Being Disconnected from Life- Meanings of Existential Loneliness as Narrated by Frail Older People

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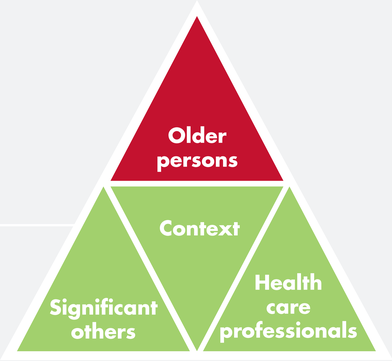
BACKGROUND

Existential loneliness, a deeper sense of loneliness, seems to occur in relation to threatening life events and losses. Aging often bring about several losses, such as loss of bodily functions but also losses of significant others who pass away. Talking to others about existential issues is important but difficult for health professionals as well as for the older people themselves. Knowledge about older people's experiences of existential loneliness could guide the development of supportive measures by health professionals.



The LONE study

This study is part of a larger research project, the LONE study, where existential loneliness is explored through interviews with older persons, their significant others and health care professionals. The LONE study is in the development phase of designing a complex intervention.

AIM

To illuminate meanings of existential loneliness as narrated by frail old people

METHODS

- Individual interviews
- Phenomenological hermeneutical analysis

SAMPLE

Characteristics	n=23
Men/women	12/11
Age, median (range)	85 (76-101)
Widowers/Widows	6/10
Single households/Cohabiting	19/4
Care context	
Outpatient Primary Care Center	2
Homecare	4
Residential care	8
Hospital	2
Specialized palliative home care	6
Specialized palliative ward	1

Comprehensive understanding

'Being disconnected from life'

Findings

- Being trapped in a frail and deteriorating body
- Being met with indifference
- Having nobody to share life with
- Lacking purpose and meaning.

Conclusions

The threatening of the lived body by illness and physical limitation affects access to the world. Being met with indifference and being unable to share one´s thoughts and experiences of life with others reinforces a sense of worthlessness, triggering an experience of meaninglessness and existential loneliness, i.e., disconnection from life

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