

## Social Isolation

Interactions with other people are the social fabric that link individuals to the community. Our ability to feel connected to our community is known as social inclusion and it relates to the chance to participate in all social, political and economic facets of our society. It can be as simple as having a neighbor come for tea once a week or knowing when and where to vote for an election. Regardless of the activity, the association between “me” as an individual and “us” as a community is an important one. So important in fact, that a lack of social inclusion – known as social isolation – has been referred to by some as, The Modern Plague

Social isolation is defined as a state of complete or near-complete lack of contact between an individual and society. Social isolation is different from loneliness, in that loneliness is a state of emotion that is felt by individuals who are not satisfied with their social connections.

Social connectedness has declined in the last twenty years. People are more and more isolated from each other. Human beings are not designed to live like this. For the great majority of human history, people resided in small, intimate hunter-gatherer communities. And anthropologists who spend time with modern-day hunter-gatherer bands report that social isolation and loneliness were largely unknown among them: group members spent the bulk of their time - virtually all day, every day - in the company of friends and loved ones.

The roots of human civilisation stem from a natural gathering of local peoples forming symbiotic communities – essentially a “home” that is safe and helps ensure the survival of their like kind. However, in the past several centuries, and especially in the past several decades, the sudden boom of global technological advancement has created gatherings of more unlike peoples such as from different cultural backgrounds. This in turn produces more potential for social stress and higher barriers to interpersonal relationships.

Even though people may be physically close, there is a psychological distance. They are emotionally away from others, not being able to connect with them in meaningful ways. Friendships are replaced by screens, gadgets, and exhausted couch-potato stupor. Information overload strains people and leaves them feeling low. Technology changes what would be normal, everyday activities like being with people, talking, sharing, doing things together.

Much of interpersonal communication has moved online. Nowadays, we can communicate without physically being in each other’s presence. Telephone conversations and instant messaging allows low-effort human contact that fills a measure of our emotional need for human connection but leaves out some imperative aspects. We thus feel generally sated but like something is slightly amiss. Modern communication is a smoke screen that omits physical presence and contact, and body language and present empathy.

The toll - Increased vulnerability to mental illness. Social isolation is a huge risk factor for the onset of major depression, which has more than doubled over the past decade. And there's growing evidence that isolation increases vulnerability to various forms of addiction, as well.

Loneliness can accelerate cognitive decline in older adults, and isolated individuals twice as likely to die prematurely as those with more robust social interactions. These effects start early. Socially isolated children have significantly poorer health 20 years later, even after controlling for other factors. All told, loneliness is as important a risk factor for early death as obesity and smoking.

Individuals with less social connection have disrupted sleep patterns, altered immune systems, more inflammation and higher levels of stress hormones. One recent study found that isolation increases the risk of heart disease by 29 percent and stroke by 32 percent.

The solution – Relationships are a huge factor in warding off feelings of isolation. Meaningful relationships need time and effort. We need to maintain and invest in relationships. They may need patience. But the fruits of close relationships are sweet.

Joining groups doing activities that interest us or are meaningful to us is another way of enhancing social connections. It feels good to do things with others, and the time spent together revives the human spirit.

Sometimes we may connect to others but are emotionally distant. It is good to open up and be yourself, at least to some people. Shallow conversations and superficial relationships abound in today's society and bring about feelings of loneliness. Reach out to others and connect deeply.

One more factor that leads to social isolation is negative thinking and wrong assumptions about others. That must be dealt with and countered for social connectedness.

Excerpts from:

(<https://www.routesc.org/social-isolation>)

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/the-depression-cure/200907/social-isolation-modern-plague>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/22/upshot/how-social-isolation-is-killing-us.html>

<https://www.virgin.com/entrepreneur/how-modern-loneliness-impacting-mental-health>