FRAILTY AND SOCIAL CONNECTION: KEY INSIGHTS FROM WHO REPORT
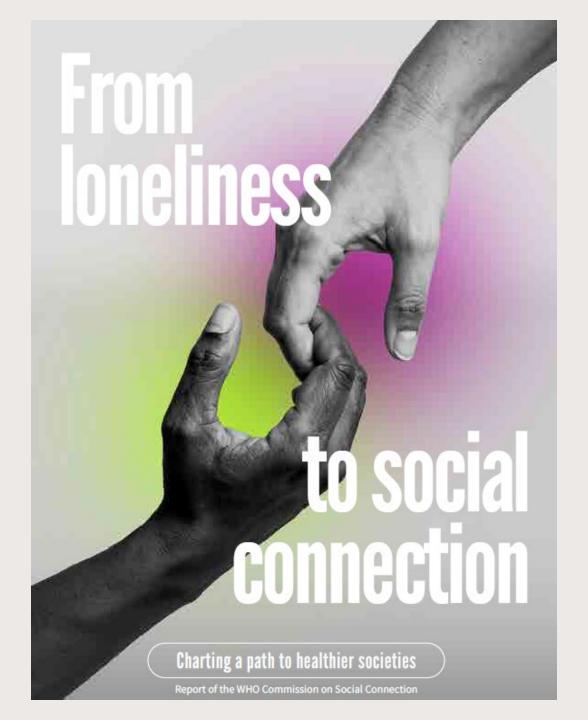
Understanding the impact of social ties on frailty

From loneliness

to social connection

Make no mistake – connection is not just a nice idea. It is fundamental. It strengthens communities, fosters cooperation and creates opportunities. Without connection, we will not succeed in solving the problems facing us today – whether they are public health, economic growth or social stability.

WHO Commission on Social Connection, 2025

FRAILTY AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

Impact of Frailty on Social Engagement

Frailty reduces mobility and physical ability, limiting social participation especially among older adults.

Prevalence of Social Isolation

Between 25–33.6% of older adults globally experience social isolation due to frailty and related factors.

Risk Factors for Isolation

Living alone and poor health increase risk of social isolation and reduce meaningful social connections.

Addressing Social Isolation

Effective solutions require addressing physical, emotional, and environmental barriers to social engagement.

HEALTH IMPACTS OF LONELINESS

Increased Physical Health Risks

Loneliness raises the risk of cardiovascular disease by 29%, stroke by 32%, and type 2 diabetes by up to 24%.

Mental Health Effects

Loneliness doubles depression risk and increases anxiety, suicidality, and psychosis likelihood.

Vulnerability of Frail Individuals

Frail individuals face heightened vulnerability due to loneliness exacerbating health challenges.

Urgent Public Health Concern

Loneliness is a critical public health issue requiring interventions addressing emotional and physical health.

COGNITIVE DECLINE AND FRAILTY

Link Between Frailty and Cognition

Cognitive decline is closely related to frailty and worsened by social isolation in older adults.

Impact of Loneliness

Loneliness increases Alzheimer's risk by 72% and accelerates cognitive decline in seniors.

Importance of Social Connection

Strong social ties boost cognitive resilience and can delay dementia onset.

Cognitive Support Interventions

Memory training and social activities improve mental function and quality of life for frail individuals.

COMMUNITY-LEVEL SOLUTIONS

Social Infrastructure Investment

Investing in libraries, parks, and community hubs creates accessible venues for social connection among frail individuals.

Social Prescribing Programs

Programs like social prescribing link individuals to non-clinical services that enhance well-being and social inclusion.

Inclusive Public Space Design

Designing inclusive public spaces ensures community interventions are effective, sustainable, and promote belonging.

Community Engagement and Partnerships

Involving communities and multi-sector partnerships can tailor solutions to local needs and fosters purpose among frail populations.

DIGITAL INCLUSION AND SUPPORT

ICT Training for Older Adults

Providing ICT training helps older adults reduce digital exclusion and enhances social engagement through technology.

AI and Virtual Reality Support

AI companions and virtual reality can supplement human interaction but require careful use to prevent overreliance.

Safe Inclusive Digital Spaces

Creating identity-safe digital platforms and inclusive policies helps marginalised groups overcome stigma and isolation.