"Throw your arms around me": Explorations of the importance of social connectively to people's wellbeing

Editorial

We are social creatures at heart, and connectivity sustains and strengthens us. As the world reconnects after shutdowns and boarder closures, we are reminded how important togetherness and interconnectivity is to being human and maintaining heath. To hug loved ones who we have only connected with over digital technology in recent years, and to meet in person colleagues with whom we have only spoken with online is wonderful. The mental health benefits of connectivity are clear, and strong relationships and frequent positive social interaction are strength factors in maintaining good mental health and living well.

However, the lack of social connection is emerging as one of the greatest challenges of our age (Smith, 2018). More people are living alone and disconnected from their communities. Social isolation, especially among older people living alone, is a determinant of ill health and early death (WHO, 2022). Living alone can increase mortality risk as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day or having an alcohol related disorder (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Social isolation not only has psycho-social impact, but also physical. Loneliness has been linked to high stress causing autoimmune disease as well as an increase in both coronary heart disease and stroke (Valtota et al., 2016).

As Rushby-Jones (2020) writes, "loneliness is lethal".

The articles in this edition of the JOSI make important contributions to the exploration of the importance of connectively to people's wellbeing. The papers cover the centrality of connectedness to practice in the helping professions. They also consider connectedness when planning services for communities and specific groups who are at risk of social isolation, including older adults, adolescents and young people, poor populations, and lone refugee mothers. Other papers explore the impact of racial exclusion on experiences of disconnection and disintegration.

As you read through this edition, we invite you to, in the words of Australian 1980s rock band Hunters and Collectors, "throw your arms around me" and each other as we explore the connectivity that is the essence of being human and living together well, and the harms that become us when this is disrupted. Using the experiences of exclusion within deprived populations in the Basque Country (Spain), the study *Loneliness as an unresolved issue in social inclusion programmes by* Ainara Arnoso, Javier Sancho, Edurne Elgorriaga, and Maitane Arnoso, demonstrates how the effects of loneliness, social isolation, and exclusion are exacerbated in less fortunate communities who are systematically segregated from social, economic, political, and cultural pursuit. There is much that can be done to reduce the burden of social isolation within vulnerable groups. Person-centred interventions, community empowerment, and the expansion of social networks and interactions, for example, are some of the most impactful approaches in the reduction of unwanted loneliness. The promotion of government strategies and policies designed to address loneliness effectively and efficiently, especially promoting employment within the most vulnerable community groups, remain paramount.

Similarly, Mollie McDonald, Jeniece Cordova, and Lawrence Meyers, in their paper, *Social*

support as an explanatory mechanism of the relationship between social class and mental health in university students: a structural mediation model, point to a negative relationship between socio-economic status and experience of social isolation and mental health. They further note a negative relationship between social isolation and academic performance, with poor students hit the hardest. This is mainly because, evidence (Lipson et al., 2018) suggests, as the prevalence of mental health disorders in college students continues to rise, students of lower socioeconomic status become particularly vulnerable. The role of social support as a mediator between subjective social class and various aspects of mental health such as depression and anxiety in college students is paramount. Consequently, educational institutions and the relevant stakeholders should consider how to best provide a socially supportive environment to lower social-economic students.

In *Like a Social Breath: Homecare's Contributions to Social Inclusion and Connectedness of Older Adults*, Reidun Norvoll, Christine Øye, and Astrid Helene Skatved explore the important role home care services play in creating social connectedness for older adults. Using interviews with older adults from four municipalities in Norway and Denmark, the authors combine social inclusion theories and Goffmanian microinteractionalism to show that care encounters are fundamental to mitigating the detrimental effects of social isolation on the health and wellbeing, and that the inclusive resources embedded in homecare need to be supported and utilised in policy and practice it increase older people's social inclusion.

The importance of services for social interaction and integration is also explored by Teddy Nagaddya, Brian Stout in their article *Not Leaving 'Lone Migrant Mothers' Behind: The Role of Place-based Childcare Support in Australia's Marginalised Neighbourhoods*. In this article, the authors show how childcare support for lone migrant mothers is not just a service that allows mothers time for other endeavours like paid work, but is also a strategy to settlement and integration. Drawing on Sen's capabilities framework, the article demonstrates that place-based childcare support is not only a welfare services but a tool for building localism. Creating healthy spaces, place-making and community cohesion help curb the isolation and disorientation that is often the experience of lone migrant mothers, building connectivity with their local community and fostering resilience.

Finally, Shinya Uekusa's commentary opens up discussion about inclusivity and exclusion in response to recent Danish public policy and discourse including plans to restrict non-White immigration, the passing of laws to require Taxi drivers to speak Dutch or English, and accusing inclusive research about migration, ethnicity and education research communities as being 'pseudo-scientific'. While the article focuses on Denmark from an outsider's point of view, it is a clarion call to all researchers and helping professionals to pick up the tools of their trade – pens, hearts and evidence based expertise – to safeguard their country against the harms that exclusion and racism cause, and protect against the loneliness and isolation of homogeneity and bigotry.

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