



Summary report Policy workshop

Knowledge sharing process on
“Isolation and loneliness of older people
during the COVID-19 pandemic:
formal/informal care”

Background

Joint Programming Initiative ‘More Years, Better Lives’ (JPI MYBL) aims to complement, and provide a concrete perspective, to existing research on the issues regarding Isolation and loneliness of older people during the COVID-19 pandemic: formal/informal care” by involving policy makers, stakeholders, and researchers. The underlying document for the process is the red line document. The document provided a short background and summary of the state of the art on the topics of isolation and loneliness during the pandemic. During the knowledge sharing process this document would be expanded towards a state of the art document. The process consists of 4 workshops. All workshops will be attended by the whole group of stakeholders, researchers, and policy representatives

This report summarises the third workshop moderated by Peter Allebeck chair of the JPI MYBL and Bruno Arpino (coordinator of the knowledge sharing process). After introductions from Peter Allebeck and Bruno Arpino, the national perspectives and policies on isolation and loneliness from France, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK are presented. There was also time for some questions and discussion.

The workshop was recorded and is available on the JPI MYBL you tube page.

1. Researchers’ presentations

Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna: The Italian perspective

It is instructive to observe that every European state – and not just European – has taken different paths, deeply intertwined with the prevailing anthropological structure of families. Moreover, these differences have not disappeared over time, and may, in fact, strengthen in the years to come due to the different demographic dynamics of Northern and Southern Europe. The identification of the most suitable policies to ensure the best possible conditions for seniors should start with a recognition of the profound diversity of family systems across countries. Yet, this does not mean that the welfare of each individual country is definitively shaped by the dominant family configuration. Nor does it mean that countries cannot adapt and change in their search for optimal welfare solutions in a given historical period, looking also at the solutions adopted in other countries.

Elsa Perdix: The French perspective

In France, a governmental loneliness policy is still in development. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, France only had public policies focused on reducing loneliness in elderly. The related activities are organized by associations and charity. The Covid-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for the government, encouraging them to take action on loneliness (focused on older persons). New initiatives, like intergenerational micro-childcare facilities, were implemented, to fight against isolation, also after lockdown.

Viyeta Biere & Anke Verhoeve: The Dutch perspective

The Dutch government has an action program to combat loneliness among older adults, the slogan is “one against loneliness’. The program focuses on improving communication on individual level, strengthening awareness and developed early warning systems. Additionally, it aims to prevent and reduce loneliness, in the long run. This is achieved by (1) communication and a nation wide campaign, (2) establishing a national alliance against loneliness, (3) support of initiatives and interventions, (4) prevention and tackling loneliness on a local level, and (5) science and research. During the Covid-19 pandemic, loneliness levels increased in the Netherlands, and simultaneously social participation decreased. Additionally, awareness of loneliness was raised due to the restrictions.

Christina Victor: The British perspective

The United Kingdom has reviewed several loneliness policies, and they have reframed the definition of loneliness. Their latest strategy was aimed at improving the evidence based burden of loneliness, measurement, and effective interventions. The evaluation of all government strategies and policies regarding loneliness and initiating a national conversation about loneliness. The strategy also aimed at reducing stigma, increasing awareness, and recognising risk factors. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK government launched a major effort to tackle loneliness. For example, budget was cleared for organisations that worked to tackle loneliness and build social connections. Loneliness campaigns in the UK are not only focused on older adults, but on all age categories, which is the prevention component.

See annex 2 for the abstract or slides of the individual presentations.

2. Conclusion

The presentations showed that loneliness policies differ per country, some are at the start developing their national policies to tackle loneliness, others in the middle of implementing them or reviewing their current policies. Overall it can be concluded that the Covid-19 pandemic really highlighted the issues related to loneliness and isolation and showed the strengths and limitations of the policies and interventions. When it comes to ‘curing’ loneliness (among older adults), we have a long way to go. For the future it is advised to investigate why some older adults are lonely and some are not, and it use that knowledge the prevent loneliness among all ages.

3. Next steps

The participants will meet again in September to evaluate the knowledge sharing process and to agree on lessons learned and possible recommendation. They are also considering publishing an e-book informing the public about loneliness and isolation from their perspective.

Annex I - List of participants

Participants who confirmed attendance are:

Clemens	Tesch-Roemer	German Centre of Gerontology (DZA)	Germany
Theo	Van Tilburg	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	Netherlands
Elsa	Perdrix	Dauphine University	France
Jennifer	Bethell	KITE Research Institute, Toronto Rehabilitation Institute – University Health Network	Canada
Oliver	Huxhold	German Centre of Gerontology (DZA)	Germany
Christina	Victor	Brunel University London	The UK
Gianpiero	Dalla Zuanna	University of Padua	Italy
Viyeta	Biere	Dutch ministry of Health	Netherlands
Anke	van Beckhoven	Dutch ministry of Health	Netherlands
Lena	Dahlberg	Ageing research center	Sweden
Tineke	Fokkema	Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI)	Netherlands

Organisation:

Bruno	Arpino	Coordinator JPI MYBL knowledge sharing Process
Giuseppe	Gabrielli	JPI MYBL General Assembly member
Denice	Moi Thuk Shung	JPI MYBL secretariat
Emma	Wilckens	JPI MYBL secretariat

Annex II – Programme

Draft programme

A knowledge sharing process on “Isolation and loneliness of older people during the COVID-19 pandemic: formal/informal care”

Date and time: 17 May 2022 from 13.30 till 16.00H CEST.

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://zomnw.zoom.us/j/97174342169?pwd=OVZObWJaakZLVEw0cDB5V2NyQVRYUT09>

Meeting ID: 971 7434 2169, Passcode: u?MLOH#H

Organization: Bruno Arpino, Peter Allebeck, Giuseppe Gabrielli

Support and documentation: Denice Moi Thuk Shung and Emma Wilckens, MYBL secretariat

Participants: stakeholders, researchers, and policy representatives

Objectives of the knowledge sharing process:

- to complement, and provide a concrete perspective, to existing research on these issues by involving policy makers, stakeholders, and researchers.
- to disseminate knowledge, research, and practices; and contribute to the JPI visibility.

Setting:

The process consists of 4 workshops and is based on a redline document. All workshops will be attended by the whole group of stakeholders, researchers, and policy representatives. During each workshop one group gives its views on the redline document and after each workshop the document is revised. The process ends with a half day face to face event during which the participants make a synthesis of all the input and agree on needs for the future.

Workshop 3: Policy

Chair: Peter Allebeck (Chair of the JPI MYBL) and Bruno Arpino (Coordinator of knowledge sharing activities)

Time	
13.30 – 13.45	Welcome & Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> About JPI MYBL: aim, activities, agenda (Peter Allebeck) Introduction to the topic and aim of the knowledge sharing process (Bruno Arpino, coordinator of knowledge sharing activities)
13.45	Presentation I 13.45: Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna: The Italian perspective 14.05: Elsa Perdix: The French perspective
14.25 – 14.40	<i>Screen break</i>
14.40 – 15.20	Presentation II 14.40: Viyeta Biere & Anke Verhoeve: The Dutch perspective 15.00: Christina Victor: The British perspective
15.20 – 15.50	Plenary session Discussant: Bruno Arpino <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion of the research questions of the redline document in relation to the presentations.
15.50 – 16.00	Next steps (Bruno Arpino)

Annex II - presentations

Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna: The Italian perspective

It is neither easy, nor perhaps useful, to say whether the welfare state was born in Northern and Central Europe to make up for the shortcomings of family aid, or if Eastern and Southern Europe's provision of insufficient welfare has forced families to provide primary assistance to the vulnerable. It is, however, instructive to observe that every European state – and not just European – has taken different paths, deeply intertwined with the prevailing anthropological structure of families. Moreover, these differences have not disappeared over time, and may, in fact, strengthen in the years to come due to the different demographic dynamics of Northern and Southern Europe.

Any broad judgments of the merits of a given welfare system compared to any other must therefore be made with caution. It is unlikely that the welfare approaches of Denmark or Sweden – who have “weak” family ties – would be able to maximize well-being for the frail elderly living in Spain and Italy – who have “strong” family ties. The identification of the most suitable policies to ensure the best possible conditions for seniors should start with a recognition of the profound diversity of family systems across countries. For example, in today's Italy there would be important reforms of the methods of employment of foreign domestic workers, for example by simplifying the procedures to allow regular entries from abroad (also thanks to direct agreements with some countries of departure) and hiring in good standing: it was estimated that at least one third of foreign domestic workers do not have a regular contract.

Yet, this does not mean that the welfare of each individual country is definitively shaped by the dominant family configuration. Nor does it mean that countries cannot adapt and change in their search for optimal welfare solutions in a given historical period, looking also at the solutions adopted in other countries. However, the most suitable “formulas” for helping seniors in countries with strong family ties, where most elderly parents and adult children live in close proximity, will look much different than those most appropriate in countries where the majority of parents live far away from their children.

Elsa Perdix: The French perspective

Viyeta Biere & Anke Verhoeve: The Dutch perspective

Christina Victor: The British perspective