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## **Protecting older people from loneliness during the coronavirus (Covid-19) and other novel infectious disease pandemic: An intervention project**

### **Release of the preliminary study findings**

*Power point of the event is available on the EdUHK website*

*< <https://www.eduhk.hk/aps/zh/press-con-20220425/> >*

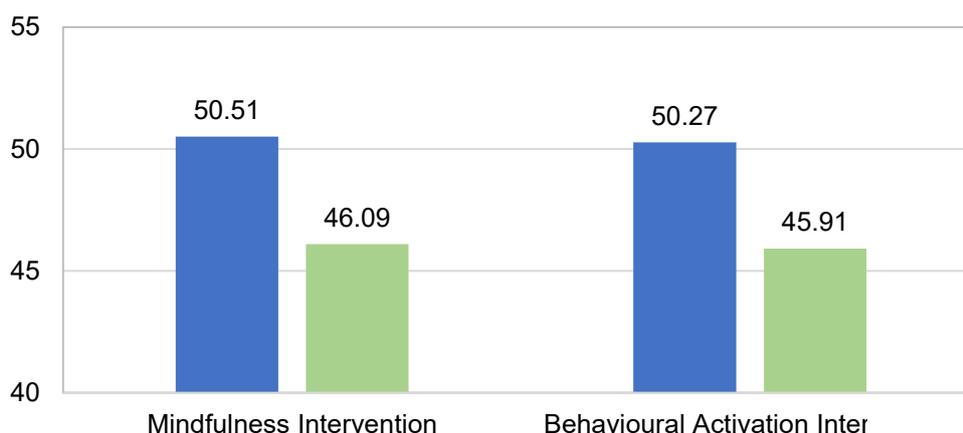
The spread of Covid-19 around the world has not only brought various impacts to Hong Kong, but also caused a series of social problems. Among them, on the days of staying at home to fight the pandemic, the elderly living alone have to face not only the risk of infection, but also the isolation from family and friends to comply with the social distancing measures. This study aims to assess how the three psychosocial interventions can protect the elderly from loneliness during the pandemic, so as to alleviate the loneliness level of the elderly in Hong Kong under social distancing measures, and to formulate an effective intervention.

To alleviate the loneliness level of the elderly in Hong Kong due to social distancing measures and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Asian and Policy Studies of The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK) is now conducting the interventional study. Two types of elderly are recruited for this study, namely low-income elderly aged 65 or above who are living alone and with symptoms of loneliness (hereafter “the elderly”) and volunteer seniors (hereafter “the volunteer”). The recruited volunteers are first invited to participate in six two-hour training workshops as the intervention activities (i.e. mindfulness intervention, behavioural activation intervention or befriending intervention). In a three-arm randomized controlled trial (RCT), the volunteers provide the interventions through telephone calls with the recruited elderly and the effectiveness of three interventions will be assessed. Both elderly and volunteers will participate in baseline assessments prior to the interventions, the elderly will then conduct three times of follow-up assessments and the volunteers will conduct two times of follow-up assessments.

The study has recruited 122 low-income elderly aged 65 or above who are living alone and with symptoms of loneliness since 2021. During the research period, the recruited elderly received mindfulness intervention, behavioural activation intervention, or befriending intervention. The study found that after 8 sessions of 30-minute intervention activities which last for about a month, it can effectively reduce loneliness and psychological stress, and improve life satisfaction, mental health and sleep quality among the elderly.

The loneliness of the elderly is assessed by UCLA Loneliness Scale, the higher the score, more severe the loneliness. The preliminary study results indicate that the baseline scores of elderly with mindfulness intervention and behavioural activation intervention are 50.51 and 50.27 respectively whereas the first follow-up scores are significantly dropped to 46.09 and 45.91 respectively. In short period of time, the interventions could help the elderly feel less lonely (see the chart below).

## UCLA Loneliness Scale



Other scales with significant differences are as follows:

- The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is adopted. Higher score refers greater stress. The stress levels are significantly reduced among two intervention groups.
- The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) is adopted. Higher score refers to higher level of life satisfaction. The levels of life satisfaction are significantly improved among two intervention groups.
- The Scales of Psychological Well-being (SPWB) is adopted. Higher score refers to better mental health status. The mental health statuses are significantly improved among two intervention groups.
- The Sleep Condition Indicator (SCI) is adopted. Higher score refers to better sleep quality. The sleep qualities are significantly improved among two intervention groups.

Instruments	Mindfulness Intervention		Behavioural Activation Intervention	
	Baseline	1 <sup>st</sup> Follow-up	Baseline	1 <sup>st</sup> Follow-up
UCLA Loneliness Scale	50.51	46.09	50.27	45.91
Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)	25.62	21.65	24.34	19.93
Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)	17.81	18.64	19.57	19.91
Scales of Psychological Well-being (SPWB)	55.13	59.74	55.36	61.39
Sleep Condition Indicator (SCI)	22.55	26.32	21.89	25.57

This study starts with Covid-19. While the outbreak of the fifth wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2022, the elderly faces a higher risk of infection and loneliness due to the compliance with the social distancing measures. The situation is even more severe. The study aims to adopt different interventions to protect the elderly from loneliness during the pandemic. As a companion, and under the concept of “elderly influencing elderly”, elderly can have the feeling of being accompanied, making them easier to accept different intervention information; and volunteers who have received intervention training can help others and themselves, and continue to promote positive thinking and caring concept.

~ End ~

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