Author’s response to reviews

Title: Loneliness and social isolation interventions for older adults: a scoping review of reviews

Authors:

Olujoke Fakoya (ofakoya01@qub.ac.uk; oafyemisi@yahoo.co.uk)

Noleen McCorry (n.mccorry@qub.ac.uk)

Michael Donnelly (michael.donnelly@qub.ac.uk)

Version: 2 Date: 16 Nov 2019

Author’s response to reviews:

November 16, 2019

BMC Journal of Public Health

Dear Editor,

Thank you very much for reviewing our manuscript. We also greatly appreciate the reviewers for their comments and suggestions as we believe that these have given the paper more clarity, and made it more accessible to the journal’s wider readership. We have adhered to the reviewers’ suggestions and revised the manuscript accordingly. Please find below a point-by-point detailed response to the reviewer’s concerns, describing the amendments that have been made to the manuscript text and where these can be viewed. We ensured to respond to all comments in as concise a manner as possible. We hope that you find our responses satisfactory and that the manuscript is now acceptable for publication.

Sincerely,

Olujoke A. Fakoya, Ph.D, BSc

Research student
Centre for Public Health
Queen’s University Belfast
Institute of Clinical Sciences B
Royal Victoria Hospital
Belfast, BT12 6BA
Email: ofakoya01@qub.ac.uk
Reviewer 2

MINOR
1) Clarity with wording needed regarding mode as an intervention characteristic - group/one-to-one as one option, technology/non-technology as another option and used in different included review papers?

Response: Thank you for your comment. Page 12, line 48 and page 13, line 17 now clarifies that sometimes the terms (including mode) are used to mean different intervention characteristics.

2) Conclusion of abstract discusses loneliness interventions and its limitations/individuality - what about conclusions regarding social isolation?

Response: The conclusion regarding social isolation has been included in the ‘Conclusion’ of the ‘Abstract’ (page 2, line 5). Further clarity is now provided in the ‘Results section’ (page 10, line 45) where it is written that while there is a distinction between loneliness and social isolation, there was not any obvious distinction in differences in reviews that focussed on loneliness or social isolation in terms of the review type, where the research was conducted and how the findings were reported. This is also discussed on page 17, line 10.

3) High- and low-income countries were specified - is this particular information relevant to the research in this publication (as opposed to middle-income?); perhaps consider whether just a global context may be what is being referred to here - page 2 (line 19)

Response: Thank you for your comment. A global context was what we were referring to and this has been added in the text as seen on page 2, line 34.

4) A number of sentences need restructuring to better convey the meaning, for example page 2 (line 20-21) - do you mean smoking, lack of exercise…etc. are each a risk factor for morbidity/mortality?

Response: Thank you for your comment. We have attempted to address this throughout the manuscript. In the example specified on page 2, line 54, amendments have been made to better convey the meaning.

5) "Greater geographical mobility" was listed as a risk factor for loneliness/social isolation in older adults - please clarify - page 3 (line 5-6)

Response: We have clarified this information as requested by the review (page 3, line 29).

6) Consider defining social isolation and loneliness before giving the statistics and risk factors for them

Response: The definition for loneliness and social isolation were added on page 2, line 37, in accordance to the reviewer’s suggestion.
7) In general, please check grammar and punctuation, and take care with the order, structure and format of the piece

Response: We have attempted to address this across the manuscript.

8) Please elaborate on/describe instead of only listing some of the examples you provide, for example for the systematic reviews in the current literature - page 5 (line 12-13)

Response: We have addressed this comment across the manuscript. In the example specified from page 4, line 59, brief descriptions of the systematic reviews are provided.

9) May be useful to demonstrate why it was necessary to conduct preliminary searches before the actual search, and how this was conducted

Response: We have demonstrated why preliminary searches were conducted before the actual search and this can be seen on page 7, line 8.

10) Search of grey literature - was this Google Scholar?

Response: Yes, this has been clarified and can be seen on page 7, line 25.

11) Page 8 (line 17-18) - are the reasons for exclusion highlighted or listed somewhere?

Response: Yes, the reasons for exclusion are provided on page 9, line 26. The reasons for exclusion can also be seen in the PRISMA chart (Figure 1) as referenced in-text in the manuscript on page 8, line 40.

12) Please be consistent with the use of numbers in the results section when listing the number of reviews included/excluded at each stage in-text just for the ease of the reader - general suggestion, perhaps spell out the number if ten and under, and use the numerical value if greater than ten

Response: Thank you for your comment. We have addressed this comment by the reviewer across the whole manuscript and written numbers using words if below ten and used numerical value if greater than ten. For example, as seen on page 12, line 1 where it is stated ‘Only two out of the 33 reviews (41,52) included gender as an inclusion criteria, and these two papers focussed specifically on interventions targeted at the male population only, including Men’s Sheds (52) and gendered interventions for older men (41).’

13) Take care in bringing in the term ‘physical social isolation’ without have defined what that means earlier and how it differs from social isolation alone/how it differs from the definition of social isolation previously given

Response: Thank you for your comment. This has been addressed and can be seen on Page 4, line 5 which states that ‘ACEL did not clarify what was meant by the term ‘physical social
isolation’ and this further highlights the varied terminology used regarding loneliness and social isolation.’

14) Reclarify the message that you are trying to get across regarding age range - page 13 (line 4-5). May be beneficial to specify earlier that the reviews included in this paper didn't always specify age ranges (because if not, it would have been beneficial to incorporate age range as part of the data extraction in the outset)

Response: This has been clarified as stated by the review and can be seen on page 11, line 18.

15) If 'Men's Shed' is not commonly/widely/globally known, it may be worthwhile very briefly explaining what this is when it is first mentioned - page 14 (line 17)

Response: A brief explanation of ‘Men’s Sheds’ was added and can be seen on page 12, line 5.

16) Consider discussing why there was a female skew in the discussion section/linking it to your aims in the discussion

Response: This comment has been addressed (page 20, line 19).

17) In the results, there is a lot of listing of XYZ included review authors having a specific feature/characteristic/categorisation in their review - consider whether it may be clearer to have this listed in a larger table to better provide a comparison and simultaneously demonstrate other characteristics - for example when categorising country/countries

Response: Thank you for your comment. The ‘categorisations’ of interventions and other review characteristics are included in Table 2. We ensured to refer the reader back to Table 2 in the main manuscript as seen on page 9, line 38 and page 15, line 51.

18) Take care in saying "in the remaining review" as it can at times come across as the remaining review out of all the included reviews - whereas to my current understanding, I believe you are referring to the remaining review of the X number that you listed for a specific section in the results e.g. remaining out of 6 on technology-based interventions

Response: Thank you for your comment, this has been clarified in the manuscript as seen on page 14, line 27; page 15, line 14.

19) Instead of saying that that an included review paper was similar to another review paper in a general feature, it would be helpful to remind the readers in what way they were similar i.e. what the paper you are comparing it to did that was similar to the paper you are now talking about - for example page 19 (line 12-14)

Response: This comment has been addressed as seen from page 16, line 1.

20) Clarity from the beginning on what you are referring to when you say "constructs" would be helpful
Response: For better clarity, the phrase ‘constructs’ has been substituted with the phrase ‘terms’ when referring to the terminology used in the categorisation of interventions by the authors of reviews that were included in this paper. For example, see page 17 line 46.

21) Please highlight/give examples of what interacting components making social isolation/loneliness interventions complex

Response: This comment has been addressed as seen on page 18, line 38.

22) Please clarify what is meant by the "difficulty of behaviours" - page 23 (line 12)

Response: This was clarified and is seen on page 19, line 33.

23) There is mention of different types of loneliness in the discussion - what are these?

Response: The sentence was revised to provide better clarity and examples were provided as seen from page 20, line 2.

24) Really nice conclusion in terms of the future directions, implications and recommendations - an additional brief line about the findings of your scoping review after the first sentence would be helpful to make a clear summary and really highlight the main message

Response: This comment has been addressed and is seen on page 21, line 44.

MAJOR

1) Please give a clear definition for loneliness like you did for social isolation, and demonstrate how the two differ (in the background section)

Response: A definition for loneliness and social isolation was provided and can be seen on page 2, line 37, in accordance to the reviewer’s suggestion.

2) Still have some concerns regarding the limited range of words used in the search strategy e.g. use of truncations as a boolean search modifier

Response: Thank you for your comment. We hope that the explanation below will demonstrate how the ‘limited’ range of words was appropriate to the databases used, and how Boolean truncations are not helpful within these specific databases.

Medline (part of PubMed) uses MeSH (Medical Subject Headings) to search for relevant articles. The MeSH Database is like a thesaurus that enables terms to be located and selected. “Truncation, or finding all terms that begin with a given string of text, is generally not recommended search technique for PubMed. Truncation bypasses Automatic Term Mapping and automatic explosion” (https://www.nlm.nih.gov/bsd/disted/pubmedtutorial/020_460.html).
EMBASE uses a similar indexing system – the Emtree thesaurus, which “contains almost 83,000 biomedical preferred terms and 373,000 synonyms ordered within 14 facets (topic-specific taxonomies) including anatomy, diseases, organisms, biochemical functions, biomedical procedures, healthcare concepts, study types and geographical areas among others.”


Similarly, “the CINAHL Subject Headings authority file is a controlled vocabulary thesaurus that assists in more effectively searching your CINAHL database. Each bibliographic reference in the database is associated with a set of subject terms that are assigned to describe the content of an article.” (https://connect.ebsco.com/s/article/Advanced-Searching-with-CINAHL-Subject-Headings?language=en_US)

We hope that this explanation satisfies and convinces the reviewer that our search was comprehensive, using the appropriate tools of each database.

3) Please make a note of clearly distinguishing between review authors (yourselves) vs. review authors (the authors of the reviews that were included in this paper) - especially in the abstract since this really sets the scene, and when explaining that loneliness/social isolation are different but used interchangeably (additional note: some of my comments have pertained to needing clarification/justification for certain things which in retrospect having distinguished the scoping review authors (you) vs. included review paper authors - these comments are in reference to justifying your own decisions in the scoping review (not the decisions of other authors)

Response: Thank you for your comment. We appreciate your comment that this is potentially confusing however in all instances where ‘review authors’ was used, we were referring to the authors of the reviews that were included in this paper. For better clarity, we have revised this and stated in the Abstract, ‘Authors of reviews’, page 1, line 53; also on page 6, line 13, it was written ‘How have authors of the reviewers that were included in this paper (hereafter referred to as ‘review authors’) grouped or categorised loneliness and social isolation interventions.

Reviewer 3

1) page 18 line 5 "Internet" is unnecessarily capitalised - not consistent.

Response: This has been addressed throughout the manuscript.

2) page 18 line 7 "e-Interventions" capitalised - if drawing from a source perhaps use inverted commas

Response: This has been addressed and the term decapitalised as seen on page 14, line 58.

3) page 23 line 10 consider rewording "complexity of complex interventions".
Response: This comment has been addressed as seen on page 19, line 26.

4) page 24 lines 15-17 consider rewording for clarity.

Response: This comment has been addressed as seen from page 20, line 36.

5) page 28 ref 8: formatting.

Response: Reference has been formatted.