

# The impact of KOMP on seniors' levels of loneliness and well-being



**In the EU, 8.9 million senior citizens (75+) have contact with family and relatives once a month or less (Eurostat, 2016).**

The impact of loneliness on mental- and physical health

Loneliness is a subjective, negative feeling resulting from a mismatch between desired and achieved levels of social contact (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). Research shows that loneliness can have a detrimental effect on individual's mental and physical health (Nygqvist et al., 2016; Steptoe et al., 2013; Forsman et al., 2011), leading to an accelerated risk of depression (Cacioppo et al., 2006), cognitive decline (Donovan et al., 2017; Kuiper et al., 2015), heart disease, stroke (Valtorta et al., 2016) and premature death (Holwerda et al., 2016; Tabue Teguio et al., 2016).

## Factors related to loneliness amongst seniors

Like other groups, seniors feel lonely for various reasons. Diminishing health (Barstad & Sandvik, 2015), the loss of a partner and living alone (Thorsen & Clausen, 2017). Fear of disturbing busy family members are also factors associated with loneliness (Hagen, 2011; Greenhalgh et al., 2013). Studies, however, show that the size of seniors social network does not impact their feelings of loneliness. Whereas expectations do, and especially so the expectations of the quality of relations with family and close friends (Thorsen & Clausen, 2017; Greenhalgh et al., 2013).

## Seniors using ICT report feeling less isolated due to the connections they make with relatives and friends

A meta-analysis of studies looking at the effect of information and communication technology (ICT) in reducing loneliness and social isolation, conclude that communication technology increases both the quality and quantity of contact between seniors and their loved ones. Moreover, mastering ICT products increases the seniors self-confidence. They feel "connected to information", "young" and "part of the modern generation" (Chen et al., 2016; Ages 2.0, 2015).

Research furthermore shows that when ICT is used to maintain contact with family and friends it can lead to a decline in loneliness, depression and an increase in overall well-being. Video-calls have for example been shown to have long-term effects in alleviating both depressive symptoms and loneliness of residents in nursing homes (Tsai et al., 2010; Tsai et al., 2011).

## Many seniors are unable to use generic communications technology

The literature suggests that seniors are part of the digital divide; a distinction made between those who do and those who do not adopt technology (Mitzner et al., 2010). At No Isolation, we estimate that as many as 15,6 million EU citizens 75 years and over are not online due to either physical barriers like visual impairment or lack of comfort with using technology. Generally, current literature shows that seniors are open to using technology, but that there are interface barriers to use (Vaportis, 2017, Geriatrik sykepleie, 2018). Very few products are tailored for people with zero to limited digital skills, and they struggle with anything from buttons (Vaportis, 2017), too many features (Mitzner et al., 2010), safety concerns (Mitzner et al., 2010), or that touchscreen designs are incompatible for elderly users (Culén & Bratteteig, 2013). One study showed that after 4 months of learning how to use a tablet, half of the senior participants were *not able to perform specific tasks* (Alvseike & Brønnick, 2012). As many seniors have little knowledge of technology and tablets, use is dependent on the care personnel taking responsibility and control over the activity (Geriatrik sykepleie, 2018).

As of January 2019 there are close to 600 seniors in Norway, the U.K., Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands using KOMP to stay in touch with their families, and KOMP has been part of more than 10 pilots. Testimonials from our users' evidence that KOMP's simplicity and user friendliness ensure that the users do not need to expand their technological skills. Users attest that "I didn't think it would be this easy, you only turn it on and off (<https://sumo.tv2.no/programmer/fakta/helsekontrollen/sesong-5/helsekontrollen-5-episode-6-1399064.html?showPlayer=true&start=952>)" and that "I was not nervous about trying when I heard there was only one button (<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/video-news/pensioner-uses-future-tech-to-aid-her-way-of-life-36974352.html>)".

Equally important, the product has a positive impact on their well-being. The KOMP-users tell that "it's lovely to see my grandchildren and great grandchildren (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p067f3bd>)", that KOMP has "impacted my day-to-day life (<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/video-news/pensioner-uses-future-tech-to-aid-her-way-of-life-36974352.html>)", "made me feel seen by my family (<https://www.noisolation.com/assets/documents/How-and-why-we-made-KOMP-1.pdf>)" and "eased my feelings of loneliness (<https://www.bergen.kommune.no/hvaskjer/publikasjoner/301/9887?artSectionId=9887&articleId=158874>)". While this is the case, KOMP has not replaced established communication practices, such as telephone and face-to-face contact, but instead prompted the contact and given the families more to speak about (Brænden et. al, 2018).

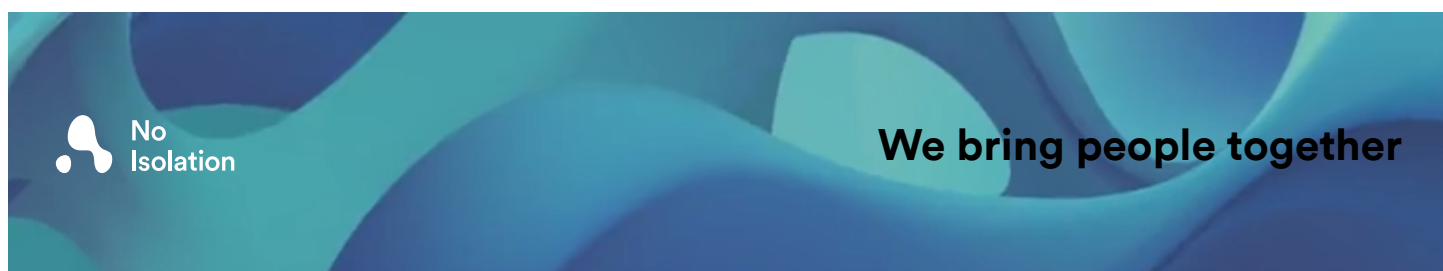
KOMP is currently part of several university research projects, that are looking into various aspects of the products effect on seniors and their families.

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