



Stigma and Prejudice around Loneliness

Coffee Catch Up Takeover

@ Tackling Loneliness Hub

October 22nd 2025

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(Tackling) Loneliness Symposium:
Prejudice and Stigma as Shared Markers Across Vulnerable Groups
2 - 4 July 2025, Hannover, Germany



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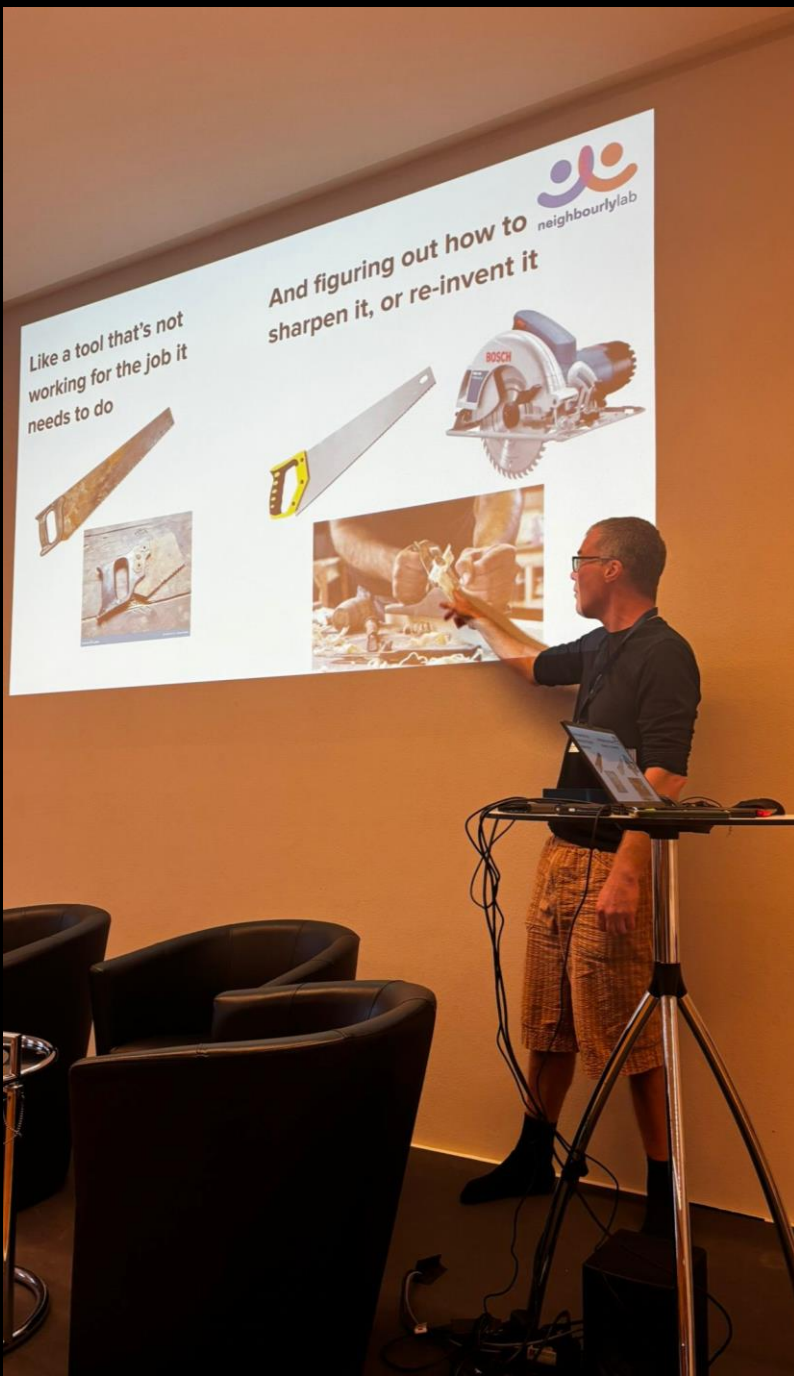
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What to expect today



Scientific insights

Understanding how prejudice, stigma, and loneliness intersect



Reflection exercise

Exploring how these dynamics show up in ourselves, others, and more systemically



Practical challenges

Bridging insight and action in research and practice



Open Discussion



What is loneliness for you?

Anyone open to share their experience?



Loneliness experiences are **DIVERSE**

Science defines loneliness as the perceived gap between the relationships we have and the ones we desire, in either quantity or quality.
(Perlman & Peplau, 1981)

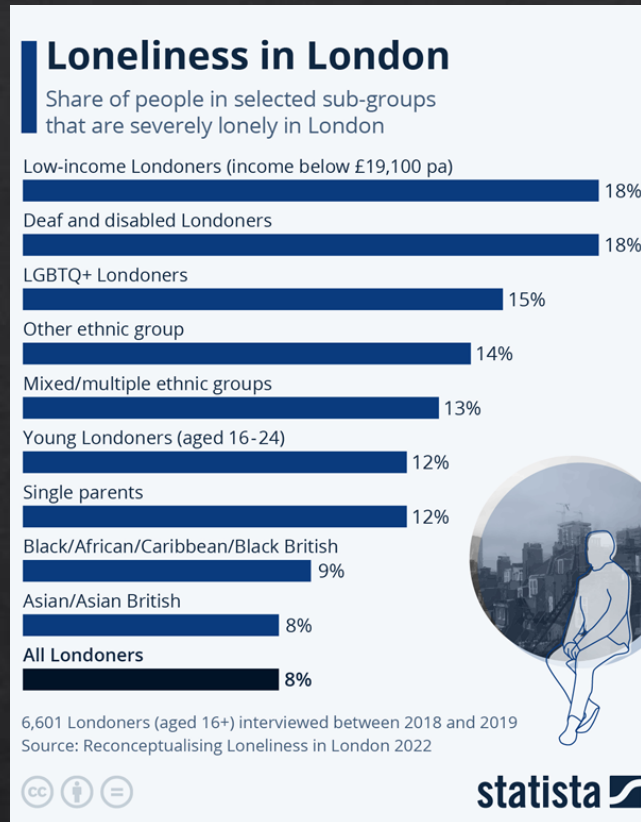


Loneliness experiences are
STIGMATIZED



Loneliness experiences are **SOCIALLY PATTERNED**

- Most prevalent in minoritized and devalued social groups



Loneliness experiences are **SOCIALLY PATTERNED**

- Most prevalent in minoritized and devalued social groups

One common factor



What is stigma / prejudice?

Both refer to negative attitudes toward individuals or groups that can lead to discrimination.

They may differ in who or what specifically they target but often overlap.



Stigma operates on multiple levels



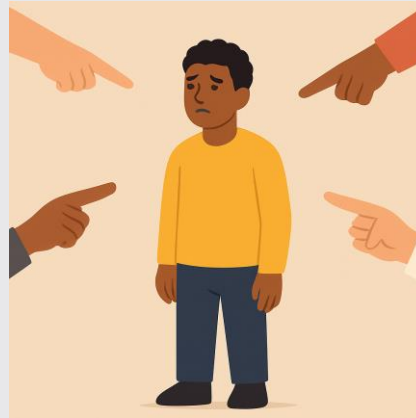
Micro

= Self-Stigma
(Attitudes, Beliefs, Behaviors)



Meso

= Interpersonal Stigmatization
(Families, Friends, Social Networks)



Macro

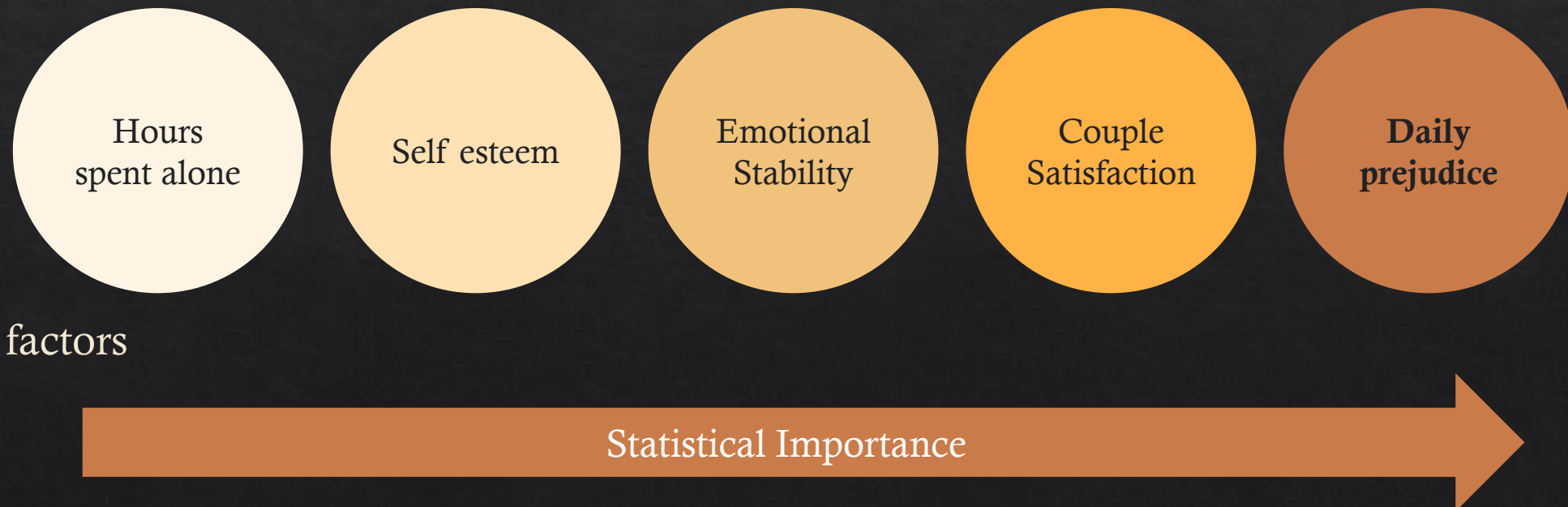
= Structural / Systemic Stigma
(Policies, Communities, Institutions)



Stigma / Prejudice and Loneliness

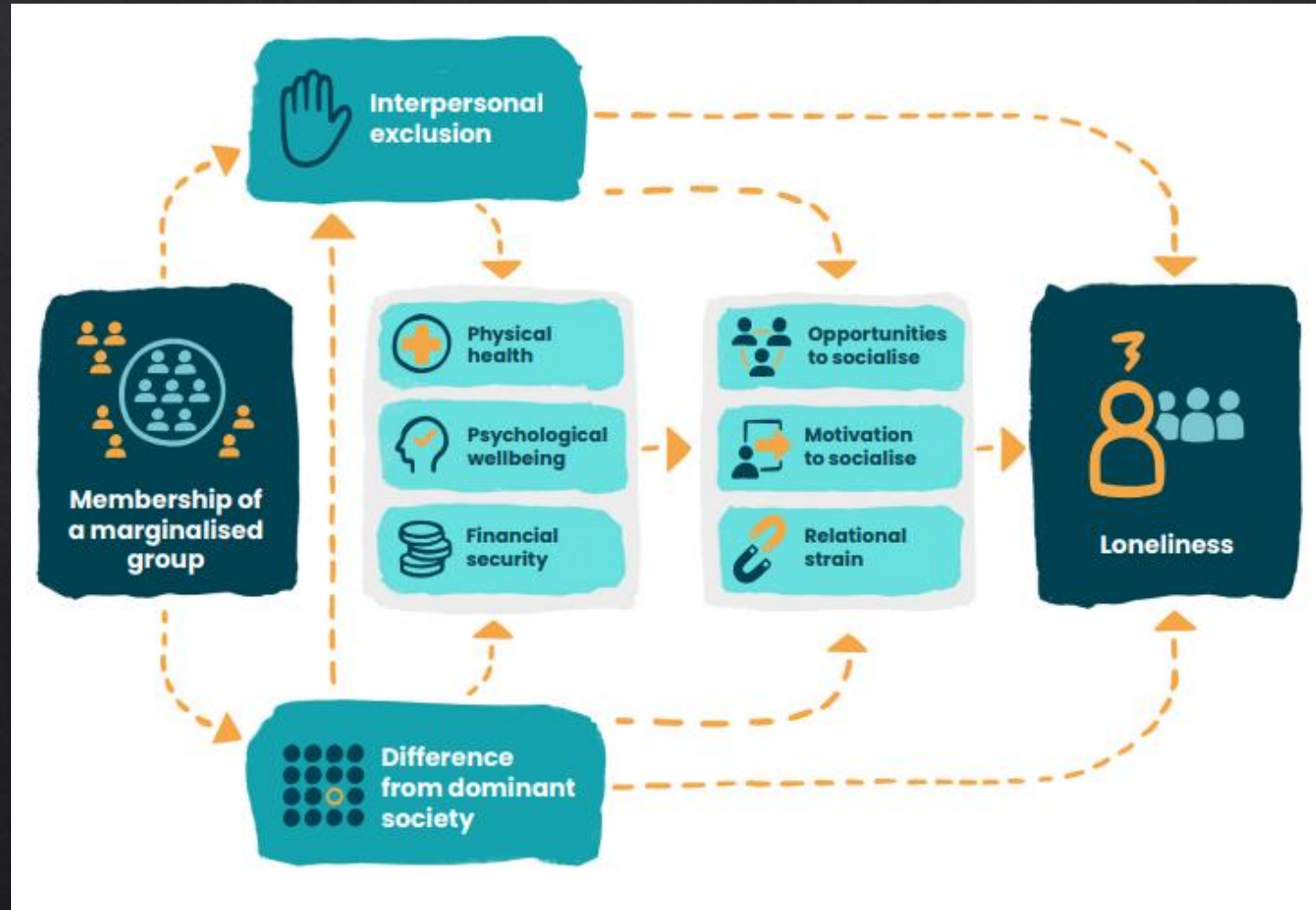
➤ Machine Learning Evidence shows

- Daily prejudice / stigma as the most statistically important associate of loneliness



+ 27 other factors

How Stigma links to Loneliness





The case of ageism

“Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age” (WHO, 2025)



Studies indicate that **every second person** holds ageist attitudes (Officer et al., 2020)

Reflection Exercise:

How does **ageism** show up within us (micro), between us (meso), and around us (macro)?

What could we do to challenge it on each level?

Micro

= Self-Stigma
(Attitudes, Beliefs, Behaviors)

Meso

= Interpersonal Stigmatization
(Families, Friends, Social Networks)

Macro

= Structural / Systemtic Stigma
(Policies, Communities, Institutions)

Reflection Exercise:

How does **ageism** show up within us (micro), between us (meso), and around us (macro)?

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Micro

= Self-Stigma
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Macro

= Structural / Systemic Stigma
(Policies, Communities, Institutions)



10 min breakout sessions:

- We'll post the questions in the chat so you can see them in your breakout rooms.
- Discuss them in your group and note how ageism shows up and can be challenged.
- Nominate one person to take notes and tag ideas as micro, meso, or macro.
- Back in plenary, note-takers will paste their results in the chat.
- All ideas will be collected and shared with you afterward.

Ageism within us, between us, and around us

Paste your notes in the chat – we'll take a moment to look at the patterns together



Silbernetz e.V. Campaign against Ageism



Addressing Ageism to reduce loneliness in older adults

Bridging science, policy and practice

Key challenges

- ❖ **Loneliness cuts across sectors, yet policy and administrative systems remain siloed**, making coordination and accountability difficult.
- ❖ **Science, policy, and practice operate on different time scales**; research evolves slowly, while policy cycles and service delivery demand rapid action.
- ❖ **Funding is limited and fragmented**, often short-term, hindering sustainable interventions and long-term evaluation.
- ❖ **Evidence gaps persist**; we need more robust, context-sensitive research to understand what truly works in different communities.

Bridging science, policy and practice

Potentials

- ◆ **Successful practice examples demonstrate multiple co-benefits** — reducing loneliness can also strengthen community resilience, improve health, and enhance social trust.
- ◆ **Reframe loneliness within a broader vision of well-being and prevention. Inspire with a shared, positive vision**, emphasize hope, purpose, and collaboration towards a more connected society.
- ◆ **Foster cross-sector exchange and learning** to build on existing knowledge and **avoid ‘reinventing the wheel’**
- ◆ **Encourage creativity**, thinking and working **beyond traditional sector boundaries** to co-design innovative solutions.

Bridging science, policy and practice

Way Forward

- ❖ Tackling loneliness requires a **holistic, multidisciplinary approach** connecting science, policy, NGOs, and public services to create coherent, system-wide strategies.
- ❖ Interventions work best when they are **peer-based, participatory, and sustainable**, empowering communities to co-create and own the solutions.
- ❖ Adopt a **Health in All Policies** perspective, integrating social connection and loneliness into health impact assessments and policy planning across all sectors.
- ❖ Tailor **communication** to context, reframe loneliness in ways that resonate with shared values and collective goals, fostering common purpose and engagement.

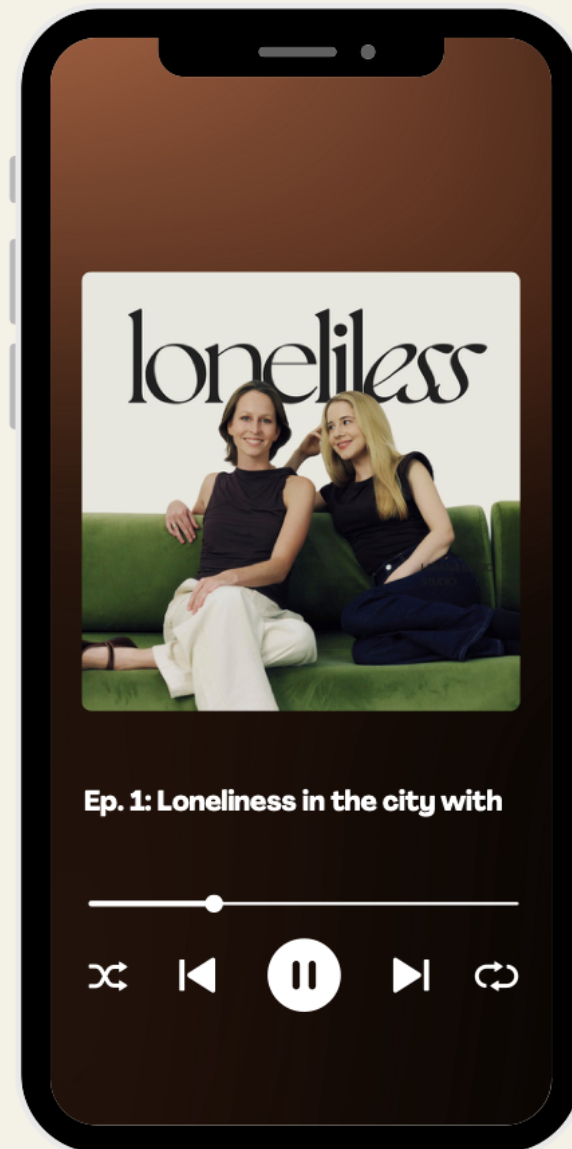
loneliless

a podcast to reconnect

1 in 4 young adults often feels lonely – mostly in silence. Loneliless breaks down the stigma with open conversations.

In each episode, hosts Lea Merkel and Enya Elstner together with experts from science, practice and lived experience explore loneliness from a different angle.

Loneliless Season 1 will be released in November 2025. Follow along and get in touch!



Get in touch:





Can you share examples of cross-sector collaboration that effectively addresses loneliness and stigma?

References

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