

Examining Social Isolation and Loneliness using Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging Data

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Social isolation is a modern plague, says expert



Social isolation expert c

Why doctors are prescribing bingo, not pills, to keep patients healthy

Loneliness May Be The Biggest Threat To Mental Health Today

Does Canada need a loneliness strategy?



Posted: Jan 17, 2018 10:09 PM ET | Last Updated: January 17

The National
Does Canada need a loneliness strategy?



COMMENT NATIONAL OPINION

Loneliness is a problem we can only tackle together

Defining social isolation and loneliness

- Social isolation
 - the objective state of a person not having many social relationships and contacts.
- Loneliness
 - the unpleasant subjective experience resulting from the perceived mismatch between the (quantity or quality) of relationships we *want* compared to what we *have*.

Lonely in a crowd



Socially isolated but not lonely

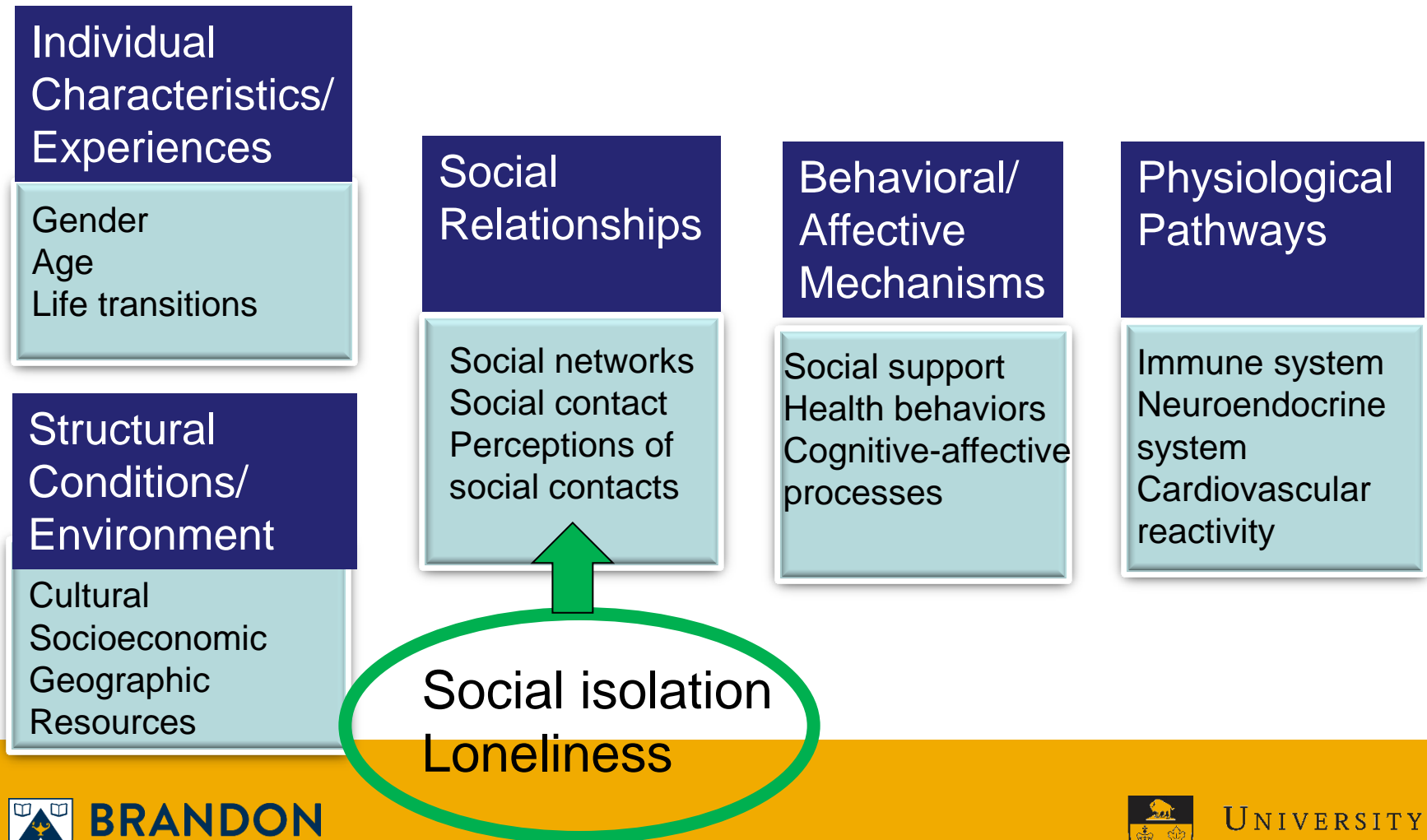


Social isolation and loneliness are health risks

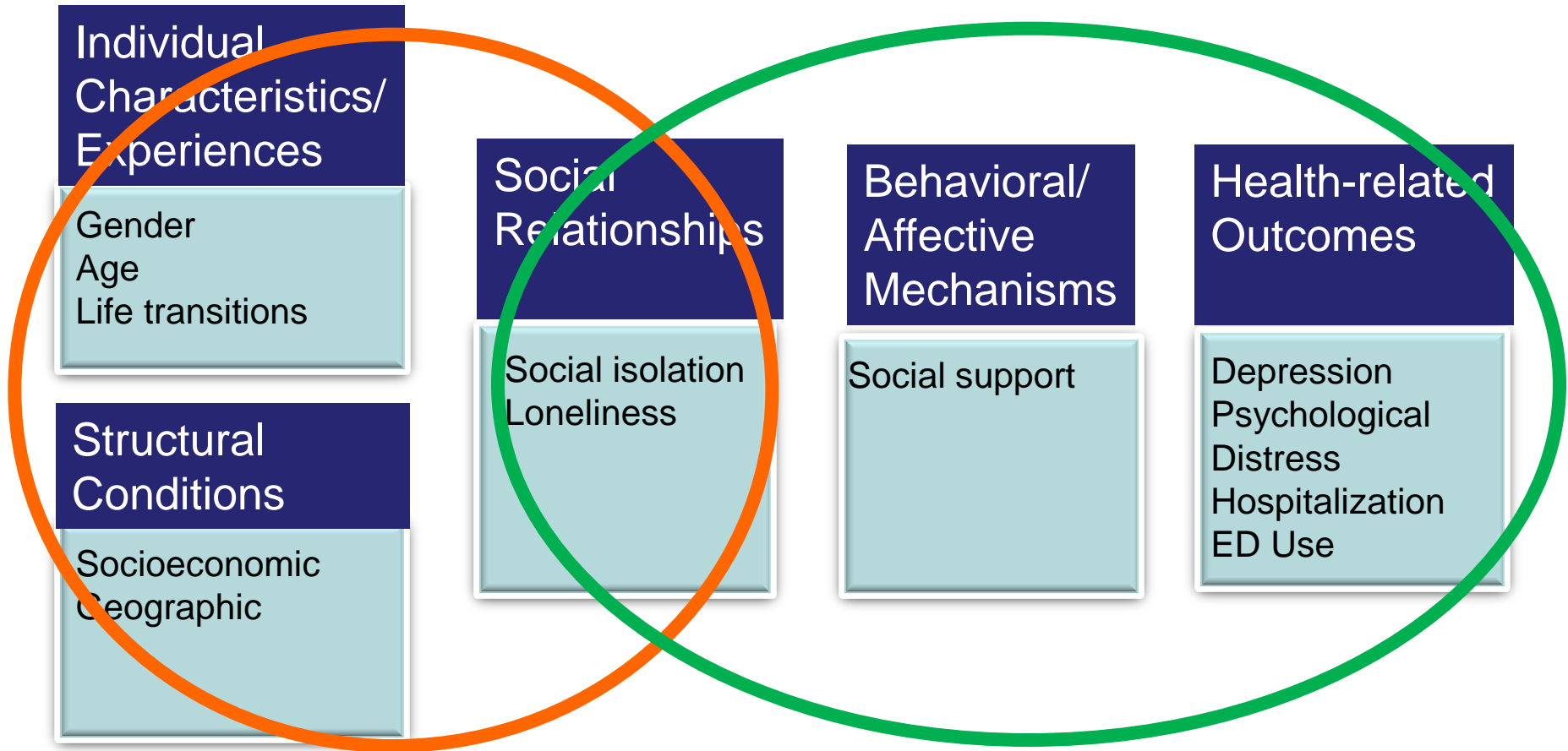
- Decreased immune system
- Worse sleep quality
- Increased risk of heart disease and stroke
- Increased risk of dementia
- Increased risk of depression
- Poor quality of life
- Increased risk of mortality
- Increased health care use
- Etc., etc., etc.



Why might social isolation/loneliness impact physical and mental health?



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Measures – Social network structure in the CLSA

Social network size. Number of: 1) biological children, adopted children, as well as stepchildren; 2) living siblings; 3) relatives; 4) close friends; and 5) neighbors.

Frequency of contact with network members.

“More than 1 year ago” to “Within the last day or two”.

Social participation. Frequency of participation in eight activities in the past 12 months.

Measures – Social support

19-item Medical Outcomes Study (MOS) – Social Support Survey.

- Affectionate support (e.g., “someone who hugs you”);
- Emotional support (e.g., “someone you can count on to listen to you when you need to talk”);
- Positive social interaction (e.g., “some to get together with for relaxation”);
- Tangible support (e.g., “someone to help you if you were confined to bed”).

Social isolation and depression: The mediating role of social support

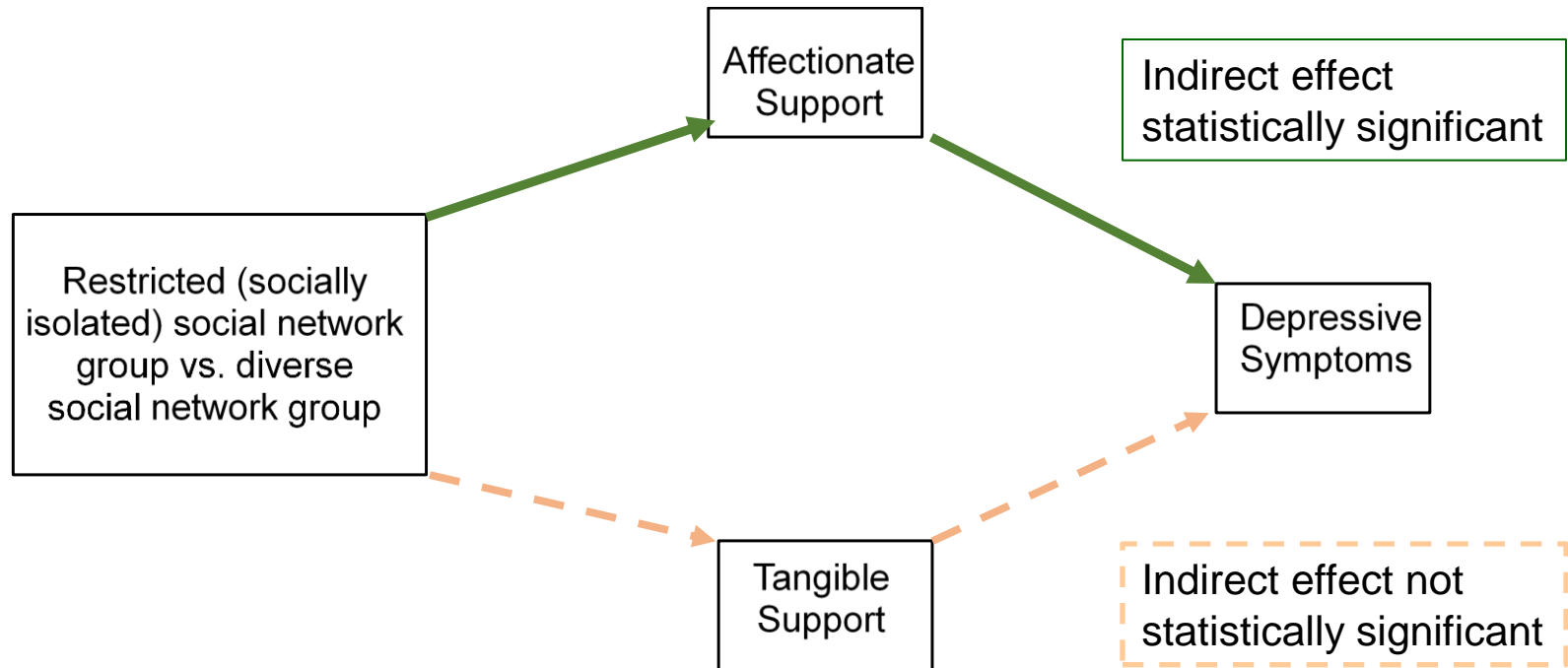


Figure adapted from Harasemiw O, Newall N, Mackenzie C, Shoostari S, Menec V. Aging & Mental Health (in press).

Our approach to measuring social isolation and loneliness using the CLSA

- **Social isolation index**

1. living alone and not married or in a common law relationship = 1 point
2. less than monthly visits with friends or neighbours
3. less than monthly visits with relatives/siblings
4. less than monthly visits with children
5. being retired and less than monthly participation in 0 or 1 of 8 social activities.

Total score = 0-5; dichotomized: 3-5=socially isolated.

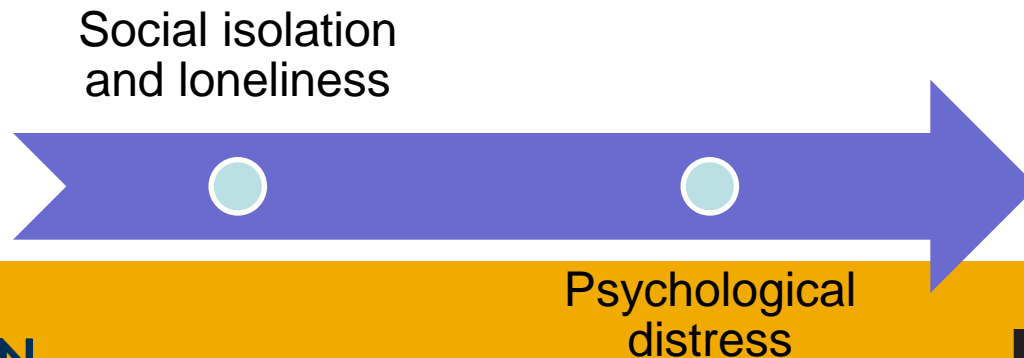
- **Loneliness**

“How often did you feel lonely?”; dichotomized: “all of the time” [5-7 days] and “occasionally” [3-4 days] = lonely.

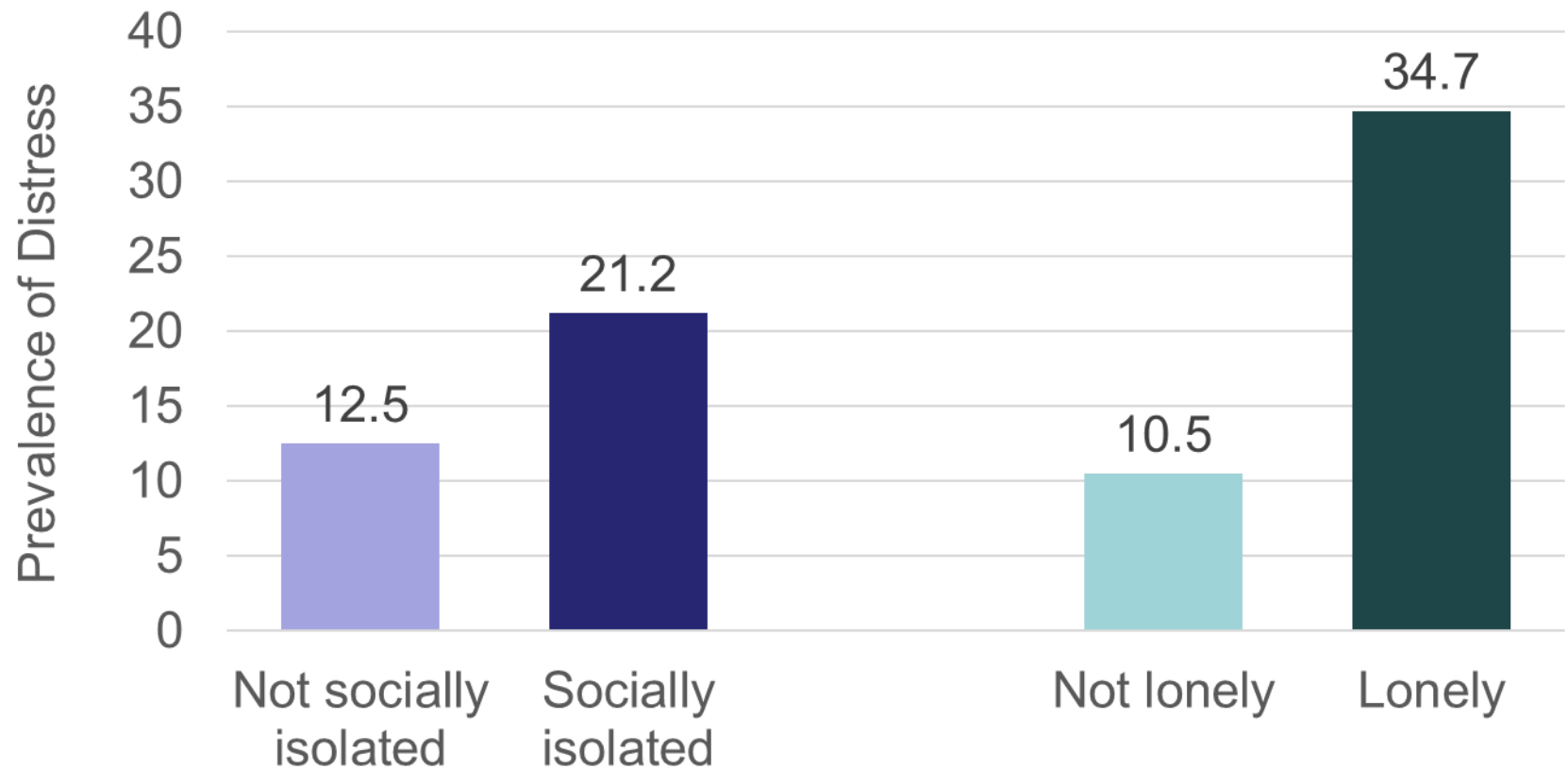
Data source - CLSA

Comprehensive cohort

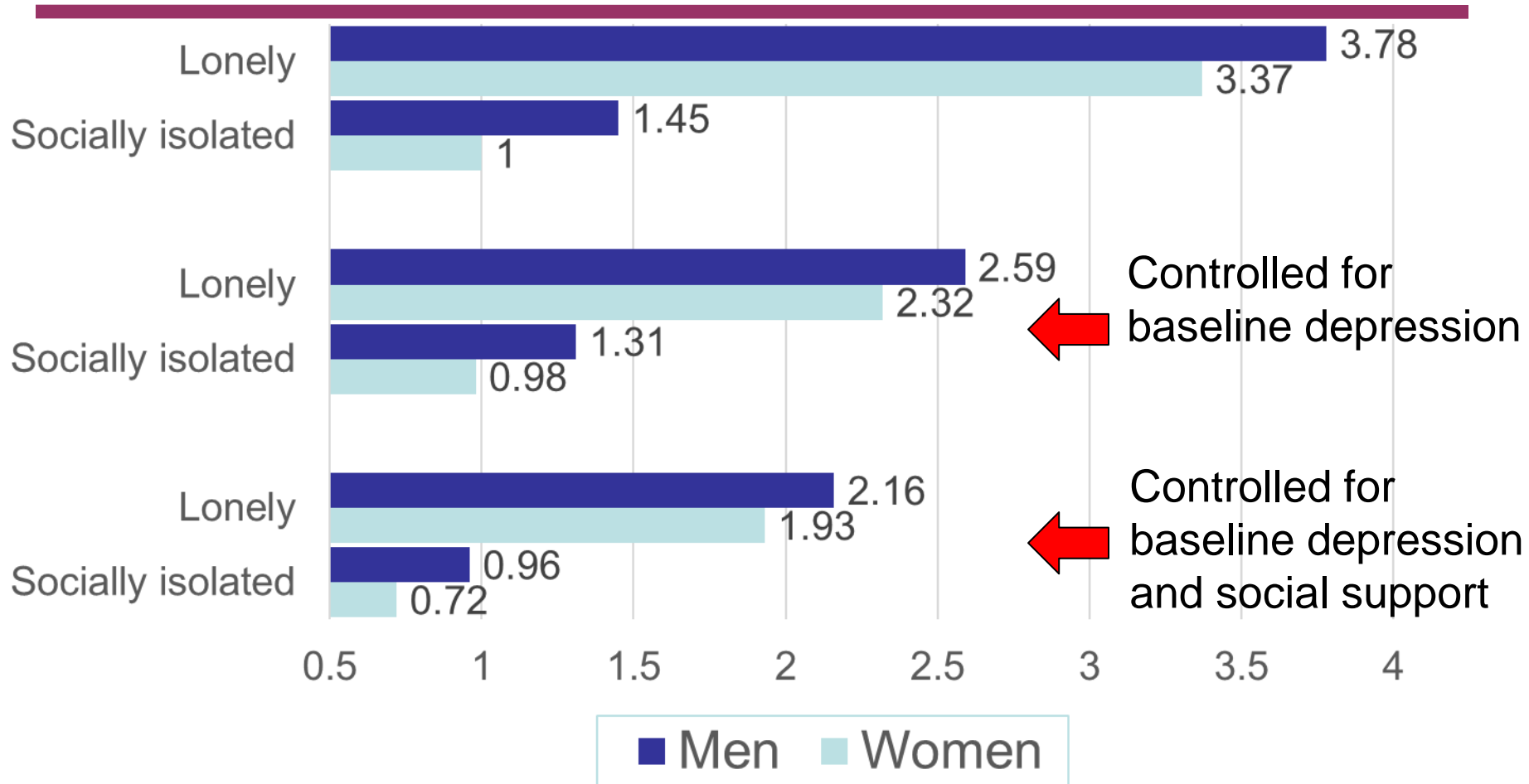
- **Baseline data**
 - to derive main predictor variables - social isolation and loneliness variables (and covariates)
- **Maintaining contact questionnaire (MCQ)**
conducted about 18 months after the baseline data collection
 - to derive outcome variable - psychological distress (Kessler K10 scale)



Social isolation and loneliness and psychological distress



The relationship between loneliness and social isolation and psychological distress (Adjusted odds ratios)



Conclusions

- Social support may mediate the relationship between social isolation and loneliness and mental health to some extent, but
 - there appear to be gender differences
 - results may differ depending on the type of support
 - we need to test a mediational model
- We need to look at other possible mediators.





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