



# **The Impact of Loneliness and Social Isolation on the Mental Health of Older Adults**

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## **Abstract**

According to the World Health Organization, the global elderly population is expected to triple by 2050, reaching 16% of the world's inhabitants. In this scenario, understanding the emotional and social challenges experienced in old age becomes increasingly relevant. This study aims to analyze the effects of loneliness and social isolation in older adults, highlighting how these phenomena influence mental health and the experience of aging. The aging process is shaped by subjective and contextual factors that determine how individuals reorganize their social roles and respond to transitions in this stage of life. As a result, some older adults remain actively engaged, while others may experience different degrees of loneliness or isolation.

Loneliness is a subjective experience arising from the perceived gap between desired and actual social relationships, often generating emotional discomfort, dissatisfaction, and a sense of disconnection. It has become more evident due to population aging, changes in family structures, and shifts in societal organization. Social isolation, on the other hand, is defined by an objective reduction of social contacts, characterized by limited interactions, a weakened support network, or scarce participation in social activities.

Although distinct, loneliness and isolation are interrelated processes. Scientific evidence indicates that both are associated with increased morbidity and mortality among older adults, linked to systemic inflammation, autonomic dysregulation, stroke, and cardiovascular diseases. Understanding these dynamics is essential to guide interventions, promote healthy aging, and strengthen mental health strategies for the elderly population.

**Keywords:** aging; well-being; psychosocial factors; geriatric health; social connectedness