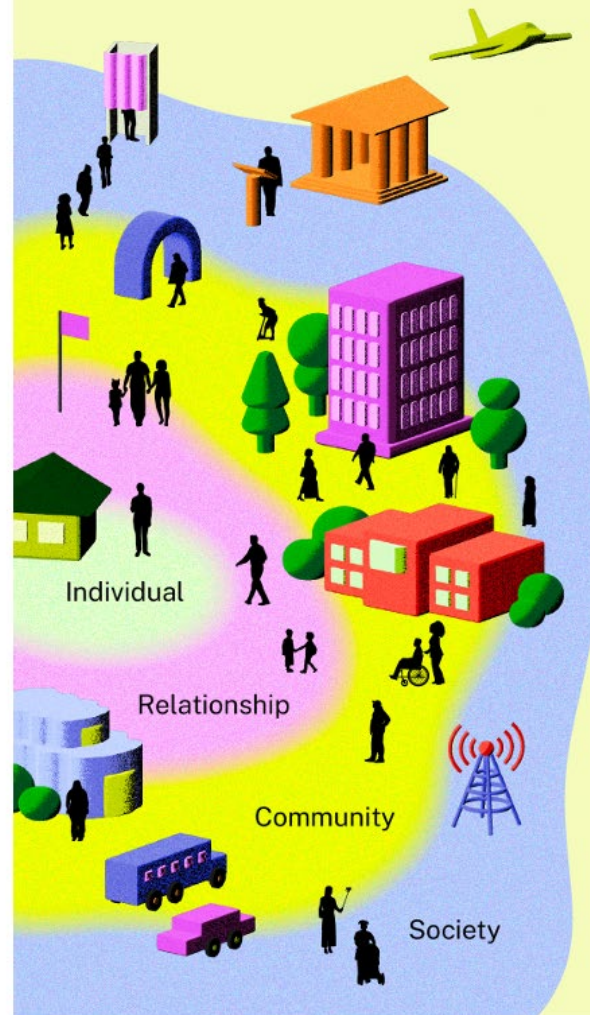


# Losses predict increases in loneliness at the level of the Individual (and isolation)





# Factors That Can Shape Social Connection



## Individual

- Chronic disease
- Sensory and functional impairments
- Mental health
- Physical health
- Personality
- Race
- Gender
- Socioeconomic status
- Life stage

## Relationships

- Structure, function, and quality
- Household size
- Characteristics and behaviors of others
- Empathy

## Community

- Outdoor space
- Housing
- Schools
- Workplace
- Local government
- Local business
- Community organizations
- Health care
- Transportation

## Society

- Norms and values
- Public policies
- Tech environment and use
- Civic engagement
- Democratic norms
- Historical inequities

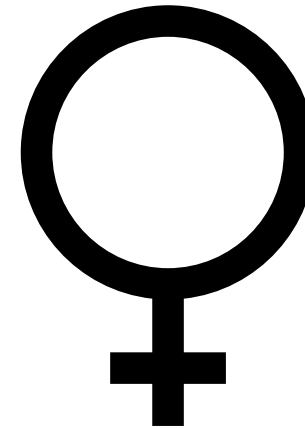


FIGURE 3: Factors That Can Shape Social Connection

# What is unique about Women?

- Caregivers
  - Longevity and living alone
  - Losses
  - Physiology and function: Incontinence
  - Immigration status
  - Abuse and Trauma
  - Women with functional limitations have been found to experience greater loneliness if they have strained marital relationships
- 
- Uncertainty:
  - ~Social networks
  - Gender norms
  - levels of loneliness are similar for males and females across the lifespan.

# Unique populations: Women Veterans

- Wounded Warrior Project's 2023 Women Warriors Report:
  - Women warriors report significantly **higher levels of loneliness (73%) than males (64.9%)**.
  - Women warriors report that their identity as a veteran significantly affects their social health, often **keeping military and civilian friends separate** and not talking about military experiences with civilian friends.

# Unknowns and Where Data is Lacking

- The effect of demographic shifts on the rates of social isolation and loneliness among future generations of older adults is unknown
- Literature focusing on social isolation and loneliness in at-risk subgroups is sparse.
  - Gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals tend to experience more loneliness than their heterosexual peers.

# LONELINESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

IS LONELINESS A DIAGNOSIS?



# Loneliness and Mental Health

- May be more appropriate to categorize as a social determinant of health (unmet needs)
- Can co-occur with depression and anxiety
  - Relationship likely bidirectional
    - Cause or worsen depression
    - Once depressed, this increases the likelihood of low social connection
- **Loneliness is not a clinical syndrome, but an experience with health effects.**
  - Factors do not load on the same elements of depression (i.e. loneliness does not have ALL the associated clinical symptoms seen in depression—sadness, loss of appetite, suicidality)
  - Can be lonely *without* being clinically depressed

# Depression and Loneliness

- Depression can lead to problems in social function and well-being, including high levels of loneliness, low social support, and fewer social connections
- Can be unrelated to social network size, or level of social support or individual personality traits
- Loneliness may stem from depression-related cognitive biases in which social interactions are appraised more negatively or experienced as less rewarding
- With anxiety, may be more sensitized to high levels of loneliness

# HEALTH EFFECTS

UNDERSTANDING RISKS

# Loneliness in Older Persons: A Predictor of Functional Decline and Death

Carla Perissinotto, MD, MHS, Irena Cenzer, MA, Kenneth Covinsky, MD, MPH

- National survey of 1604 adults aged >60 followed for 6 years
- Asked if they were lonely - UCLA Loneliness Scale
- Results:
  - Loneliness is common
    - 43% of older adults
    - 66% of married individuals
    - 25% of individuals living alone
  - Worse health outcomes
    - Increased mortality: 23% vs 14%, aOR: 1.5 (1.1-1.9) → 45%
    - ADL impairment: 25% vs 13%, aOR: 1.6 (1.2-2.1) → 59% increase risk

# Social isolation, loneliness, and all-cause mortality in older men and women

Andrew Steptoe, Aparna Shankar, Panayotes Demakakos, and Jane Wardle

- 6500 men and women over 7 years
- Mortality higher in socially isolated AND lonely

The screenshot shows the PNAS research article page. At the top, there is a 'Listen' button. Below it, the title 'Cumulative effect of loneliness and social isolation on health outcomes among older adults' is displayed, followed by the authors 'Timothy L. Barnes, Stephanie MacLeod, Rifky Tkatch, Manik Ahuja, Laurie Albright, James A. Schaeffer & ...show all'. The publication date 'Received 12 Dec 2020, Accepted 31 May 2021, Published online: 02 Jul 2021' is also visible. A 'Check for updates' button is present. Below the title, there are links for 'Full Article', 'Figures & data', 'References', 'Citations', 'Metrics', 'Licensing', 'Reprints & Permissions', and a 'PDF' icon. The 'Abstract' section is visible, with the heading 'Objectives' and the text: 'Loneliness and social isolation are described similarly yet are distinct constructs. Numerous studies have examined each construct separately; however, less effort has been dedicated to exploring the impacts in combination. This study sought to describe the cumulative effects on late-life health outcomes.' A 'Related' section is partially visible on the right, showing 'People also read' and 'Loneliness'. At the bottom, there is a cookie notice: 'To learn about our use of cookies and how you can manage your cookie settings, please see our Cookie Policy. By closing this message...'.

In 2020, still see worse health outcomes in adults with BOTH loneliness and isolation



# Loneliness and Physical & Psychological Symptoms

- Lonely older adults experience higher rates of:

- pain



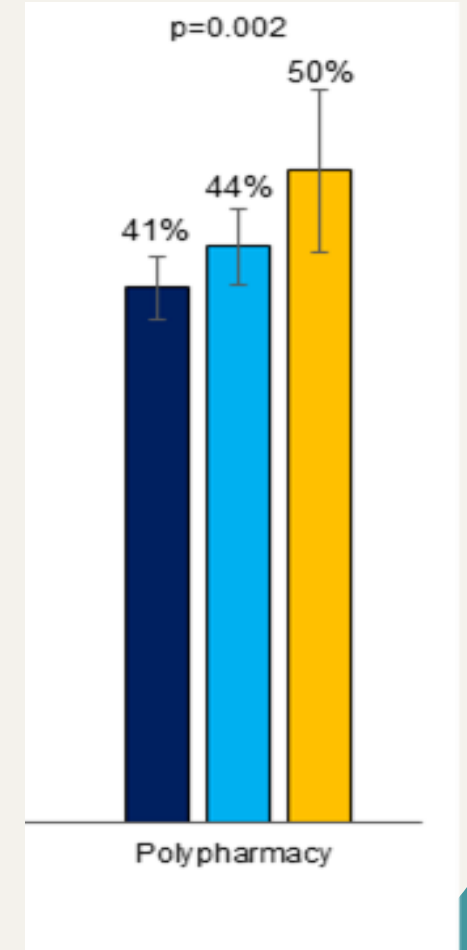
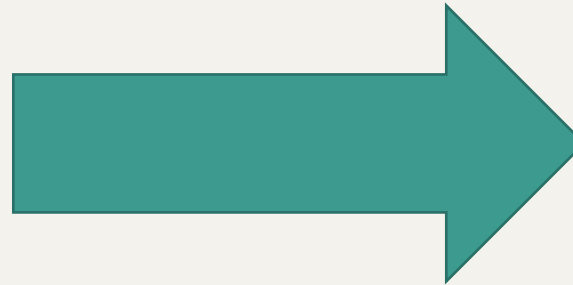
- Anxiety



- Depression



- and insomnia





# Health Effects

- May be harmful at any age when severe and prolonged and likely worse for older adults.
- Social isolation and loneliness are associated with:
  - Worsened heart disease
  - Worse control of diabetes
  - Poor Sleep and depression
  - Frailty and functional decline
  - HIGHER health care costs
  - Increased mortality



# More Disconnection→\$\$\$

- 2020 Cigna report estimated the cost of loneliness: **\$406 billion annually**, that is **\$4,200 per employee**.
- **6.7 billion in medicare spending annually**

<https://www.aarp.org/pri/topics/health/coverage-access/medicare-spends-more-on-socially-isolated-older-adults.html>

# SHOULD WE “SOLVE” LONELINESS?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SOLVE  
AND  
WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM EVOLUTION




WSJ. MAGAZINE

## Can You Solve Loneliness? These Startups Are Betting On It.

Entrepreneurs focused on social connection are popping up around the country amid what medical practitioners are calling an epidemic







**“Loneliness is  
proof that  
your innate  
search for  
connection is  
intact.”**

- MARTHA BECK

# Loneliness from an Evolutionary Perspective

- Seeking bonds with others helps ensure the survival of the species.

Keeping children close to caregivers

Mutual protection in a group

Cooperation in hunting and sharing food

Division of labor to allow growing food

Emotional support to get through crises

Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009

Striking out alone helps ensure the survival of the species.

- Courage and willingness to leave the group and find new territory and new food sources, and return to share with the group



# Conclusions and Solutions



# Social Connection is vital for our individual and collective health & well-being



Healthy



Safe



Inclusive



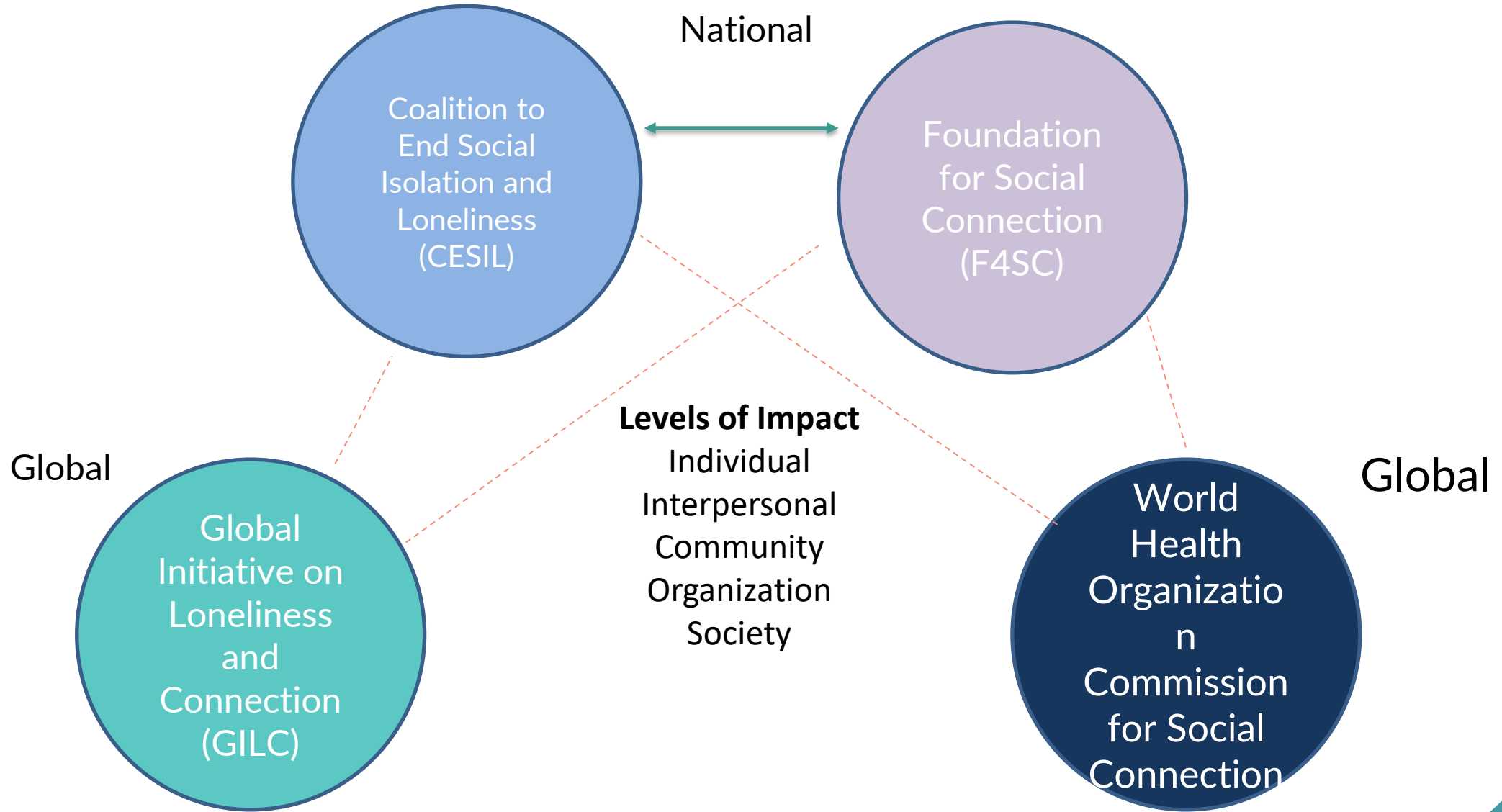
Prosperous



Resilient



Civically Engaged



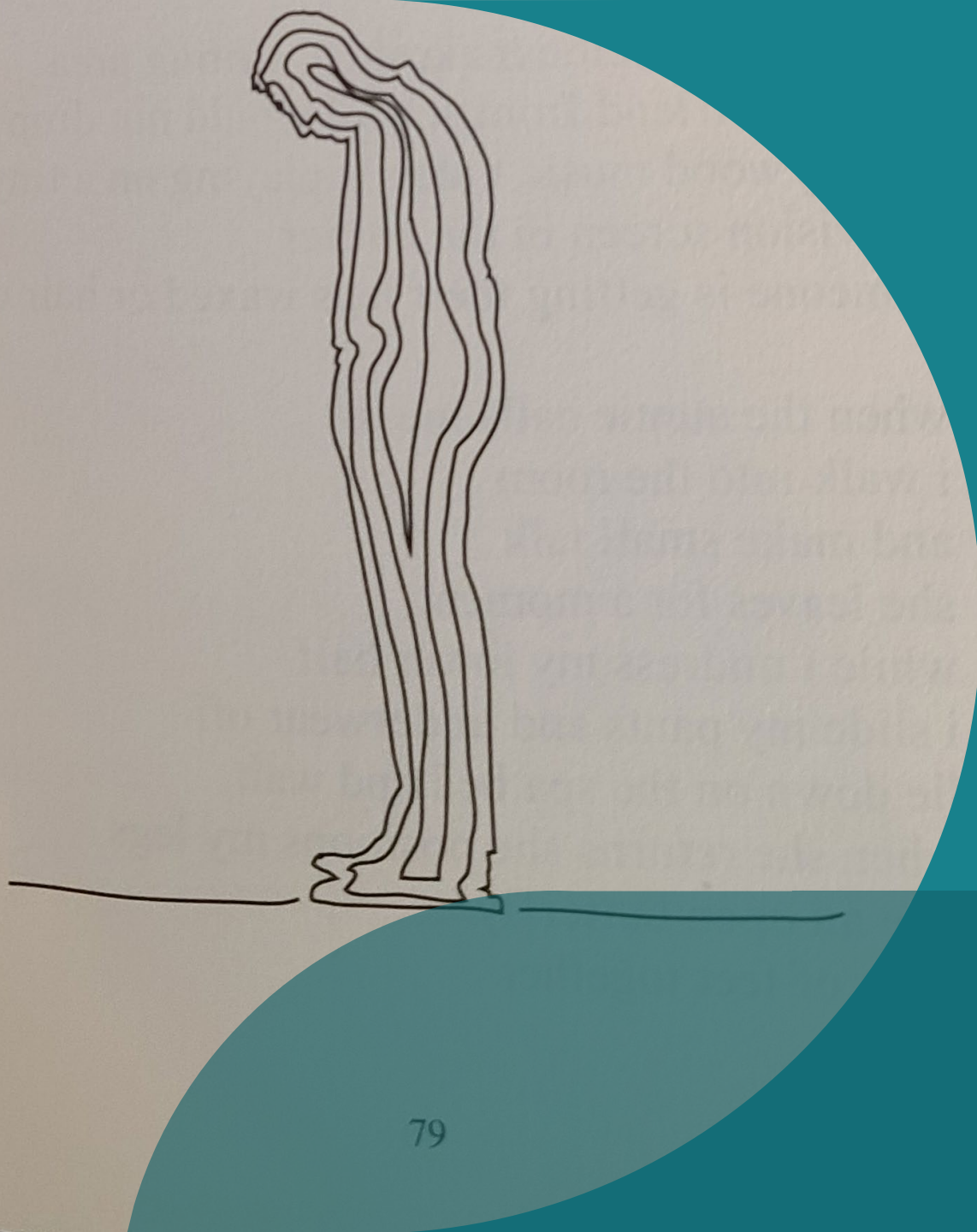


IN CONCLUSION



**2 STORIES**





**The irony of  
loneliness  
is we all feel it  
at the same  
time  
  
-together**

RUPI KAUR, "THE SUN AND HER  
FLOWERS"