

Healthcare professionals' perceptions of loneliness amongst older adults: A qualitative study

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Abstract

Background: Loneliness amongst older adults is linked to poor health outcomes and constitutes a public health issue worldwide. Healthcare professionals' perceptions could influence the strategies they implement in order to prevent, detect and manage loneliness amongst older adults. The aim of this study was to describe and understand healthcare professionals' perceptions of loneliness amongst older adults. **Methods:** A descriptive qualitative study. Twenty-six Spanish healthcare professionals with experience caring for older adults participated in the study. Data were collected between November 2019 and September 2020 using focus groups and in-depth interviews. Data were analysed following a content analysis method using ATLAS.ti software. **Results:** Healthcare professionals' perceptions of loneliness amongst older adults is represented by three themes: (1) "when one's personal life and social context lead to loneliness"; (2) "from abandonment to personal growth: the two faces of loneliness"; and (3) "loneliness as a health issue that needs to be addressed".

Conclusions: Healthcare professionals perceive loneliness as a multifactorial, subjective experience that can trigger different coping mechanisms and negatively affect older people's health. Healthcare professionals consider that a greater involvement of the whole society is needed in order to fight loneliness amongst older adults as a public health issue. © 2021 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

Author keywords

Descriptive study; Healthcare; Loneliness; Older adults; Public health; Qualitative study