

2022 ASEM Forum on the Human Rights of Older Persons:
Present and Future

“Human Rights and Mental-Emotional Health of Older Persons”

September 6 – 7, 2022, Seoul, Republic of Korea

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Poor mental health must be recognized and treated in all people, including older adults, with the same urgency as poor physical health as it is essential to overall health and wellbeing. At least one in four older adults experience some mental disorder such as depression, anxiety, or dementia, and the number of older people with mental disorders is expected to double by 2030 (WHO 2017). In addition, people aged 85 and older have the highest suicide rate of any age group. However, mental-emotional health problems in older people often go unrecognized. They are seen as a normal part of aging, a natural response to loss, or mistaken for signs of frailty or dementia. Older persons are often too ashamed to admit that they are having emotional difficulties, and few older adults receive treatment, which results in a “treatment gap”. Given the rapid ageing of the global population, the mental and emotional health and wellbeing of older persons should be recognized as a priority for health, learning, productivity, and social inclusion. Therefore, the governments of ASEM partner countries should be more proactive in taking action to ensure the mental health of older adults. Against this backdrop, the ASEM Global Ageing Center (AGAC) is organizing the **2022 ASEM Forum on the Human Rights of Older Persons: Present and Future** with the theme of **Human Rights and the Mental-Emotional Health of Older Persons**. Since the number of older people living with mental health problems is on the rise, mental illness among older adults may eventually lead to other serious issues, such as suicide or lonely deaths. Furthermore, COVID-19 and the associated lockdowns have increased loneliness among older people and contributed to heightened concern for their mental health. The

AGAC is taking this year’s forum as an opportunity to pay close attention to the mental and emotional health of older adults and discuss what actions can be taken with various stakeholders, including international organizations, national government officials, academic researchers, and civil society groups and activists. The Forum aims to 1) address general concerns and issues relating to the mental and emotional health of older persons in Asia and Europe, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic; 2) discuss immediate and long-term measures to tackle the mental health crisis as well as best practices that can be implemented by governments and international civil society groups; and 3) explore what additional efforts can and should be made to increase global cooperation in preventing the mental health problems including social isolation and loneliness of older persons as well as to raise public awareness of the issue.

Sessional Topics for Discussion

The Forum consists of four sessions including a special session with WHO in which its Advocacy Brief, “Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older People,” will be discussed. The Civil Society Talk Concert, a regular session of the forum, aims to create an opportunity to hear the voices from the ground, in which activists and practitioners of INGOs will share their experiences and lessons learned through their work, and to explore ways to institutionalize and expand the application of these lessons to wider policy areas.

The sessions are as follows:

<p>Session 1</p> <p>The Mental-Emotional Health of Older Persons: Current Status and Responses</p>
<p>Session 2</p> <p>Civil Society Talk Concert: Sharing and Exploring Rights-Based Community Building Practices</p>
<p>Session 3</p> <p>Addressing Loneliness from Governmental Perspectives</p>
<p>Special Session with WHO: Social Isolation and Loneliness among Older Persons</p>

Each session will be led by a moderator and consist of four to five presentations (15-20 minutes each) followed by a question and answer session.

Session 1: The Mental-Emotional Health of Older Persons: Current Status and Responses

In Session 1, academic researchers and experts in the mental and emotional health of older persons will address various related issues, including but not limited to depression, lonely death, and suicide. Although there are many warning signs of mental health crises among older men and women, such as withdrawal from activities and changes in sleep and appetite, these signs are not often taken seriously. The majority of patients over the age of 65 have at least one chronic disease, which is in general the highest priority for treatment. As a result, mental illness is often unnoticed or ignored. Session 1 examines the current status of mental and emotional health issues and discusses what countermeasures can and have been adopted. Presenters include Dr Debanjan Banerjee at the Apollo Multispecialty Hospitals, Kolkata, India, Dr Jung-Hwa Ha at the Department of Social Welfare, Seoul National University, South Korea and Dr Sunwoo Lee, Faculty of Physical Culture, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic. This session will be moderated by Dr Giyeon Kim at the Department of Psychology, Chung-Ang University, South Korea.

Session 2: Civil Society Talk Concert: Sharing and Exploring Rights-Based Community Building Practices

One of the challenges many countries are currently facing is that older people's health and care are often managed in disconnected and fragmented ways. Community-based support and services vary in form from personalized health and support services designed to help older people continue living at home safely and independently to activities that help them to stay socially connected to family, friends, and their communities. Governments, families, communities, and civil society can provide various levels of assistance depending on their means to meet the needs of older persons. However, the role of civil society is particularly important. Although many long-term care services have been implemented at the national level, there are still many barriers to older persons' accessing these services. Additionally, older people who are in good health are often ineligible for these services. Also, the demands for community care are not only to meet people's physical needs but their psychological needs as well.

The Civil Society Talk Concert, one of the regular sessions of the Forum, hopes to create an opportunity to hear and share the voices from the ground – while the presenters of other sessions consist of academic researchers and government officials, the Civil Society Talk Concert invites the activists or practitioners of civil society groups engaged with activities at the grassroots level. This year's focus is on 'Sharing and Exploring Rights-Based Community Building Practices'. There have been many attempts and trials across ASEM partner countries to create and build new or alternative forms of community-building practices from the perspective of human rights. We are particularly interested to learn what human rights-based community building practices or projects have been invented and implemented by NGOs based in ASEM partner countries utilizing their different material and cultural resources. In so doing, we also wish to explore ways to institutionalize and expand the application of model-practices to wider policy areas.

The participants of the Civil Society Talk Concert this year include several NGO activists who have been involved in the community building practices/projects in ASEM partner countries. Ms. Ilena Gheno from Age Platform Europe and Ms. Susanne Dobner from Queraum who will introduce their projects called the Dreamlike Neighbourhood where older people form a social network and support each other in a local community. Ms. Chu Viet Nga, Senior Manager of HelpAge International in Vietnam will introduce the Intergenerational Self-Help Club (ISHC) Development Model and Mr. Hyunse Cho, President of HelpAge Korea will introduce various community-building projects implemented in Korea. In addition, Prof. Nattapat Sarobol at Thammasat University and Ms. Thitinan Nakphu from Bueng Yitho Municipality, Thailand, will talk about their Strong Program – A Collaborative Municipal-Community Model for Comprehensive Elderly Care. Ms. Tomoyo Suzuki from NOGEZAKA-GLOCAL in Japan, who was also involved in and collaborated with the Strong Program with the Thai partners, will also talk about a similar project in Japan. Furthermore, Mr. Kensuke Sugawara from Grundtvig.Inc. based in Japan will discuss their project called 'Housing Complex as One Big Family', which won 2020 Asian Health and Longevity Innovation Award. Session 2 will be led by Dr Youngran Park at the Department of Silver Industry, Kangnam University, South Korea.

Session 3: Addressing Loneliness from Governmental Perspectives

Loneliness has increasingly become a pressing social issue especially for older people, and some countries with a large elderly population started to address it at the level of government policy. For instance, at the end of 2017 a UK government commission, the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, reported on a year-long investigation into the prevalence of loneliness in the UK. According to the report, 9 million people in the UK suffer from loneliness, making up 14 per cent of the population. Rates are much higher among vulnerable groups such as older adults and those living with disabilities. Accordingly, the UK government appointed a minister for loneliness for the first time and published a “Loneliness Strategy” in 2018 (HM Government UK 2018). Japan followed suit, appointing its first minister of loneliness in 2021 to combat a loneliness and isolation crisis that worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, France, the Netherlands and Germany have incorporated loneliness into their national policy agendas. In Session 3, we invite government officials and policy makers from countries that have taken on loneliness and social isolation as part of their national agendas/programs. Speakers are from the governments of the UK, Japan, Germany and South Korea: Ms. Emma Barlow, Policy Advisor at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, the UK; Mr. Masanobu Ogura, Minister in Charge of Measures for Loneliness and Isolation, Japan; Dr Matthias von Schwanenflügel, Director General at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Germany; and Ms. Yuri Lee, Deputy-Director at the Senior Policy Division, Ministry of Health and Welfare, South Korea. They will discuss the rationale behind establishing government institutions in charge of loneliness (if applicable), what challenges they have encountered in their respective countries and what measures/policies have been and will be taken to address loneliness among older persons through policy interventions. Session 3 will be moderated by Dr Eun-Ha Namkung, Associate Research Fellow, Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs, South Korea.

Special Session with WHO: Social Isolation and Loneliness among Older Persons

The World Health Organization published an advocacy brief entitled “Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older People” in 2021. This brief emphasizes growing public health and policy concerns about these issues, which have become more serious during the COVID-19

pandemic at the global level. The brief not only summarizes the scale, impact, and harms of social isolation and loneliness among older people but also outlines what can be done to reduce these negative effects. In addition, it describes several policy options that offer opportunities to address social isolation and loneliness among older adults and proposes a global strategy to tackle these issues. This special session with WHO invites Dr Christopher Mikton, the lead author of the advocacy brief, to discuss its key findings with four other speakers: Dr Michelle Lim, a founding member of Ending Loneliness Together (ELT) and the Global Initiative on Loneliness and Connection (GILC), Ms. Eszter Zólyomi and Ms. Vernica Sandu from the European Center for Social Welfare Policy and Research who are the main researchers of "Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older People in Europe," and Prof. Eunsoo Choi, a professor of psychology at Korea University. Speakers will respond to the WHO Advocacy brief while sharing their research findings in the contexts of Australia, Europe and South Korea. The Special Session will be moderated by Dr Eun-Ha Chang, Director at the Korean Women's Development Institute, South Korea.

Timetable

	Day 1 Tuesday, September 6	Day 2 Wednesday, September 7
Morning	Registration (09:30-10:00)	
	Opening Ceremony & Keynote Speech by Prof. Diego De Leo Prof. In Kyoon Lyoo (10:00-11:30)	
	Lunch (11:30-13:00)	Registration (12:00-13:00)
Afternoon	Session 1 (13:00-15:30) Mental-Emotional Health of Older Persons: Current Status and Responses	Session 3 (13:00-15:30) Addressing Loneliness from Governmental Perspectives
	Break 15:30-16:00	Break 15:30-16:00
	Session 2 (16:00-18:30) Civil Society Talk Concert Sharing and Exploring Rights-based Community Building Practices	Special Session with WHO (16:00-18:00) Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older Persons
		Closing (18:00-18:30)