

WHO Declares Loneliness As Global Health Threat

Why In News

- In a concerning development, **loneliness has been declared a pressing global health threat by the World Health Organization.**
- Loneliness, once perceived as a challenge limited to developed nations, has now been elevated to the status of a pressing global health threat by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- The gravity of this issue has been likened to **smoking 15 cigarettes a day** by the US Surgeon General, Dr Vivek Murthy.
- This declaration comes in the **wake of the COVID-19 pandemic**, which not only disrupted economic and social activities but also heightened the levels of loneliness across the globe.



What Is Loneliness

- Loneliness is often a **subjective emotional state**, characterised by a perceived sense of isolation, even when surrounded by others.

LONELINESS (N):

A sadness resulting from feeling alone - regardless of your physical proximity to other people at the time.

- The **primary drivers of loneliness** include a generation gap, changes in living arrangements (such as an increase in nuclear families), excessive usage of social media as well as financial instability.
- The pandemic has further intensified loneliness due to halted economic and social activities.

What Does Study Says

- The US surgeon general, **Dr Vivek Murthy**, added a stark warning, stating that the health risks of loneliness are as **detrimental as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, surpassing** even those associated with obesity and physical inactivity.
- He emphasised that loneliness is an often **underestimated public health threat**.



- **Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**, the Director-General of WHO, said in a statement, “High rates of social isolation and loneliness around the world have serious consequences for health and well-being. People without enough strong social connections are at higher risk of stroke, anxiety, dementia, depression, suicide, and more.”
- Loneliness, according to WHO, is linked to a **50% increased risk** of developing dementia and a **30% increased risk** of coronary artery disease or stroke in older adults.
- Research also indicates that between 5% and 15% of adolescents experience loneliness, although these figures are likely underestimations. “Additionally, loneliness can contribute to **mental health issues** such as decreased confidence, feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, tiredness, and lack of motivation.



- Loneliness has long been linked to an increased risk of **dying prematurely**; new research suggests a monthly visit from loved ones could cut that risk.
- Those who were never visited by friends or family had a **39 per cent higher risk of early death** compared to those who were visited daily, the study found.



Step Taken

- The World Health Organization will launch a **commission on social connection**, “the first global initiative to tackle the epidemic of loneliness,” the group’s director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.



- The group—to be led by co-chairs **U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy and Chido Mpemba**, youth envoy at the African Union Commission—will work to understand the health risks of social isolation and effective solutions, Ghebreyesus said. It will be comprised of 11 “leading policymakers, thought leaders, and advocates,” including Murthy and Mpemba, and run for three years, according to the WHO.



Some Practical Tips To Deal With Loneliness:

- **Curating self-care rituals:** Develop proactive and personalised self-care rituals designed around the mind, body, and soul.
- **Hobbies and activities:** Identify and engage in activities that bring joy and allocate scheduled time for hobbies like painting, pottery, photography, or trekking.
- **Volunteer activities:** Dedicate time to social causes and activities that bring fulfillment, such as volunteering at old age homes, orphanages, or NGOs.
- **Rejuvenate relationships:** Foster meaningful relationships and build a support system to combat loneliness.
- **Reprogramming subconscious mind:** Embrace personalised programs like mindfulness and meditation to reprogram the subconscious mind. Seek professional help proactively and without hesitation.

What can you do if you feel socially isolated or lonely?

- 1. Get in touch** with friends by meeting up or through phone or social media
- 2. Do the things you enjoy**, like a hobby or spending time outdoors
- 3. Reach out** to local services that can connect you with new people, communities, or professional help

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