Reviewer’s report

Title: Interventions targeting social isolation in older people: a systematic review

Version: 1 Date: 10 May 2011

Reviewer: Heikki Heinonen

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- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The aim of this systematic review was to assess the effectiveness of interventions planned to alleviate social isolation and loneliness among older people.

2. The primary study question was defined clearly. However in the method part the authors do not describe how social isolation and loneliness were measured (self-reports? validated measures: depression, QOL etc.). Furthermore they do not give any data how social health outcomes were empirically measured.

3. The methodology concerning search for relevant studies is well described and thorough. The inclusion criteria are appropriate, also the validity of included studies is well assessed and described.

4. Information concerning missing data among the accepted studies is reported only in one study. In discussion the authors excluded the studies with non-significant results. More profound justification for this exclusion is needed.

5. Taken account of the small number of accepted studies the conclusions related to the effectiveness of interventions should be stated with caution.

- Minor Essential Revisions

1. Regarding the literature search it is amazing that the study of OLLONQVIST Kirsi; et al. (Network-based rehabilitation increases formal support of frail elderly home-dwelling persons in Finland: randomised controlled trial.Reference: Health and Social Care in the Community, 16(2), March 2008, pp.115-125) was not found. This is one of those studies with significant results without theory.

2. In Methodological quality: moderate risks of bias

   The authors review the reference 59 and suppose that it might be unpowered, which does not seem to be the case while there are over 700 subjects.

3. The symbols (×,#) in the table 6 should be clarified.

- Discretionary Revisions
It would be helpful for the readers that the results were presented in the tables. For example how many studies were: theory based/no theory and what were their effect on outcome variables. Statistical indicators (for example #²-test) also would help reasoning. Furthermore it would be interesting to know whether professional background of persons who deliver intervention has any importance?

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests