Reconceptualising Loneliness in London
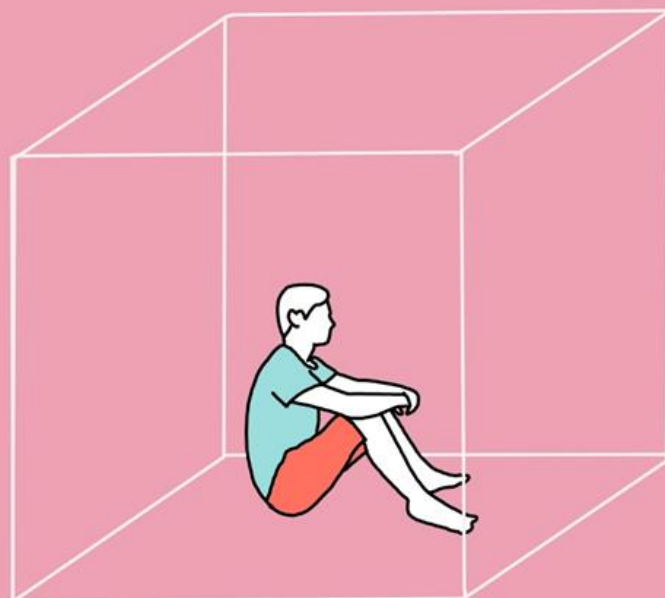
March 2022

Foreword

As Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice, I am proud to represent one of the most diverse and welcoming cities in the world. London's status as a leading economic and cultural city would simply not be possible without the richness of our communities.

Our city's openness and diversity are the foundation of London's success. Millions of Londoners connect every day through work, community, leisure, friendship and family, but we know many still face major barriers in their everyday lives. When the Mayor launched his Social Integration Strategy in 2018, he recognised that our communities were changing rapidly, inequality was increasing, and our sense of social cohesion was being put to the test.

Since becoming Deputy Mayor, I have seen even greater strain placed on Londoners' sense of belonging. The alienating effects of Brexit, the inequalities that the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated, and the systemic racial injustices that brought the Black Lives Matter movement to prominence have revealed the isolation of being unheard and excluded from the very place people call home.

Social integration cultivates trust, connection and equality. Yet we know that too many Londoners lose out due to loneliness - because they lack meaningful relationships, or do not have a sense of belonging to a place and a feeling of being valued by others.

I commissioned this research to better understand how loneliness impacts our communities and what we can do to tackle it in our effort to build a socially integrated city.

The findings are stark. Drawing on an analysis of the GLA's Survey of Londoners, the report finds over 700,000 Londoners experienced severe loneliness prior to the pandemic, with Londoners more likely than people in other parts of Britain to be affected by it. The report also highlights the major factors that contribute to it, from acute poverty and disability, through to prejudice and the challenges associated with major transitions in life, such as newly arriving in London.

The multifaceted nature of severe loneliness in London means it requires a multifaceted response to bring about change. The research highlights the importance of a cross-government, cross-societal effort involving local, regional and national government, funders, charities, communities and individuals. This response also requires up-to-date data with which we can accurately gauge and measure loneliness as it interacts with changing social pressures and events. When the next Survey of Londoners is released later this year, I look forward to follow-up work which will give us a more accurate picture of how loneliness in London has changed since the pandemic.

City Hall is already taking action to address this problem through our Social Integration Strategy and in partnership with London Councils on London's Recovery Programme. Through the mental health and wellbeing recovery mission, 250,000 wellbeing champions across the city will help empower individuals to support their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others,

contributing to the massive step-up in social connection suggested by the researchers of this report.

Another way we are supporting this step-up in social connection is through social prescription. Learning can provide opportunity for increased social participation. The GLA has recently published research on 'Social Prescribing to Adult Education in London' with a view to improving the responsiveness of learning provision funded by London's delegated Adult Education Budget to Londoners' health and wellbeing needs. The research is accompanied by a toolkit which aims to support social prescribers by sharing effective best practice with the intent of increasing and sustaining social prescribing in adult education provision for Londoners.

Similarly, as part of the Building Strong Communities recovery mission, programmes such as Civil Society Roots and the Building Strong Communities Fund are aiming to strengthen the community groups who bring people together, by building relationships, amplifying unheard voices and contributing to reducing loneliness and social isolation through the creation of a more just city.

While there is no quick fix to the challenges identified in this report, I am confident that this work will not only create a better understanding of the issues but provide an impetus for Londoners to work together to build a more socially inclusive, connected and integrated city.

Debbie Weekes-Bernard

Deputy Mayor, Communities and Social Justice

Note from the authors

At present, 700,000 Londoners are severely lonely: that's around one in 12 of us. This widespread distress should serve as an alarm call for all Londoners, because from an evolutionary point of view, this is the job that loneliness does for us. Like thirst or hunger, it's a pain that tells us to alter our behaviour or change our environment if we are to survive as a species. Dr John Cacioppo, the eminent psychologist, wrote: "Loneliness is not a pathology. It's just an external signal from our body that something is going wrong with our environment."

The key finding in this report is that severe loneliness is unequally distributed: it falls disproportionately amongst people who already have disadvantages, or for whom life is particularly difficult. This finding should not come as a surprise. Severe loneliness is the feeling that comes when you face tough times without enough supportive people around you. The more likely you are to face tough times (e.g., if you're acutely poor or if you're newly arrived to London), or the more likely you are to not have enough supportive people around you (e.g., if you're single and live alone; have a disability that makes socialising hard; or feel excluded from the community around you), the more likely you will experience severe loneliness.

The data that drives this report was collected before the Covid-19 pandemic. Clearly the disease and the consequent measures alongside the fear of socialising have increased the incidence of severe loneliness and further exacerbated existing inequalities. The universal restrictions on social contact have served to shine a light on the meaningful relationships we all need with people and place in order to thrive.

Seeing how unequally distributed severe loneliness is, and how painful it is for people whose lives are already difficult, is an urgent signal that the way we're living together is not working well enough for all of us, and requires repair. There are lots of practical ways to bring us closer together; London's local authorities, and voluntary and community organisations, are already doing excellent work to tackle loneliness. What this report contributes is a fresh look at the data to direct policymakers to better target their response to the people who are most at risk.

Our organisations Neighbourly Lab and the Campaign to End Loneliness are committed to continuing to work with the London Boroughs, the GLA, voluntary and community organisations and funders to build on these empirical foundations to reduce the inequitable impact of severe loneliness in London. Thank you for reading this and please get in touch with questions, additions and ideas.

Harry Hobson and Kalpa Kharicha

About the organisations that have authored this report:

Neighbourly Lab: Data-driven research and innovation organisation that is entirely focused on social connectedness, studying what works towards closer, connected communities.

Campaign to End Loneliness: Experts in the field of loneliness and connection, developing and sharing research, evidence and knowledge to tackle loneliness and bring communities across the UK together.

What Works Centre for Wellbeing: An independent collaborating centre that develops and shares robust and accessible wellbeing research and evidence to improve decision-making that is used by governments, businesses and civil society.

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Summary of findings and areas for action

One in 12 Londoners are severely lonely: about 700,000 of us right now feel the despair of not feeling connected or valued by other people.[1] We Londoners are more likely than people living in the rest of Britain to experience this phenomenon. Severe loneliness cannot be eradicated, but if policymakers and practitioners can better understand how and why it's experienced, then they can work to prevent, reduce or alleviate it.

This report offers some breakthroughs in our approaches to severe loneliness in London. It helps us see where to focus and what we and our partners can do about it. We have analysed the most comprehensive dataset about Londoners, and have engaged with many of the frontline organisations tackling loneliness in London.

The findings of this report include the following:

1. Focus on severe loneliness
Severe loneliness is painful and debilitating; mild loneliness is a commonly occurring unwelcome feeling that most of us experience sometimes. The two things should not get conflated by policymakers or funders: it is severe loneliness that merits a robust policy response. The word "loneliness" causes confusion, so it's essential for analysts and policymakers to establish this clear distinction between severe loneliness and mild loneliness. In this report, it is our concentrated focus upon severe loneliness that enables us to identify the associative factors and to describe a clear explanatory framework. By severe loneliness, we mean people who report being lonely "often or always".

2. Data shows us which Londoners are most likely to be severely lonely:
Severe loneliness is not random: it falls heaviest on a select group of people. Analysing survey data, we can identify the strongest associative factors that go with severe loneliness. This is an attempt to reverse engineer severe loneliness in London: it enables us to answer the question, "Why are some Londoners more likely than others to become severely lonely?" and thus can sharpen the policy response.

These "big five" associative factors are:

Being acutely poor

Being single or living alone

Being Deaf and disabled

Going through life changes or being new in London

Feeling different or experiencing prejudice

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[1] GLA, (2019) <u>Survey of Londoners Headline Findings</u>

3. We offer a simple explanatory framework to show how people become severely lonely

We are proposing that policymakers align on a common explanatory framework for understanding severe loneliness. We acknowledge that because each person's experience of severe loneliness is unique and subjective, any such framework can only be general and indicative.

In this framework we posit that two qualities are required to prevent loneliness, and two protective shields can defend against severe loneliness.

The two required qualities are:
- social connectedness: having enough high-quality connection with other people
- sense of belonging: feeling you fit into the world around you, so you feel purposeful and optimistic.

The two protective shields are:
- support network: access to people who you are close to and on whom you can depend
- psychological resilience: a way of seeing the world that enables you to cope with setbacks.

When the required qualities are inadequate, and the protective shields are weakened, that's when an individual is likely to experience severe loneliness. This scenario is shown in the diagram below:
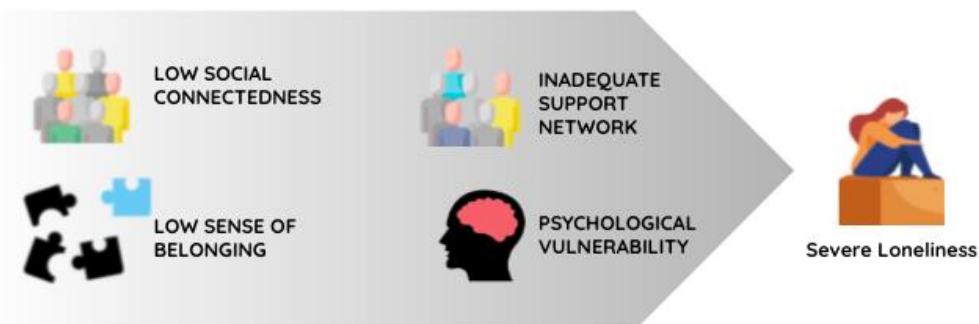
4. Londoners are more likely than others in the UK to become severely lonely.

This is because London contains a higher-than-average number of people with these "big five" associative factors. Within London, severe loneliness is especially experienced within sub-groups where one or more of these associative factors are especially prevalent (e.g., people from an ethnic minority, younger people, LGBTQ+ people, and people who are acutely poor or Deaf and disabled or have recently moved to London). Our view is that Londoners therefore need to be especially alert to those most at risk of severe loneliness, and work especially hard to prevent and alleviate its effects.

5. Areas for action: How to reduce severe loneliness in London

The frequency and intensity of severe loneliness in London can be significantly reduced if local, regional and national government, funders, charities and service providers act concertedly and ambitiously. Our action areas include ways to prevent severe loneliness by enabling more connectedness, and ways to alleviate severe loneliness by structurally resetting public-facing services to make kindness default. We also call for a better targeting of interventions to meet the gaps, and for the structural causes of loneliness to be seen as health risks. Therefore, our four key areas for action are:

- massively increase London's level of social connectedness
- instigate a systemic redesign to build kindness into all service provision
- rethink the targeting of loneliness interventions in London
- treat the structural drivers of severe loneliness as a health risk.

We believe that to enact these areas for action, all layers of London society must take responsibility. With this in mind we have identified key actions that seek to address the findings of our analysis and allocated these to specific organisations and individuals.

Stakeholder:	Main actions to reduce Loneliness in London
Frontline organisations seeking to tackle loneliness (e.g., charities)	● Target your resources better. Use the "big five" associative factors to ask whom you might be missing. ● Target interventions specifically to the transitional moments in people's lives.
GLA	● Drive innovation in new ways to massively reduce barriers to social connectedness. ● Help service providers deliver more kindness into public services.
Local government (London boroughs) and providers of public services	● Continue steps to design more kindness into the delivery of public services. ● Drive more social value from your existing social infrastructure (libraries, parks, high streets, frontline staff, etc).
Individual Londoners	● Identify opportunities locally to connect with people from different backgrounds; proactively engage with those who may be more likely to struggle to connect with others through group/neighbourhood activities. ● Use the big-five factors to consider whom you know who's at risk of severe loneliness; then be ready to offer them persistent care.
Funders	● Redirect more funding towards preventative upstream interventions. ● Review the cohort-targeting of your loneliness funding. Be guided by the big-five associative factors.
Government (all levels)	● Treat acute poverty as a health risk. ● Drive innovation in new ways to massively reduce barriers to social connectedness.

Finally, the response must be joined up and coordinated across all of London's government, voluntary and community organisations and funders.

Context, scope and method for this study

This report was commissioned by the GLA Social Integration Unit in spring 2021. The GLA's long-term interest in connectedness and wellbeing has been sharpened by the unequal effects of the pandemic and lockdown. It has affected every aspect of how the city functions and how Londoners feel about themselves and their neighbours, with the health and economic impacts exposing structural inequalities.

The method used combines data analysis with wide engagement with organisations that support Londoners. We've mined the data that emerged from the Survey of Londoners – a large quantitative survey of Londoners' habits and attitudes from 2018-19. This pre-Covid data set offers a clear picture of the distribution of loneliness in London.

We carried out logit regression analyses on the data – a method that allows us to see the associations and correlations between people's loneliness and other characteristics or life experiences of Londoners. This format allows us to explore how important one attribute (the 'comparison category') is relative to another (the 'base category'). The difference between the 'comparison category' and the 'base category' is presented as an odds ratio, which is a measure of association between exposure and an outcome. Within our data, if the odds ratio is higher than one, then there is a higher probability that the comparison category will experience severe loneliness rather than the base category. If the odds ratio is lower than one, then the comparison category has a lower probability of experiencing severe loneliness than the base category.

In particular, we've used this data to understand as much as possible about the 8 per cent of us who are severely lonely. We also interviewed dozens of experts and organisations engaged in understanding and alleviating loneliness, especially organisations focused on supporting people with protected characteristics.

Note on definition. We are focused on severe loneliness in this report. This corresponds directly with the topmost response to intensity or duration of loneliness in standard loneliness surveys (including in the Survey of Londoners, 2018-19) as the top one out of a five-point Likert scale. This is defined as when a person "often or always feels lonely". Mild loneliness corresponds to responses of being lonely "some of the time or occasionally".

A framework to conceptualise Loneliness in London

Why we are focused on severe loneliness

Almost everyone reading this document knows what loneliness is from their own first-hand experience. It is a subjective emotion: it is necessarily experienced differently by each of us, and is usually entangled with other emotions or moods. The academic definition is that loneliness occurs when there is a gap between our actual and desired social relationships, and when the quality or quantity of these relationships does not meet our expectations.[2]

The Survey of Londoners includes the question, "How often do you feel lonely?". The respondent answers from a five-point scale ranging from "never" to "often/always". The results from the most recent survey are as follows:

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[2] Perlman, D., Peplau, L.A. (1981), 'Toward a social psychology of loneliness', *Personal relationships*, 3(1), 31-56.

How often do you feel lonely?

Never, hardly ever (44%)   Sometimes (45%)   Often, always (8%)

& Preferred not to answer or don't know: 3%
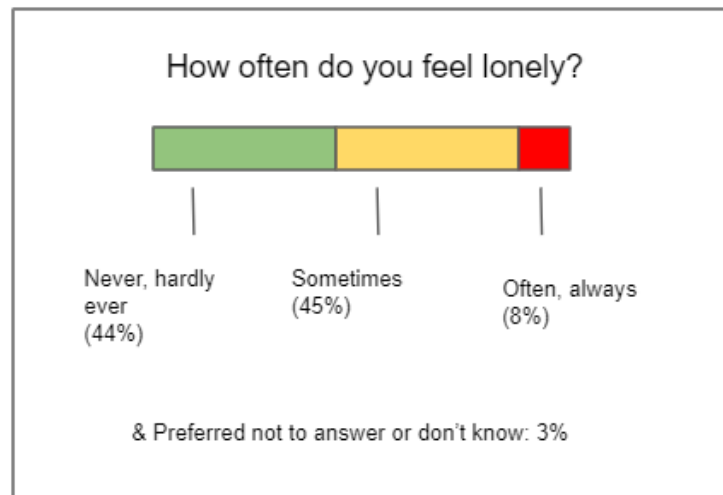
As we see from this response, 8 per cent of respondents said that they are often or always lonely. It is these Londoners whom we define as severely lonely.

Unlike most studies of loneliness, we have decided to focus exclusively on severe loneliness, and not at all on mild loneliness. Severe loneliness is painful and debilitating; it is bad for your health and damages your economic opportunity; mild loneliness does not. The two things should not be conflated by policymakers or funders: their focus should be on preventing and alleviating severe loneliness.

So what is this feeling of "severe loneliness"? It's a subjective individual experience and therefore always different in how it manifests itself. It will vary in cause and context, but its common characteristics are:
- the conscious feeling that you lack the relationships around you that you need
- it is an extremely painful and distressing experience
- it is long-lasting or frequent and difficult to get rid of
- it usually erodes your sense of feeling "on top of things" or "able to cope with everyday life"
- it overlaps with depression and anxiety, and feelings of despair and alienation
- it often causes a "downward cycle": it accelerates deeper incapacity and risk of poorer mental health, because it reduces the person's capacity to look after themselves and access help. It can co-occur with alcoholism and addiction, which is the other main factor that can reduce capacity to cope.

Here are three first-hand accounts from Londoners who are describing what severe loneliness feels like for them:

Kantar Public with the Co-Op and the British Red Cross share what loneliness feels like for one female Londoner	The Forum has published Jo's lonely and isolating experience of being a refugee	The Wellcome Collection shares Thom's difficulty coping with loneliness after a break-up

"You feel like you're in a black pit and there's no light and you're struggling. You want to get out but you can't get out."

Female, 18-34, London[3]

"I was feeling alienated. My loneliness was a painful and disturbing realisation of being unaccepted and unloved, of being alone and having no other choice…"
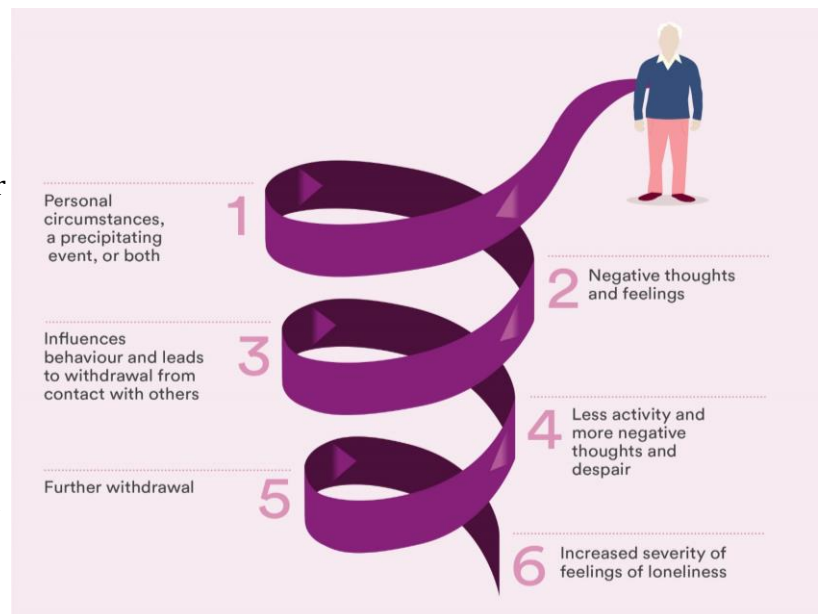
Jo, London[4]

"After the unravelling of a relationship I found myself living alone in the south London flat I once shared. As my first relationship with another man, it was fundamental for my understanding of my identity. I hardly left the apartment's four walls, the post-breakup emotional limbo making me withdraw from my family and friends. I didn't want to talk, as I didn't know what to say. I didn't want to be around others, as I didn't know how to be."

Thom, London[5]

For many people, feeling severely lonely is just one element amongst a bundle of difficulties, and in most cases there are other difficulties that feel more immediate or salient (e.g.: needing better housing, or insecurity around finance or legal status, or health problems or chronic pain). Severe loneliness is often a compounding factor that worsens these other problems, or makes them harder for the person to resolve. So, as well as bringing significant emotional pain, severe loneliness has this knock-on effect of preventing the person from being capable of resolving other challenges. Hence this downward spiral of despair:

1. Personal circumstances, a precipitating event, or both
2. Negative thoughts and feelings
3. Influences behaviour and leads to withdrawal from contact with others
4. Less activity and more negative thoughts and despair
5. Further withdrawal
6. Increased severity of feelings of loneliness

Source: Campaign to End Loneliness (2020), The psychology of loneliness[6]

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[3] Kantar Public (2016), Trapped in a bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK
[4] The Forum (2014), This is how it feels to be lonely: A report on migrants and refugees' experience with loneliness in London, Migrants Organise
[5] James, T. (2018), Sick of being lonely, Wellcome Collection
[6] Campaign to End Loneliness (2020), The psychology of loneliness

How do Londoners become severely lonely?

Loneliness is personal, subjective and emotional, so there can be no "one size fits all" explanation for how someone comes to be severely lonely. As with the myriad ways in which severe loneliness is experienced, the pathways towards it are just as various: often hard for the individual to discern; and often tangled with different factors accreting over time.

Despite this wide variety in how severe loneliness is experienced and how it comes about, we are offering here a simple explanatory framework for how individuals become severely lonely, because we believe it is an essential tool to guide policy and practical interventions to prevent or alleviate severe loneliness. There is a need amongst policymakers and funders for a clear framework like this, which can be applied to different individuals, communities and contexts.

The framework emerges from the academic theory on loneliness, and is backed up by the data analysis and by many lived experience accounts of loneliness. The framework is used in the following section as it explains the factors associated with severe loneliness, and therefore why some people are more likely than others to be severely lonely, and thence why some sub-groups of Londoners (e.g., minority ethnic groups, LGBTQ+ people, young people) contain a disproportionately high number of severely lonely people.

To introduce the framework clearly, we first show the conditions that lead to the "OK scenario", which describes the 92 per cent of Londoners who are not severely lonely. We then show the framework for people who are experiencing severe loneliness.

Here is the framework for that "OK scenario":

The framework shows that:
  ● there are two "required qualities" in everyone's life that, when they are absent or inadequate, often cause you to feel lonely: having plenty of good social connections ("social connectedness"); and feeling you fit into the world around you so you feel purposeful and optimistic ("sense of belonging")
  ● there are two "protective shields" that collectively protect you from becoming severely lonely: access to people who you are close to and whom you can depend on ("support

network"); and a way of seeing the world that enables you to cope with setbacks ("psychological resilience")

The framework follows the academic understanding of loneliness as a psychosocial phenomenon. The top level describes the social drivers of severe loneliness and the bottom level describes the psychological drivers.

The scenario that shows the occurrence of severe loneliness is shown below. We'll refer to this diagram throughout the next section to show how each of the big associative factors exerts an effect towards severe loneliness.
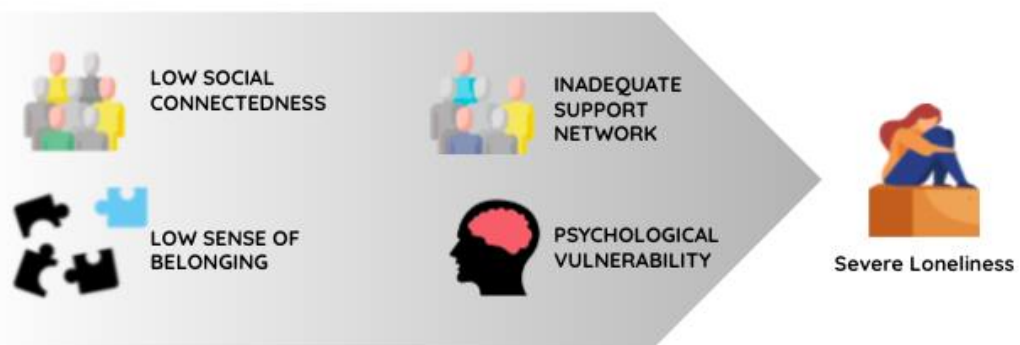
To explain how this model works in simple terms: when the required qualities are inadequate, and the protective shields are weakened, that's when severe loneliness is likely to be experienced. So see where you yourself fit on this framework.

If you're one of the 44 per cent of Londoners who don't feel lonely, you will hopefully read this framework and be able to think: *"OK, yes, I have pretty good general social connections, I have stuff going in my life that makes me feel like I belong and I matter … and for when it comes to the crunch I can depend on Sue and Mo … and I guess I'm pretty much able to weather storms when they come along."*

If you're one of the 45 per cent of Londoners who feels a bit lonely some of the time, then perhaps you will see that things are weaker for you on the left-hand side but fairly strong on the right-hand side. You might think to yourself: *"Hmm, I'm probably a bit 50-50 on how much I see people at the moment or I'm not always feeling a strong sense of fitting into everything … but I have some close people around me and I'm feeling pretty strong in myself."*

If you're one of the 8 per cent of Londoners who's experiencing severe loneliness, you can probably map this experience on shortfalls across the left-hand side (not much connectedness, not much reason to feel you matter in the world), and also on weaknesses on the right-hand side (your support network is inadequate, your state of mind is fragile or vulnerable).

The following section provides more detail on the required qualities and protective shields.

The two required qualities

Social connectedness	Defined as: the social interaction that you would like to have. This is necessarily subjective, as there is no measurable "sufficient amount of sociality".
	A lack of sufficient meaningful social connectedness is well captured by the definition of general loneliness: "a person's network of social relations is deficient in some important way, either quantitatively or qualitatively" (Peplau & Perlman).[7]
	We assume that this unwanted state is a result of the individual facing constraints on their sociality.
	In London, where social opportunities are abundant, common constraints on accessing this opportunity are: ● limited material resources (e.g., cannot afford to join friends out drinking at the pub; or cannot afford hardware or airtime to use online social media) ● not being welcome or accepted due to experiences or fear of prejudice or discrimination ● fear of not being welcome due to self-perceived identity differences (e.g., "I'm an army veteran and civvies don't get me") ● constraints due to disability or poor mental health not being supported (e.g., a physically disabled person who cannot access independent mobility support) ● time constraints, for example due to demands from work or commute or caring responsibilities.
Sense of belonging	This is about having occupations and things going on in life that give the person a sense that they fit in the world around them, that they matter in the world.
	There are some big features in some people's lives that provide this: meaningful work, or caring for other people. The data shows that being employed is an insulating factor against severe loneliness (people who are employed are 1.45 times less likely to experience severe loneliness than people who are unemployed); and that having children at home also reduces the likelihood of experiencing severe loneliness (odds ratio of 1.48).[8]
	As well as these factors, there is a range of personal or seemingly small or intangible elements in our lives that provide this sense of belonging or meaning – such having a pet; religious beliefs; voting in elections; shopping; or listening to the radio.

The two big protective shields

Support network	Access to people upon whom we can depend anytime, especially at moments of need. Most commonly this will be a spouse or life partner or close family. It may also be friends, colleagues, neighbours, or wider community groups or services.
Psychological resilience	The person's ability to cope with setbacks and manage the onset of mild or periodic loneliness, anxiety or low mood. This resilience is a product of intrinsic psychological characteristics (e.g., personality type) and circumstantial variables (e.g., level of stress, mood); and may intersect with physical health and wellbeing as well. In the following section we explore how this resilience can be eroded by acute poverty, discrimination or insecure immigration status.

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[7] Perlman, D., Peplau, L.A. (1981), 'Toward a social psychology of loneliness', *Personal relationships*, 3(1), pp.31-56.
[8] What Works Centre for Wellbeing (2021), What matters for our sense of purpose?

Who's most likely to be severely lonely in London, and why?

So: we know from survey data that around 700,000 Londoners say they're "often or always lonely". What's the make-up of all these Londoners who're feeling severely lonely? In terms of demographics and age, it's a broad mix that looks like a microcosm of London overall. Women make up a slightly higher proportion than men (55:45 per cent); older people are only a small slice of the severely lonely (14 per cent are over 65, compared to 83 per cent under 65), and people from a minority ethnic background make up 37 per cent (minority ethnic individuals make up 41 per cent of all Londoners).

But, when we dig deeper into the data, guided by the explanatory framework introduced above, we start to see clues that reveal how unequally distributed severe loneliness is in London. Of this group of 700,000 severely lonely Londoners:

- **50 per cent** are acutely poor
- **61 per cent** are single and live alone
- **41 per cent** are long-term disabled
- **59 per cent** have recently experienced prejudice.

So: severe loneliness in London is not random – it's weighted heavily towards some specific groups of people. By understanding these associative factors, it becomes possible to know who's most at risk of severe loneliness and how best to design and target interventions.

In the remainder of this section we look at the "big five" associative factors; after that, we look at the most promising interventions.

The "big five" associative factors for severe loneliness

When we mine into the survey data,[9] we see five major factors that are associated with severe loneliness. In simple terms, we studied everything we could[10] about the 8 per cent of Londoners who are severely lonely; and then we identified the main other things going on in those people's lives. We ranked these other things according to the degree of overlap, and that led us to these five factors. Details on these regression analyses and the data-science methodology are in the section above ("Context, scope and method of this study"); we are also publishing the data-analysis details and workings. To be clear: the data shows clear correlations, but this analysis cannot be used to prove causation as the data is cross-sectional – that is, based on one time point.

The five characteristics closely associated with people who are severely lonely are as follows:

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[9] GLA, (2019), Survey of Londoners Headline Findings
[10] The associative factors that this analysis discerned were necessarily a subset of the questions asked in the survey. It is possible that other factors that were not explored in the survey could be other additional associative factors (e.g., alcohol addiction or substance abuse).

Being acutely poor		Going through life changes or being new in London	
Being single or living alone		Feeling different or experiencing prejudice	
Being Deaf and disabled			

Let's look at each of these associative factors in turn, to see how the data supports the association between each of these factors and the experience of severe loneliness, and how this can be mapped onto the explanatory framework.

How going through life changes or being new in London is associated with severe loneliness

A major trigger towards severe loneliness is life transitions, such as bereavement, moving neighbourhood or unemployment,[11] because these tend to unsettle social connection and psychological stability. The main reason transition acts as a trigger is that it removes (or significantly reduces) the main protective factor of a dependable support network – the availability of friends or family who can offer support and care. Sometimes these transitions are "bad shocks" (losing your job, becoming ill, bereavement, etc); sometimes the triggers are more routine, or even desired changes of circumstances that carry unintended consequences (e.g., becoming a parent, moving home, joining or leaving university, leaving care, leaving the armed forces etc)

Mixed in with transition is transience: not being settled and stable in life, or not having long-term prospective security. This transience makes it harder to establish social networks, makes people less inclined to participate in social opportunities.

The data shows a strong correlation between people who are new to London and severe loneliness. There is a very strong correlation among those who have "lived in London for less than one year"; then no correlation beyond that in the series (the high P-numbers on the right-hand side of the following table show low levels of correlation). With this data, an odds ratio higher than one signifies that the comparison category has a higher probability of experiencing severe loneliness than the base category. Living in London for less than a year has the highest odds ratio of experiencing severe loneliness – hence, it is highlighted in purple.

| Base category	Comparison category	Odds ratio of severe loneliness	P number for severe loneliness
Always lived in London	Lived in London less than one year	**1.56**	**0.04**
	Lived in London for one year or more, but less than two years	1.25	0.32

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[11] Recent evidence on the relationship between loneliness and unemployment can be found in Cotofa, M,. et al (2021), World Happiness Report, Work and Well-being during Covid-19: Impact, Inequalities, Resilience, and the Future of Work

Lived in London for two years or more, but less than three years	1.11	0.67
Lived in London for three years or more, but less than five years	1.22	0.27
Lived in London for five years or more, but less than 10 years	1.01	0.97
Lived in London over 10 years, but not all life	1.03	0.79

Being "settled and secure" seems to be a factor that helps to protect against loneliness, because it enables and motivates the individual to invest time and effort in building social networks. Data from the Survey of Londoners shows that home-owners have a 5 per cent prevalence of severe loneliness compared to 12 per cent for renters.

The mechanism at work here could be that transience (not being in a place for long) and transition (changes of circumstance) prevent or disrupt the formation of social networks. We also posit that psychological resilience may be weakened by the stress associated with transience and insecurity (in a similar way to stressors associated with acute poverty).[12] We map this onto our explanatory framework like this:
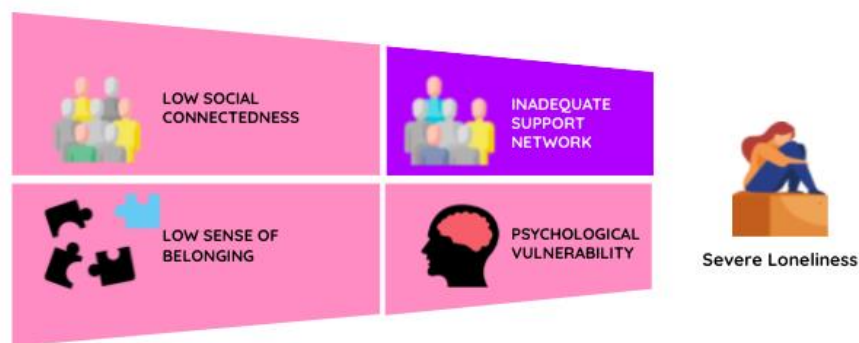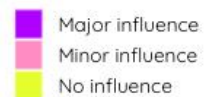
Transition and transience are also likely to make it harder for people to access support services if they do become severely lonely. This is because they're less likely to be familiar with (or known to) statutory or voluntary support services; or because they need to make greater effort to find out what is available.

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[12] Schilbach, F., Schofield, H. and Mullainathan, S. (2016), 'The psychological lives of the poor', *American Economic Review*, 106(5), 435-40.

First-hand accounts show us how being new in London can lead to severe loneliness. Here, for example, is the experience of a Londoner who's just arrived from Delhi. His account was shared in a 2019 British Red Cross report.[13]

> *"I suddenly felt very lonely as I moved here, even though London is very welcoming, and I was able to settle down in this new environment very quickly. Back in Delhi I had a family group of around 30 people who I would interact with quite frequently, and I also had a large network of friends. Having been independent from an early age, I didn't expect moving away from my cultural framework to impact me like this. It was easier to make friends back home: you could meet people, start a conversation and become friends. Here in London people are very busy, it seems difficult for people to find time to invest in making new friends. That was one of the reasons I felt lonely."*
> **Shuchi, 34, London**

How acute poverty is associated with severe loneliness

We see from the Survey of Londoners data that there is a correlation between (a) food insecurity and (b) indebtedness and severe loneliness:

Base category	Comparison category	Odds ratio of severe loneliness
No debt burden	Somewhat of a debt burden	1.29
	Heavy debt burden	**2.12**
No food insecurity	Low food security	1.90
	Very low food security	**2.40**

While the data shows this clear association between acute poverty and severe loneliness, it does not show a broader correlation between income level and severe loneliness across the scale of income. There are no significant effects between different income increments up to £58k. However, amongst the very richest (over £79k), the odds of becoming severely lonely are significantly lower than for everyone else, as we can see from the data.

Base category	Comparison category	Odds ratio of severe loneliness	P value of severe loneliness
Household income between £30,701 and £37,000	Household income less than £11,000	0.93	0.68
	Household income between £11,001 and £14,900	0.81	0.29
	Household income between £14,901 and £19,100	0.78	0.22
	Household income between £19,101 and £24,300	0.99	0.94
	Household income between £24,301 and £30,700	1.04	0.80

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[13] British Red Cross (2019), Barriers to belonging An exploration of loneliness among people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds

	Household income between £58,901 and £79,300	1.20	0.31
	Household income more than £79,301	**0.74**	**0.10**

So: a low income doesn't per se make you susceptible to severe loneliness, but being very wealthy does seem to insulate people against risk of severe loneliness.
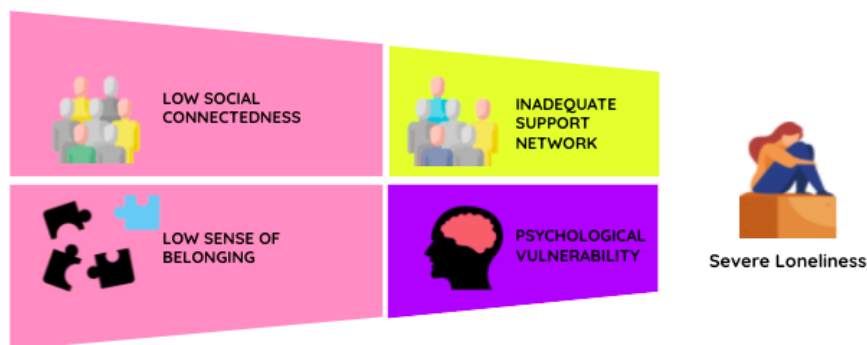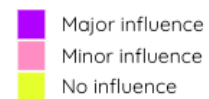
The emphasis on debt burden and very low food security suggests that the mechanisms through which acute poverty exerts its effects towards severe loneliness are mainly psychological stressors. These are also likely to coincide with transience, and constraints on accessing meaningful social interactions.

This is supported by recent research on how poverty can have a compounding effect on loneliness. A 2021 report by anti-poverty campaign group 4in10, "Flying Against Gravity – The Lived Reality of Poverty in London", sets out how social interaction can provide valuable respite from emotional pressures and responsibilities. However, for Londoners on low incomes, social activities are often too expensive to engage with, given the costs of the activities and of transport.[14]

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[14] Swords, B., Raidos, D., McGarry, N. (2021), Flying Against Gravity – The Lived Reality of Poverty in London, 4in10, p.20

This is echoed by first-hand accounts in the report. These include the experience of Mo, a man from Havering in East London, who has spent his retirement in isolation due to the restrictions placed on him by his pension credit and the coronavirus pandemic.[15]

> *"If there were income, you could go out, socialise … but you can only afford to just stay in your room. I can't remember the last time I ate outside. But you can't do it because you are stretched in budget. You have to think about every day, budget-wise – you don't think of where your next meal is coming from, you know."*

Another account detailing the association between severe loneliness and acute poverty comes from Crisis (2015): Sara, a homeless service user, shares her experience of being lonely in London.[16]

> *"It was horrible, the worst time I've ever had … cos I was all on my own …when I was sleeping rough … you feel so lonely it's crap, you don't want to wake up in the mornings cos you don't want to spend another day on your own."*

How being single is associated with severe loneliness

We see from the Survey of Londoners data that there is an extremely strong correlation between people who say that they are severely lonely and people who say, "I don't have a particular close person I can rely on."

Base category	Comparison category	Odds ratio of severe loneliness
They can rely on someone	They don't have a spouse or partner, immediate family and friends	4.36

And looking at household situations, we see that single people across all categories (whether with children or not, whether pensioner or not) are more lonely than couples, they are highlighted in green to indicate their protective capability against loneliness.

Base category	Comparison category	Odds ratio of severe loneliness
Single without children	Pensioner couple	0.16
	Single pensioner	0.65
	Couple with children	0.62
	Couple without children	0.39
	Single with children	1.12

So: being part of a couple is the greatest single protective factor against severe loneliness. The way this maps onto our explanatory model is obvious: a readily available support network is more likely to exist (directly and/or via the partner's social network); and being single makes general sociality harder.

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[15] Swords, B., Raidos, D., McGarry, N. (2021), Flying Against Gravity – The Lived Reality of Poverty in London, 4in10
[16] Sanders, B., Brown, B. (2015), 'I was all on my own': experiences of loneliness and isolation amongst homeless people, Crisis

How Being Single increases a Londoner's risk of experiencing Severe Loneliness

Major influence
Minor influence
No influence

LOW SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS · INADEQUATE SUPPORT NETWORK · LOW SENSE OF BELONGING · PSYCHOLOGICAL VULNERABILITY · Severe Loneliness
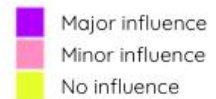
Accounts of severe loneliness amongst single people were common in the media, especially during lockdown. Lockdown is likely to have exerted a disproportionate detrimental effect on people who live alone. This hypothesis surfaced strongly in research work carried out early in the Covid-19 pandemic. [17]

The British Red Cross report, "Life after Lockdown" (2021), has paid particular attention to the struggles of Londoners living alone during the pandemic. Below is one man's struggle.[18]

> *"I feel lost without being able to talk to people, I feel like I'm on my own. If I'm in the garden and someone walks by, I'll say 'hello mate, how are you?', even if I've never seen them before."*

The Wellcome Collection (2018) highlights the effect that being single and using internet dating apps can have on a person's level of loneliness, and the detrimental impact it has on thoughts of self-comparison.[19]

> *"Internet dating is tough: I know because I've done an awful lot of it. I started in my thirties after watching nearly all my friends pair off. All through my twenties I smiled at their weddings, at their babies, at stories of their toddlers' first words and first steps. Sometimes the effort was too much. I was sick of searching, sick of dating, sick of feeling that everyone else had managed to leap over a chasm I couldn't even seem to get near."*
> **Female, London**

How prejudice or "feeling different" is associated with severe loneliness

The Survey of Londoners identifies that there is a correlation between the survey responses related to facing prejudice or "feeling different" and levels of loneliness.

For example, an individual's "sense of belonging to the local community" and their level of

[17] What Works Wellbeing (2020), How has Covid-19 and associated lockdown measures affected loneliness in the UK?
[18] British Red Cross (2021), Life after lockdown: tackling loneliness
[19] Patterson, C. (2018), How online dating can make us lonely, Wellcome Collection

loneliness is highly correlated. We see that those who feel "very strongly" that they belong to the local community are sufficiently protected against severe loneliness. By comparison, those who feel "not at all strongly" that they belong are at far greater risk of experiencing severe loneliness.

Base category	Comparison category	Odds ratio of severe loneliness
Very strongly belong to local area	Fairly strongly belong to local area	1.10
	Not very strongly belong to local area	1.14
	Not at all strongly belong to local area	**1.47**

A person's perception of London as fair or meritocratic has a similar effect on loneliness. Those who believe London is "fair and meritocratic" are far less likely to be lonely than all other responses. Therefore, a negative perception of London's fairness or meritocratic status is strongly associated with loneliness.

Base category	Comparison category	Odds ratio of severe loneliness
London is fair and meritocratic	London is fair but not meritocratic	**1.42**
	London is not fair but is meritocratic	**1.27**
	London is not fair and not meritocratic	**1.42**

We see that more direct forms of prejudice have a compounding effect on levels of loneliness. For example, survey respondents who have answered "yes" to feeling that they have been treated unfairly in the last 12 months because of one or several protected characteristics, or because of their social class, are far less protected against severe loneliness than those who answered "no".
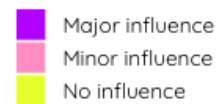
Base category	Comparison category	Odds ratio of severe loneliness
Have not been treated unfairly in the last 12 months	Have been treated unfairly in the last 12 months	**1.89**

In our experience of ethnographic research with lonely Londoners, these feeling of "being different" includes a range of (often very different) people:
- People who have experienced direct prejudice. For example, Gladys, an 81-year-old Antiguan-born Fulham-resident has experienced many incidences of direct racist abuse; this diminishes her trust and her capacity to easily socialise with her White neighbours.
- People who feel "left behind", and whose world view is out of kilter with the way they perceive London today. This often leads to embitterment and often towards polarised views of other groups. For example, Dave, a 58-year-old rough-sleeper in Ealing, says, "I can't even smile at a child in the park in case the mums think I'm a paedophile." He can't trust any female or ethnic minority doctors he sees. These feelings of being left behind or "out of kilter" make people feel less supported by the people around them and less likely to freely socialise.
- So: this feeling of being "different from people around me" leads to the person making less effort to engage socially, and having less "presumption of good intent" towards their neighbours or strangers. Our explanatory framework also suggests that facing prejudice or "feeling different" will have a major influence on an individual's psychological resilience: a likely reduction in self-esteem, an increased risk of mental health problems

and a heightened feeling that they don't belong. The effect of these detrimental factors on psychological resilience is likely to increase the risk of severe loneliness.

How Facing Prejudice or Feeling Different increases a Londoner's risk of experiencing Severe Loneliness

Major influence
Minor influence
No influence

LOW SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

INADEQUATE SUPPORT NETWORK

LOW SENSE OF BELONGING

PSYCHOLOGICAL VULNERABILITY

Severe Loneliness

.

We also assert that the causal driver of insufficient meaningful interaction is slightly associated with loneliness, as real or perceived prejudice and discrimination can diminish a person's sense of belonging and their confidence to socially interact. Incidences of severe loneliness for those facing prejudice or "feeling different" are not uncommon and are widely reported on.

For example, the CLASS and Runnymede report "We are Ghosts" (2019) shares the story of David, who has experienced racism and discrimination while growing up in London:

> *My first encounter with the police was when I was 15, Brixton in Morleys [a London chain of chicken shops]. I was there with two of my friends and my friend's little brother, he was no more than five at the time. We're just standing there, ordering food. All I heard behind me is a voice saying 'Can you come out of the shop, please?' […] They've taken us out the shop, they've searched us, all they've seen in my bag is school books and then they asked have I got concealed weapons. By the end of it, they said 'Well, there's some gang violence and you lot all happen to be wearing something brown', that's why they said they searched us.*
> **David, 20s, Black Caribbean, Kensington**[20]

How being Deaf and disabled is associated with severe loneliness

The data from the Survey of Londoners shows there is a strong correlation between severe loneliness and an individual who answers "yes" to having a long lasting limiting health condition. This condition could be related to physical or mental health.

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[20] Snoussi, D., Mompelat, L. (2019), 'We Are Ghosts': Race, Class and Institutional Prejudice, Runnymede and CLASS

Base category	Comparison category	Odds ratio of severe loneliness
Do not have a long-lasting limiting health condition	Have a long-lasting limiting health condition	2.08

Our view is that this high associative effect can be explained by the reduced opportunities for social connectedness (due to financial constraints endured by some and the challenges of accessibility around London that disproportionately impede on Deaf and disabled Londoners); and also that the protective shield of psychological resilience is likely to be lessened due to the higher prevalence of poor mental health and psychological stressors associated with being a Deaf and disabled Londoner.

How Being Deaf or Disabled increases a Londoner's risk of experiencing Severe Loneliness
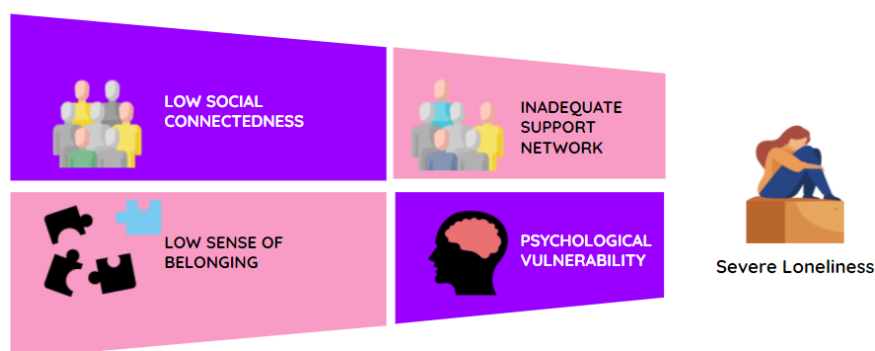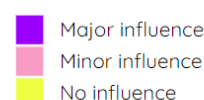
It's also likely that the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns have had a negative impact on Deaf, disabled and shielding Londoners due to heightened isolation or anxiety about social interaction due to virus transmission; and constrictions on care services (e.g., shifting to online and less face-to-face, or reduced due to social distancing measures). By consequence we believe that the pandemic has been an accelerant for severe loneliness in Deaf and disabled Londoners. This is a point of view that is informed by first-hand accounts.

We present the story of one disabled woman's experience shielding during the pandemic, as shared by Inclusion London (2021).[21]

> *"My mood has dipped as others begin to expect more from me for some reason. Their understanding of my shielding status seems to be vanishing as restrictions on them are eased. I don't understand this, and I'm feeling the pressure and stress. I am also stressed about the safety of official shielding coming to an end and what pressure from others will feel like then too."*

[21] Inclusion London (2021), Locked Down and Abandoned: Disabled People's Experiences of Covid-19

What's particular about London when it comes to severe loneliness?

Is there anything "special" about London, when it comes to severe loneliness? Yes – there's more severe loneliness here than generally in the UK. First let's explore why that is; then we'll consider how London's policy response should be tailored to respond to the way that severe loneliness is experienced by Londoners.

When it comes to the associative factors for loneliness, we can see that London skews higher than the UK overall for four of these factors (all except the proportion of people with long-lasting limiting disabilities, which is lower in London than UK-wide). The factors where London skews higher on the factors are shown in purple.

Associative factor	Example data points
Acute poverty	28 per cent of Londoners live in poverty, compared to 22 per cent nationwide,[22] and food bank usage during lockdown rose much higher in London than UK-wide.[23]
Being single	23 per cent of Londoners live alone, compared to 17 per cent nationwide.[24]
Limiting long-term disabled	The lowest proportion in London (14 per cent) can be compared to the highest proportions in Wales, the North East and the North West (all 25 per cent).[25]
Transition	More renters in London than in the UK, e.g., 29 per cent rent from a private landlord vs 20 per cent in the UK.[26]
Facing prejudice or "feeling different"	Reported workplace discrimination is 50 per cent higher in London than UK[27]; London, compared to the rest of the UK, has the lowest percentage of people who feel that they belong to Britain (81 per cent) vs highest percentage in the North East (92 per cent).[28]

Given the higher incidence of these associative factors, we would expect London to have higher-than-UK levels of severe loneliness.

The more interesting set of questions that follow from this concern specific aspects of living in London that might give these associative factors particular power. For example:

● Are Londoners who are acutely poor especially likely to feel stress or emotional pain from their situation? If so, is this caused by "social comparison" with richer Londoners, and a sense of being rejected, unwanted, or unable to take part in things that other people are doing?

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[22] Trust for London (2020), London's Poverty Profile: 2020
[23] Trussell Trust (2021), Trussell Trust data briefing on end-of-year statistics relating to use of food banks: April 2020 – March 2021,
[24] ONS (2020), Families and Households in the UK: 2020,
[25] Papworth Trust (2018), Facts and Figures 2018: Disability in the United Kingdom
[26] Generation Rent (2021), About renting
[27] CIPHR (2021), Workplace discrimination statistics in 2021
[28] Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and Office for Civil Society (2019), Community Life Survey 2018-2019, HM Government

- Is being single in London harder than being single elsewhere? Does living in London prompt higher expectations of "social success", leading to greater loneliness if these expectations go unmet?
- Clearly London is a "city of transition". Is its role as the country's "staging post" a cause of severe loneliness? Perhaps London is a particularly difficult place to be new in, and to get settled in – but does it then become a relatively easy and welcoming city, once you know your way around?
- Are there some parts of London where people are more likely to feel like outsiders? Are some boroughs harder to get a sense of "belonging to"? To the extent that place plays a psychological support role for people, is that role better played at the hyperlocal level, the borough level or the city level?

These are nuanced cultural and psychological questions, each of which requires unpacking, discussion and, probably, more targeted research. Thinking about these questions may offer new lenses through which to understand severe loneliness, and new directions for policy responses.

What's the impact for Londoners with protected characteristics?

The GLA is committed to equity and opportunity for all Londoners, and gives particular attention to Londoners with protected characteristics.

Given this focus, it's essential to understand how severe loneliness is experienced within sub-groups. Also, many charities and advocacy groups are focused specifically on these sub-populations, so looking at severe loneliness through the lenses of these sub-groups can generate action areas to better target interventions.

This study suggested seven sub-groups to look deeply into. These were selected because they are especially affected by structural inequalities, or have particular constraints on their ability to access support services. These seven sub-groups, listed below, all experience higher levels of severe loneliness than the London average (which is 8 per cent)

Sub-population	% people in this group who are severely lonely
Young Londoners (aged 16-24)	12
Low-income Londoners (income below £19,100 pa)	18
LGBTQ+ Londoners	15
Minority Ethnic Londoners Mixed/multiple ethnic groups Asian/Asian British Black/African/Caribbean/Black British Other ethnic group	13 8 9 14
Single parents	12

Deaf and disabled Londoners	18
ALL LONDONERS	**8**

Within each of these sub-populations, the distribution of severe loneliness is very uneven. Even in groups where it skews high, it's still unusual – never more than one in five individuals for any group – and it's always distributed unequally within any sub-group. For example:
- amongst Deaf and disabled people, those who are unemployed are 1.94 times more likely to experience severe loneliness than those working full-time
- amongst parents, female parents are 1.48 times more likely to experience severe loneliness than male parents
- young Londoners who use social media everyday are 2.38 times more likely to experience severe loneliness than those who don't
- ethnic minority Londoners who do not feel at all strongly that they belong to the local area are 2.85 times more likely to experience severe loneliness than those who feel strongly that they belong to the local area
- LGBTQ+ Londoners with a heavy debt burden are 5.73 times more likely to experience severe loneliness than LGBTQ+ Londoners with no debt burden.

Why do these groups skew higher for severe loneliness than for the overall London population? The simple answer is that these groups contain a disproportionate number of people who show the "big five" associative characteristics. The table below gives the percentage of individuals, in each sub-group, who show each of the characteristic associative factors for severe loneliness. We have highlighted in purple where that percentage is at least one-and-a-half-times greater than the all-Londoner figure (shown in the first column):

Associative factor for severe loneliness	% of all Londoners	% of young Londoners	% of low-income Londoners	% of LGBTQ+ Londoners	% of minority ethnic Londoners	% of single-parent Londoners	% of Deaf and disabled Londoners
Acute poverty	**18**	30	36	22	26	44	31
Being single	**38**	74	49	47	39	100	51
Limiting long-term disabled	**18**	12	25	21	16	19	100
Transition	**2**	8	3	6	2	1	1
Facing prejudice or "feeling different"	**34**	48	41	57	39	41	45

This approach helps to understand the reasons some sub-groups experience more severe loneliness than others. For example, young people's higher levels of severe loneliness is largely explained by transition; being single; and acute poverty. This insight should help policymakers to direct attention towards where interventions can have the most impact.

For migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum, data is not available from the Survey of Londoners. However, it's clear that people in that group are, by definition, experiencing transition; and are highly likely to experience prejudice and acute poverty, especially those who need English-language support.

In this section, we give a short overview of how severe loneliness is experienced by each of these sub-groups. We are aware that this study has looked at a small sample of possible sub-groups of Londoners, and that some funders or policy specialists will be interested in sub-

groups of Londoners that are not covered in this study (for example, homeless people; ex-offenders; neurodiverse people; migrants from Europe; or intersectional sub-groups).

The approach we've used here can be adapted to any sub-group, to see if the members of that sub-group are disproportionately likely to be acutely poor; single; transitional; Deaf and disabled; or subject to prejudice. This approach provides a way to illuminate the characteristics of severe loneliness amongst any sub-population of Londoners, and offers start points for appropriate interventions.

In the remainder of this section, we look briefly in turn at each of these seven sub-populations.

Young Londoners: how severe loneliness is experienced

We are defining young Londoners as anyone between the ages of 16-24. There are 961,000 Londoners who fall into this category. The average median age of London is 35.3, compared to 40.1 across the rest of the UK, meaning that London is a particularly young city.[29]

The following young Londoners are most at risk of severe loneliness:
- Those who are in the midst of transitions. Young Londoners are more likely to experience more frequent transitions such as leaving school; joining/leaving university; and getting a first job. We have identified that young Londoners who have lived in London for less than one year are 3.44 times more likely to be severely lonely than those who have always lived in London, so being new to London is highly linked to severe loneliness for young people.
- Those who are single. Single Londoners are more likely to lack consistent and dependable emotional and social support. From the data, young Londoners who can't rely at all on someone close to them when they have a serious problem are 6.78 times more likely to experience loneliness than those who can.
- Those who are in acute poverty. Young people are especially reliant on social interaction, and a low income can limit the opportunities for social connection. The data concludes that, of young Londoners on a low income, 51 per cent are severely lonely; by contrast, 14 per cent of all Londoners on a low income are severely lonely.

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[29] Barret, S., Belcher, E. (2019), The London Intelligence – Issue 9, Centre For London

Other studies have shown how young people often experience a "triple dip" in wellbeing: lower happiness, more anxiety and less sense of purpose.[30] Here are two first-hand accounts of how it feels to be lonely as a young person in London:

Frontiers in Psychology has shared this young man's experience of loneliness	Frontiers in Psychology has also shared the story of a young woman's experience of loneliness and feelings of low self-worth
"…When you see pictures that you are not involved in and it just generally seems fun, that's when you start feeling alone because you are not … with them, you are not going to be in the background smiling or anything, it's more you sitting down on your bed or something and you are looking, tapping, seeing that loads of photos… you cannot, cannot really escape these kinda, um, photos and these situations, where you are gonna bound to be and where you are not involved in."	*"This weekend has really been like such a realisation for me, when someone asked me, like, 'What do you do?' and I just said, 'Nothing,' and I realised, 'Wow, I've said that to so many people now,' just because I have nothing to say and it's just this limbo part, me working in a cafe, like, I have done a lot of creative work throughout the year, but it's just like, right now, all I'm doing is working at the cafe but, um, yeah, definitely makes you feel lesser and like you do not even have a reason to be alive…"*
Male, 18, Hackney[31]	Female, 20, Hackney

Low-income Londoners: how severe loneliness is experienced

The percentage of Londoners on a low income after housing costs is 27 per cent (2.4m) according to the after-housing costs poverty rate, which is determined by the percentage of people living in households below 60 per cent contemporary median.[32] We are defining low-income Londoners according to a more simplified threshold of anyone with an annual household income of less than £19,100 pre-tax.

Within this group, the Londoners who are most at risk of severe loneliness are:
● those who are in acute poverty; or experiencing a heavy debt burden or high levels of food or fuel insecurity
● those experiencing high levels of transition: changes to employment, income or housing are severely detrimental, as low-income Londoners do not have the financial security to bear the weight of these life shocks or transitions. The data shows that unemployed Londoners with low food security are 2.52 times more likely to experience severe loneliness than low-food-security Londoners in full-time employment.

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[30] What Works Wellbeing (2021), Wellbeing and Age: the triple dip
[31] Fardghassemi, S., Joffe, H. (2021), 'Young Adults' Experience of Loneliness in London's Most Deprived Areas', Frontiers in Psychology, 12(1), 1-14
[32] Leeser, R. (2021), Poverty in London 2019/20, London Datastore

We have included two first-hand accounts of what it is like to be on a low income in London and the effect that financial insecurity has on feelings of loneliness:

Kantar Public has shared this man's experience of feeling lonely after he lost his job	Crisis has shared Joel's experience of being homeless in London
"When I fell out of work that was a low point. Not because I like working because I don't, but the fact that I miss the lads and the laughs and jokes we used to play on each other... It felt like a loss."	While sleeping rough, Joel would wake up around 5am and try to keep himself occupied but found this difficult. "It would just be boring from then, just walking around looking for people; not even friends, just other homeless people, just so you've got someone to talk to... then pretty much the same thing all day until I got back to sleep." Joel would try to make some money from begging but felt ashamed of having to ask people for help. Joel did not tell any of his family or friends that he had become homeless as he was too embarrassed to reveal his situation.

Male, 55-74, London[33]   Joel, London[34]

LGBTQ+ Londoners: how severe loneliness is experienced

We are defining LGBTQ+ Londoners as anyone who identifies with this group. Currently, 2.8 per cent of London's population identify as LGB;[35] and 1 per cent of the UK population identify as trans but we are unable to find an estimate for the number of trans people in London.[36]

As with other sub-populations, the incidence of severe loneliness falls very unequally amongst LGBTQ+ Londoners. Those following are most at risk of severe loneliness:
- People in the midst of transitions. LGBTQ+ people typically experience more transitions, such as coming out, which can be especially difficult for those with more conservative or intolerant friends and family. They can also experience the difficulties of moving to London and finding a support network or what some describe as a "chosen family".
- Those who are facing prejudice or are "feeling different". LGBTQ+ Londoners disproportionately encounter this associative factor. Research from the National LGBT Survey showed that 70 per cent of people with a minority sexual orientation, and 68 per cent of people with a minority gender identity, say that they avoid being open about their identity in all contexts – but especially when out in public.

33 Kantar Public (2016), Trapped in a bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK,
34 Sanders, B., Brown, B. (2015), 'I was all on my own': experiences of loneliness and isolation amongst homeless people, Crisis
35 ONS (2018), Sexual orientation, UK: 2018
36 Stonewall (n.d.), The truth about trans: A Q&A for people who are hungry for real info

Here are two personal experiences of how being LGBTQ+ in London can add to the risk of experiencing severe loneliness.

The National LGBT Survey have included a quote from a gay man in London who fears for his safety due to homophobia	Stonewall have shared Tim's inability to access social services and support in London for fear of not being accepted
I still wouldn't walk down my street holding hands for fear of attack, or kiss on public transport. Simple things that heterosexual people take for granted.	*"I hate coming out to anyone (shame? fear?) and I also hate not being accepted for who I am. As I need help I don't want to have to be secretive, but I am afraid I will be."*

Man, 45-54, London[37]   Tim, 72, London[38]

Minority ethnic Londoners: how severe loneliness is experienced

We are defining this group as everyone who is from a minority ethnic group other than White. London is the most ethnically diverse area of England and Wales according to the Trust for London, with 41 per cent of Londoners being from a minority ethnic background. [39]

The minority ethnic Londoners most at risk of severe loneliness are those in acute poverty. A low income restricts access to social opportunity and increases the psychological stressors that are associated with severe loneliness. From the data we see that ethnic minority Londoners with very low food security are 2.07 times more likely to experience severe loneliness than those with no food insecurity. Similarly, a heavy debt burden increases the likelihood of severe loneliness by 1.76 times, compared to those who don't have a debt burden.

Two Londoners from a minority ethnic background explain their experiences of severe loneliness:

[37] Government Equalities Office (2018), National LGBT Survey: Summary Report
[38] Stonewall (2015), Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual People in Later Life
[39] Trust for London (n.d.), Ethnicity

CLASS and Runnymede share Dalaeja's experience of growing up in Kensington	The Joseph Rowntree Foundation shares a Somali woman's struggle with employment and being made to feel different in London
"The British Empire, or whatever you want to call it, asked the people from the Caribbean to come here to build it up, then we've done all of this, we've had our carnival, been through our troubles with the police … We finally get to this place, and then we get looked down on by people who've been living here for all of two months."	*"The media has stereotyped our community as being useless, but we also have a wall of fear that needs to be shattered. We need to be empowered and seek support. It's really daunting if you have language difficulties to go into a new workplace and stick out like a sore thumb. What would be really ideal is if you could go into work while being trained.*

Female, 16-24 Kensington   Somali woman, 33, Tower Hamlets[40]

Migrant Londoners, including refugees and people seeking asylum: how severe loneliness is experienced

We are defining this sub-group of Londoners to include migrants and people seeking asylum; and also refugees, according to the UNHCR definitions. The term "migrant" also includes third-country nationals (i.e. non-EEA) who arrived in the UK through other routes (e.g., work or spouse/dependant visa); settled communities; and EEA nationals. London has the highest foreign-born population in the UK, with 35 per cent of the UK's migrants living in London.[41]

There is little data available to enable us to disaggregate the experience of severe loneliness between different parts of this group. The Survey of Londoners did not collect data to identify people in these sub-groups. However, we can make use of the associative factors and draw on testimony from lived experience to say that the people in this sub-group who are most likely to be at risk of severe loneliness include the following:

● Those in acute poverty. Financial constraints are felt acutely by this group, particularly for asylum seekers as they are afforded £36.93 to live on for a week and they are normally unable to work whilst they receive those payments. The psychological stressors caused by financial pressures are likely to increase severe loneliness within this group.

● Those in transition. Transitions are encountered throughout the migration process and through the loss of usual support networks; alongside the challenges of finding settled housing, possibly learning a new language and adapting to the different cultural aspects of London. These transitional elements can increase the likelihood of experiencing severe loneliness.

● Those who are facing prejudice or are feeling different. Prejudice is felt through the fear of not feeling welcome in London due to the presence of racism, xenophobia and discrimination. This xenophobia surfaced in a rise in hate crimes in London around the Brexit vote in 2016.[42] Possible cultural differences and language barriers in London are also likely to increase thoughts of feeling different, which increases the severity of loneliness.

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[40] Chouhan, K., Speeden, S., Qazi, U. (2011), Experience of poverty and ethnicity in London, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

[41] Migration Observatory (2020), Migrants in the UK: An Overview

[42] According to the Metropolitan Police hate crime dashboard, between July 2015 and July 2016 we see a steep rise in reported racist and religious hate crime across the capital. There were 1,252 reported hate crimes in July 2015 and 2,141 in July 2016. See: Metropolitan Police (n.d.), Hate Crime or Special Crime Dashboard

● Those experiencing health problems, particularly mental health problems, due to trauma and psychological distress from experiences in their home country, dislocation and journey to the UK.

We have included two personal experiences that illustrate how migrant Londoners, including refugees and people seeking asylum, have experienced loneliness upon moving to London:

The Forum has shared Amira's experience of being a refugee and his experience of loss having moved to London	Refugee Action share the story of Isaam and his difficulty in building a network of friends whilst not knowing English
"I never had big losses in my life. Then suddenly I kind of lost everything: family, friends, a comfortable environment, a culture I understood and my identity. From time to time I had moments when I thought of going back to my country of origin and regain all I lost. But then you are just kind of getting used to being lonely."	*"We don't speak English. So, we spend a lot of time at home. We don't mix with people from the outside. Because we can't speak to them. We would love to have English friends but it is not easy without speaking the language… If I spoke the language, I would have the courage to meet people and communicate better. Now I feel very reluctant."*

Amira, London[43]   Isaam, London[44]

Single-parent Londoners: how severe loneliness is experienced

We are defining this group as anyone who is a single parent or a single guardian to someone under the age of 16. Single-parent families account for 19.1 per cent of London's families: the highest proportion across the UK.[45] Nationally, 90 per cent of single parents are women.[46]

The single-parent Londoners most at risk of severe loneliness are:
● Those who are in acute poverty. Single-parent Londoners experience the financial and psychological pressures of raising children in London alone, which increases the likelihood of experiencing severe loneliness; for example, single-parent Londoners with very low food security are 4.41 times more likely to suffer from severe loneliness than those who have no food insecurity.
● Those who are single or live alone. Single parents can lack the emotional, social and practical support of a co-parent; and we see from the data that if a single parent can't rely on people close to them – because they don't have a spouse or partner, immediate family, or friends – then they are 12.68 times more likely to experience severe loneliness than those who can rely on someone.

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[43] The Forum (2014), This is how it feels to be lonely, A report on migrants and refugees' experience with loneliness in London, Migrants Organise
[44] Refugee Action (2017), Safe But Alone: The role of English language in allowing refugees to overcome loneliness
[45] ONS (2019), Families and households in the UK: 2019
[46] Gingerbread (2019), Single parents: facts and figures

Below are two personal experiences showing how the various challenges of being a single parent have had a negative impact on two mothers in London:

Gingerbread has shared the story of one single mother who has struggled to find support and enough social opportunity	Gingerbread highlights the upfront cost of childcare in London, and the constraints this places upon single mums like Chloe
"I needed to keep my independence, my home, that I was creating for my daughter's arrival. However, everywhere I turned for help, I was told I didn't qualify until after my baby was born, by which point it would have been too late – I wouldn't have a roof over my family's head"	*"There are no facilities that will [support you with the upfront costs]... it is ridiculous how they expect you to give up front. It is ridiculous. It is unfair."*

Female, London[47]   Chloe, London[48]

Deaf and Disabled Londoners: how severe loneliness is experienced

We are defining Deaf and disabled Londoners as individuals with a disability or a sensory impairment. There are 1.2m Deaf and disabled people in London, which accounts for 13 per cent of the city's population.[49] We see clearly from the Survey of Londoners that people in this group are at heightened risk of being severely lonely: 15.3 per cent of this group report being severely lonely (compared to 8 per cent of the whole population). In the section above (associative factors) we have seen reasons for this heightened risk.

Deaf and disabled Londoners at the greatest risk of severe loneliness are those in acute poverty. Psychological stressors caused by financial pressure are significant for this group. Having a heavy debt burden increases the likelihood of severe loneliness by 2.11 times, compared to having no burden. Having very low food security also increases the chances of severe loneliness by 2.3 times, compared to those with no food insecurity.

Below are two personal experiences of living with a disability in London and how they experience loneliness as a result:

[47] Gingerbread (2021), Help Single Parents Thrive
[48] Dewar, L., Clery, E. (2019), Held back: Single parents and in-work progression in London, Gingerbread/Trust for London
[49] Department for Work and Pensions (2017), Family Resources Survey: financial year 2015/16, ONS

> *"Most of my activities revolve around the availability of others to either drive me or push my wheelchair... I no longer have the freedom of jumping on and off buses or driving my own car."*

Kantar Public, working alongside the Co-Op and the British Red Cross, has shared this woman's difficulties navigating London in a wheelchair

Female, 55-74, London

> *"It's pretty stressful, given that not only am I hyper-conscious of my condition and how my every word, inflection, pause, move and gesture is coming under intense scrutiny by whoever I'm trying to interact with, but also that I am simultaneously trying to scrutinise, assess and modify myself. This is worse if I'm in a crowded place, because then my senses are going haywire attempting to process every little detail around me. Consequently, any prolonged interaction with other people leaves me exhausted.*

Sense has shared Nita's experience of how living in London and being autistic is a highly isolating experience

Nita, London

# What can be done to reduce loneliness in London?

This report has highlighted why we need to look beyond sub-groups per se and have a better understanding of the drivers of severe loneliness to be able to tackle loneliness more effectively. The frequency and intensity of severe loneliness in London can be significantly reduced if local government, funders, charities and service providers act concertedly and ambitiously.

Our areas for action include ways to prevent severe loneliness by enabling more connectedness and ways to alleviate severe loneliness by building kindness into the systems and structures of public service provision. We also call for a better targeting of interventions to meet the gaps, and for the structural causes of loneliness to be seen as health risks. Therefore, our four key areas for action are:

1. **Massively increase London's level of social connectedness**
2. **Instigate a systemic redesign to build kindness into all service provision**
3. **Rethink the targeting of loneliness interventions in London**
4. **Treat the structural drivers of severe loneliness as a health risk**

These areas for action are aimed at policymakers, funders, charities, community organisations and individuals. All these have a role to play to reduce severe loneliness.

Before we get into the detail of each of these four areas for action, let's map how they each exert a reductive effect using our explanatory model of severe loneliness:
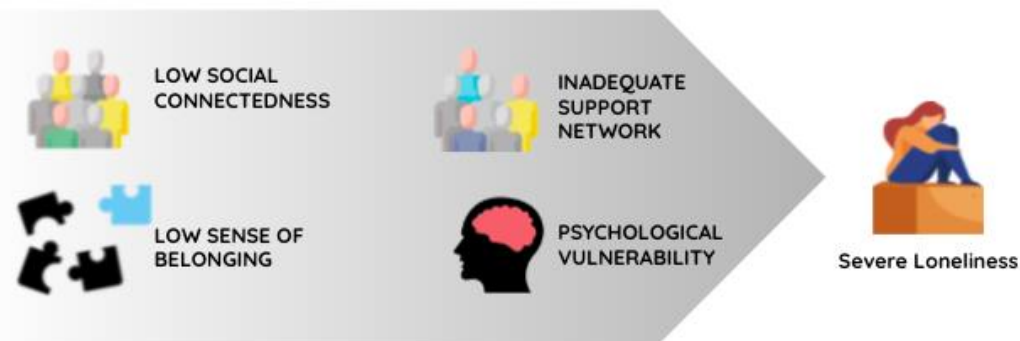
The left-hand side of the diagram is responded to by action areas 1 and 4 from our list. These are mainly about upstream factors and prevention. The "right-hand side" is responded to by action areas 2 and 3, which focus more on care-giving.

It's worth noting that the protective shields are difficult for outside interventions to support. Outside interventions cannot directly increase a person's "close support network" – trust in others, or dependable friends cannot be "magicked up" – but the aggregate effect of the other interventions (increasing social opportunities, strengthening sense of belonging and psychological resilience) contribute indirectly to stronger close support networks. The preventative mechanism to support people's psychological resilience is long-term city-wide investment in mental health provision.

The following table maps these recommendation areas by whether they're mainly about prevention or alleviation, and marks up which organisations can best take responsibility for implementing them.

Areas for action	Preventative or alleviative; wide or targeted	Key players
1: Massively increase social connectedness	Preventative and wide in their reach	● Local government ● Community organisations ● Individuals ● Funders ● Private sector
2: Instigate a systemic redesign to build kindness into all service provision	Alleviative and late-stage prevention. Can be targeted to at-risk individuals	● Providers of public services ● Funders ● Local and national government

3: Rethink the targeting of loneliness interventions in London	Mainly alleviative services	● Service providers ● Charities ● Funders
4: Treat structural drivers as a health risk	Mainly preventative	● Local and national government ● Policymakers ● Campaigning organisations

1. Massively increase London's level of social connectedness

Let's get methodical and ambitious about increasing the level of social connectedness in London, i.e., the frequency and quality of social interactions. Achieving this will directly help to prevent severe loneliness for the long term; and in the short term will speed London's social recovery, following the Covid-19 pandemic and social restrictions.

Social connection has to be aimed for, worked at and designed into every aspect of Londoners' lives. Of course the majority of social connectedness in London happens naturally between friends, families, colleagues and neighbours; and this happens both in real life and online. Unfortunately this is not enough, and it is unevenly distributed. Furthermore, London has to work especially hard at it, because of London's unique properties that make severe loneliness more likely. Maintaining adequate levels of social connectedness should be seen as an ongoing task for government and civil society, just like maintaining adequate levels of air quality or skills training or healthy eating.

The need for adequate levels of social connectedness is not a "nice to have": its presence feeds into the social capital that powers London's economic growth, and its absence is a public-health emergency.

So: what can actually be done to increase social connectedness? Here are some examples of where there's "possibility space" to increase social connectedness in London. The most promising are those that increase and routinise connection into what Londoners are already doing anyway: leveraging time current touch-points and habits.

> The built environment. Contact and neighbourliness can be "baked in" to the way that new buildings and developments are designed, and how marginal or community spaces are allowed to evolve as "bumping spaces".[50] Organisations such as the Office for Place and Create Streets are seeking to incorporate connectedness as a goal in city planning and building codes. The findings of the APPG on Loneliness Inquiry, "A Connected Recovery" highlight the impact of poorly designed or unsuitable housing and neighbourhoods on social connections and sense of belonging. It calls for new housing developments to be

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[50] See What Works Wellbeing (2021), Places, spaces, people and wellbeing/Community hubs and green space, for a good overview of the evidence base.

'loneliness-proofed', and investment in community and social infrastructure – particularly in areas with higher levels of deprivation.[51]

Hyper-local groups. The informal hyper-local groups that sprung up during the 2020 lockdown provided – and in many cases, continue to provide – a mesh of mutual care between neighbours, and increased people's sense of fitting in and togetherness. These started with an emergency response and have often morphed into well-used care-giving, meme-sharing, plumber-recommending groups, typically manifested as a WhatsApp group. Government and tech firms could do more to both widen and strengthen these groups, and address the digital divide by increasing digital skills and confidence and access to hardware and data.

Everyday interactions and London's essential workers. The role of essential workers can be elevated, to encourage and enrich interactions between people who live in a neighbourhood and the people who work and serve that neighbourhood. For example: prior to the pandemic around 2m Londoners used the Tube every day: how could that time together role model this kinder, more connected London? The Essential Mix project is working with London's frontline workers to explore what more can be achieved with these millions of everyday micro-interactions.

Given the link between severe loneliness and poor health outcomes, Public Health England and Health Education England have developed training for health and care workers to help recognise those at risk groups and apply simple interventions that can make a positive impact.[52]

Libraries could step up their role. There are 390 libraries in London, but library usage is declining and under-reaches most of the people at greatest risk of severe loneliness. There is much progressive thinking about ways for libraries to better achieve social integration,[53,54] and there are exciting trailblazers such as the Idea Store in Tower Hamlets. We would call for library funders to think even more radically. For example: what if London boroughs reinvented their underperforming libraries as local "indoor parks" for gathering and mixing?

Tool up each of us individual Londoners. Each of us can try harder (and be more encouraged or incentivised) to provide more care and kindness to the people we share the city with. This starts with the realisation that many of us are, on any day, "not OK": we can start to see each other in emotional 3D. And we can "skill up" – to be more persistent in offering support to people who're severely lonely. Persistent because severely lonely people often resist or feel unworthy or incapable of receiving support. This exhortation for more kindness can be underpinned by communications (such as through advertising space used by TfL), especially those that emphasise the reciprocal nature of care-giving. For each of us, we are all susceptible to severe loneliness, and care-giving is a mix of "give and get."

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[51] APPG (2021), A connected recovery: Findings of the APPG on Loneliness Inquiry, British Red Cross
[52] Elearning for healthcare (2021), Loneliness and social isolation
[53] For example, see: Libraries Connected (n.d.)
[54] DCMS Libraries (2021), Read, Talk, Share – How the Reading Agency helped libraries tackle loneliness

There's optimism and activity towards achieving this ambitious step up in social connectedness. Investment and attention in this area is already starting. Funders such as the National Lottery Community Fund (e.g., its [Bringing People Together](#) programme) are funding innovative experiments to strengthen connections at the local level, and organisations such as [Spirit of 2012](#) are promoting the role of sport to encourage participation and mixing. Civil society coalitions such as [Together](#) are bringing together business and civil society to aim to build " kinder, closer and more connected communities"; and the [Connection Coalition](#) is magnetising strong networks of grassroots activists and charities for experiments and knowledge-sharing. Service designers and innovators are convening through initiatives such as the [Good Growth by Design](#) inquiry to share innovative ways to strengthen connection in public services. Also, amongst employers and workplaces, awareness of loneliness and poor mental health is increasing rapidly. This is great, but its reach is mainly limited to the Londoners who are full-time employed by medium-sized and large organisations.

2. Instigate a systemic redesign to build kindness into all service provision

The people who deliver public services in London are so often the best of us. The pandemic was a powerful reminder of this. Our public servants are already often going above and beyond to serve their communities. Also it's important to consider that many public-facing service workers may well end up experiencing severe loneliness themselves given the high-pressured, low-paid nature of some of these jobs – and, potentially, the abuse they experience undertaking them.

But to support our public servants to go further – even when resources are stretched – we are calling for a structural reset and systemic redesign of public services to make kindness default and routinised.

We recommend that providers of public services build in kindness and emotional care into the design of their services, and factor severe loneliness into how they allocate resources and provide support to Londoners. The services we're talking about here would include educational settings, housing and financial advice, civil enforcement, and others; and could also stretch into public-facing services provided by the private sector, such as retail, transport, hospitality, technology and others.

This implies a widening of the duty of care that these providers have towards the individuals they serve, so that providers see the whole person in full "emotional 3D" and adapt their interactions and their solutions accordingly. Organisations such as the Carnegie Trust[55] are leading on how to implement this idea, and we can start to see what's possible from the early successes of the Make Every Contact Count programme in public health, and pilot experiments where Wellbeing Ambassadors are active in housing and employment offices.

We call for a fundamental design principle baked into all public-facing services that these services are for the whole person – in all our emotional and cognitive diversity and (often) messiness – rather than seeking to reduce people to a neat-fitting role of "user" or "client". This

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[55] Anderson, S., Brownlie, J. (2021), [Getting the measure of kindness: A guide for organisations](#), Carnegie UK Trust

is perfectly compatible with the drive towards efficiency and harnessing the power of AI and automation – it requires strong leadership and clever service design to achieve it.

Awareness and interventions should be targeted in line with the "big five" associative factors (being single; being acutely poor; being new in London; feeling different or experiencing prejudice; and being Deaf and disabled), so that providers of public services are able to anticipate and respond to the fact that people with these characteristics have a heightened likelihood of severe loneliness. The NHS's Social Prescribing approach is a useful beacon for how other public-facing services could try to identify people's wider emotional needs and encourage or refer people towards more social-connection.

How might this look in practice?

For example, a Local Authority Housing Officer would be alert to severe loneliness (through knowing the associative factors, and by being trained to identify and talk about loneliness[56]). They would signpost to relevant emotional support alongside functional support to the person, and would factor the social deficit into how they decide how to house people. Or the Home Office could more proactively provide welcome support to people who are new in London. Or debt-advice services could be able and ready to cross-refer people to services where they can receive emotional or social support as well as financial help.

3. Rethink the targeting of loneliness interventions in London

Our analysis of data for Londoners has highlighted the limitations of looking simply at sub-groups of the population per se when planning interventions. The significant variation *within* the sub-groups is based on whether individuals experience the five associative factors. Hence, tailoring and targeting of interventions needs to include an understanding of these drivers of loneliness, as well as how best to respond.

This matters because, if loneliness interventions are targeted by sub-group rather than by associative factors, the result is that people miss out on the support they need, and public funds are poorly allocated. The fact that the tackling-loneliness sector is often structured around these sub-groups inevitably leads to the misdirection of attention and funding, and to gaps in provision going unseen. Many of the organisations that seek to tackle loneliness are hypothecated to a specific sub-group. The common reasons for this include:
- an organisation that focuses on a specific group adds "tackling loneliness" to its array of services, perhaps encouraged by the prospect of funding
- cohort-specific funders encourage interventions hypothecated to a particular group[57]
- the people delivering the service default to serving people similar to themselves.

Where evaluation data is available, we can see that services such as these have a positive effect, or at least, are not doing any harm. We admire the effort and care that goes into providing these services. Also, we acknowledge that in some specific situations, people who are severely lonely may require support to be delivered by people who speak their language or share common life experience. However, we argue that the aggregate London-wide effect of these services is that

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[56] Campaign to End Loneliness (2021), The Missing Million: In search of the loneliest in our communities
[57] The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (n.d.), The Tackling Loneliness Programme

some Londoners are far more intensively served than others. We are concerned that there are gaps in service provision because of potential mistargeting of funding.

Therefore, we recommend that funders and practitioners rethink the targeting of services that alleviate severe loneliness; and we suggest that they make the following four considerations of their programmes:

● Distinguish between severe loneliness and mild loneliness. Check you're not allocating resources towards alleviating mild loneliness, if these resources could be better deployed elsewhere.
● Focus resources according to the "big five" associative factors, rather than through broader groups (e.g., by age, ethnicity or sexual orientation). In a situation where the programme is limited to a specific demographic group (e.g., younger people, or people from a particular ethnic community), then avoid generalising about loneliness and instead seek to target resources within that group in line with the "big five" associative factors.
● Check that the programme isn't inadvertently exerting a socially narrowing effect. Whilst we acknowledge that relational care requires reciprocal empathy, and that's often easiest when the care-giver and the recipient share similar backgrounds or interests, our view is that if loneliness is severe, then it can be helped significantly by whoever is most available and most qualified (as with a medical emergency or any mental health condition). On balance, we suggest that organisations who serve specific sub-groups should be wary of a presumption that their beneficiaries have specific homophilic requirements in how they socialise – it is better in the long term to reduce the barriers to general social participation than to create socially narrow social activity.
● Can the programme be modified to widen its access to include other people at heightened risk of severe loneliness? Could the programme be presented or framed in a way that signals welcome for severely lonely people who may be otherwise unreached by services?

We also suggest that there are promising approaches that become apparent from the associative factors. For example: interventions tailored to easing people who are new or experiencing disruptive transitions. Life events and transitions can be triggers for loneliness. Our networks and usual support systems may alter, or our expectations of our new circumstances may not be met. Both mean that more support needs to be offered to people at these times of change. Particular at-risk groups include younger people; those on low income; refugees and asylum seekers; and single parents. In addition, more policy attention is needed on easing transitions and helping people in their first year in London.

In our conversations with voluntary-sector organisations engaged in tackling loneliness in London, we've seen some promising models and trailblazers of what works well to increase social connectedness.

Example of Intervention to increase social connectedness	Who it's aimed at and how it's tailored
Sense: Buddying scheme	A national service aimed at young people with disabilities who have limited social opportunities. Volunteers become a friend of the young person and join them for exciting social activities in person or over video calls.

Coram: Parent Champions	A national network where parent volunteers can talk to other parents about services that are available to them in their local area. They help parents to improve their child's outcomes. The children supported through this scheme are often from marginalised and isolated families.
Host Nation: Befriending	Host Nation is a city and town-based introductory service that connects residents who want to offer their support and friendship to a refugee in their local area.

It is clear the response must be joined up and coordinated across all of London's government, voluntary and community organisations and funders.

4. View the structural drivers of severe loneliness in terms of their health risk

There are certain economic and societal drivers that heighten the risk of severe loneliness. These include:
- acute poverty
- transience and Instability
- discrimination on grounds of race or other protected characteristics.

These factors increase an individual's susceptibility to severe loneliness by reducing social opportunity and the formation of a close support network, and by eroding psychological resilience. These factors are also drivers of poor health, particularly mental health and stress, which alongside severe loneliness, collectively form a "vicious circle" of an inability to cope.

The data confirms this correlation by also revealing that economic security helps to insulate individuals from severe loneliness. For example, unemployed Londoners are 1.45 times more likely to be lonely than full-time employed Londoners; 16 per cent of Londoners who rent from a local authority are likely to experience severe loneliness, compared to 5 per cent of Londoners who own their home; and the wealthiest slice of Londoners are 26 per cent less likely than those earning average income to suffer from severe loneliness. The explanatory model shows clearly how these insulating effects provide greater access to social opportunity, more maturation of close support networks and greater sense of belonging and esteem.

It's commonplace (and right) to associate severe loneliness with health outcomes. The link with early mortality[58] and increased risk of depression in those aged 50+[59] are well evidenced. We need a better understanding of the mechanisms that underlie the link between loneliness and poor health.

What we're saying here goes beyond this. We are suggesting that the structural factors such as acute poverty and transient work, which are closely associated with severe loneliness, are themselves risk factors to public health.

Our proposal here is simple: that these issues are seen by policymakers not just as economic or social problems, but also as health-risk factors.

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[58] Holt-Lunstad, et al (2010), 'Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review', *Plos Medicine,* 7(7), 1-20
[59] Long-Lee, S. et al (2020), 'The association between loneliness and depressive symptoms among adults aged 50 years and older: a 12-year population-based cohort study', 8(1), *The Lancet Psychiatry,* 1-10