



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/social-isolation-and-loneliness>

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Isolation, loneliness impacts personal health, says K-State expert

Johannes touts benefits of social connection

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Kansas State University health professional Elaine Johannes says that a recent report indicating that about one-in-six Americans feels lonely or socially isolated is an important reminder of the value of social connections.

The Pew Research Center released findings earlier this year on the report, '[Men, Women and Social Connections](#),' indicating that roughly equal shares of American men and women say they're often lonely.

But the nonpartisan research group also reports that women are more likely than men to reach out to a wider network for emotional support.

Johannes, the Kansas Health Foundation's Distinguished Professor of Community Health at Kansas State University, said awareness of social isolation and loneliness among Americans became a greater focus during the latter part of the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

"We started to understand what the pandemic led to when we became socially isolated and we felt the loneliness of being isolated," she said.

Health experts – [including the U.S. Surgeon General](#) – have since reported negative impacts to personal health as a result of social isolation and loneliness.

Social isolation is not having relationships, contact with, or support from others. Johannes notes a [2024 study from Harvard university](#) that indicates those who are socially isolated have a 32% increase in earlier death.

Loneliness is the feeling of being alone, disconnected, or not close to others. That group, according to the 2024 study, has a 14% increase in early death.

"If you are socially isolated and also lonely...my goodness," Johannes said. "It is no wonder our lifespan in the United States seems to be shorter than it once was."

According to the Pew report, men and women most commonly rely on a spouse or partner for social connection. But women are far more likely than men to spread their support network, including parents, friends, family members, mental health counselors or online platforms and communities.

Perhaps a surprise finding, older Americans – over the age of 50 -- are less likely to feel socially isolated or lonely compared to younger Americans. Johannes says many in the older generation “were raised in a time where institutions were prevalent.”

“We were connected to a workplace, a business, a school, a faith community, and other places,” she said.

Johannes said today's youth are more likely to participate in some sort of remote learning, or as they age, work remotely. They are much more connected to technology, though some of the current tools do provide social connection.

“Some research does show that texting still provides a social connection,” Johannes said. “When the person is socially connected, they have an identity, or they have a group they can affiliate with, and thus they are less likely to feel emotionally lonely.”

Johannes touted the importance of the state's extension network, which provides numerous local programs for residents that include physical activity, leadership, health, nutrition and more.

“If the psychological effects of understanding that you're disconnected and then feeling some discomfort about that lasts for 6-8 weeks persistently, then the person may be feeling depressed,” she said. “That's when the person needs to have a provider who could support them.”

She adds: “In our society, there's a malaise. Our society, as a whole, does not know that being lonely is not typical. If people are persistently socially isolated, feel lonely and tend to think that this is the way life is, then we need to reach out and support them.”

Johannes said online behavioral health providers can be an effective way to address issues of isolation or loneliness. She also encourages Kansans to contact their local community mental health center or [local extension office](#) to learn of programs and resources available in their geographic area.

Online, help is available at <https://988lifeline.org/> or by texting or calling 988.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story

Men, Women and Social Connections (Pew Research Center),

<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2025/01/16/men-women-and-social-connections>

Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation (U.S. Surgeon General),

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

The Importance of Connections: Ways to live a longer, healthier life,
<https://hsph.harvard.edu/news/the-importance-of-connections-ways-to-live-a-longer-healthier-life>

K-State Research and Extension local offices, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/stateandareamaps.html>

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