

Loneliness and social isolation may represent a greater public health hazard than obesity, and their impact has been growing and will continue to grow, according to research presented at the 125th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association.

"Being connected to others socially is widely considered a fundamental human need crucial to both well-being and survival. Extreme examples show infants in custodial care who lack human contact fail to thrive and often die, and indeed, social isolation or solitary confinement has been used as a form of punishment," said researcher. "Yet an increasing portion of the U.S. population now experiences isolation regularly [1]."

Approximately 42.6 million adults over age 45 in the United States are estimated to be suffering from chronic loneliness, according to AARP's Loneliness Study. In addition, the most recent U.S. census data shows more than a quarter of the population lives alone, more than half of the population is unmarried and, since the previous census, marriage rates and the number of children per household have declined [2].

These trends suggest that Americans are becoming less socially connected and experiencing more loneliness [3].

To illustrate the influence of social isolation and loneliness on the risk for premature mortality, researcher presented data from two meta-analyses. The first involved 148 studies, representing more than 300,000