Research on the impact of Covid-19 on loneliness and isolation

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Key findings:
What does the impact of Covid-19 look like?

- Experienced differently by each person
- Loneliness and feelings of stress, anxiety and depression emerging as most pressing negative impact
- Increase in loneliness began early on in the pandemic
  - Feelings of loneliness affected not just by physical distancing but also the anticipation of isolation
- Negative impact on wellbeing has stayed static
- Impact on wellbeing compounded by other economic and social impacts
  - Loss of control

Impact of Covid-19: Loneliness

- 1 in 5 adults say friendships outside of their household have gotten worse ([Covid-19 Social Study](#))

- Loneliness exacerbated during the pandemic ([Red Cross](#))
  - 41% of UK adults report feeling lonelier since lockdown (doubled since before the pandemic)
  - 31% often feel alone, as if they have no one to turn to
  - **The loneliest people feel the least able to cope and recover from the Covid-19 crisis**

Who is most at risk of experiencing loneliness?

- People who felt most lonely before Covid now have higher levels of loneliness
- Adults most at risk have one or more of the following characteristics (Covid-19 Social Study):
  - young
  - living alone
  - on a low income
  - not currently working
  - living with a mental health condition
- Some groups at higher risk of loneliness (Red Cross)
  - People from BAME communities, parents with young children, young people, people living with long-term physical and mental health conditions, and those with limited access to digital technology and the Internet

Psychology of loneliness

- People describe thoughts and feelings of loneliness in ways that echo mental health problems
  - Words like anxiety, fear, shame, helplessness

- Loneliness affects the ways people perceive social experience
  - Nervousness about social situations, anticipate social rejection cues
  - Loneliness can affect how we anticipate and interpret our social experiences.

- Pathways between loneliness and mental health problems

- Growth mindset and openness to change important
  - Loneliness can worsen if the causes are seen as fixed, e.g., part of who we are or a natural consequence of age

All from Campaign to End Loneliness

Contact vs connection

- In June, around 2/3 of people said they had checked in on neighbours to see if they needed help ([ONS](#))

- BUT… Contact is not necessarily connection

- 39% of adults said they haven't had a meaningful conversation in two weeks ([British Red Cross](#))
    - Meaningful relationships, not just contact, make the biggest measurable difference to loneliness ([Campaign to End Loneliness](#))

How can reading help?

- Reading significantly reduces feelings of loneliness for people aged 18-64 ([A Society of Readers](#))

- Regular readers report fewer feelings of stress and depression than non-readers ([Reading Between the Lines](#))

- Those who read for pleasure have a greater ability to cope with difficult situations ([Reading Between the Lines](#))

- Reading for pleasure has a particular impact on young people, who report that reading helps them to escape, to relax, to increase their imagination, and to feel better about themselves and their lives ([Howard, 2011](#))

- Reading Friends helps both participants and volunteers feel more connected to others ([Reading Friends evaluation](#))