



## Research Project

INtegrating loneliness mitigation measures in pandemic management plans: an interdisCiplinary in-depth expLoration of psychologically and ethically sUitable interventions to Decrease social isolation [INCLUDE]

### Third-party funded project

**Project title** INtegrating loneliness mitigation measures in pandemic management plans: an interdisCiplinary in-depth expLoration of psychologically and ethically sUitable interventions to Decrease social isolation [INCLUDE]

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**Project start** 01.01.2023

**Probable end** 31.12.2025

**Status** Active

Introduction: It is widely acknowledged that the Covid-19 pandemic, and successive Coronavirus-related restriction measures, have caused serious disruption to ordinary lives and a deterioration in public mental health. Apart from illness and death, a distinctive mark of the pandemic has been disrupted social interactions, increasing social isolation and loneliness. Mental health consequences varied widely and were significantly dependent on an individual's unique social context. While the National COVID-19 Science Task Force (NCS-TF) proposed already in June 2020 that mitigation measures for main stress factors should be included among pandemic management plans (PMPs), in-depth research on concrete measures and on the ethical balancing between prevention of mental health problems versus prevention of virus spread remains scarce. Given the high diversity of how people cope with social isolation, there has recently been a growing recognition that the concept of loneliness captures best the difference between being alone versus lonely, and that loneliness and its mitigation (during and beyond pandemics) need to be at the center of much needed further research.

Already before the pandemic, globally, between one fifth and a third of the world suffered from loneliness. In 2005, 26% of the Swiss population reported feeling lonely and by 2017 the figure had increased to 38% (above the global average of 33%). It is well established that loneliness is a serious health risk that affects both psychological and physical health. There is a vital need to include loneliness prevention and alleviation interventions (LPAs) in PMPs. To do so requires not only thorough knowledge about feasible and available measures and their usefulness, but also a well-argued and well communicated psychologically and ethically sound balancing between measures, especially those measures that may alleviate isolation, but at the same time increase virus spreading. Taking loneliness into account in future PMPs will reduce the harmful psychological, physical and behavioral effects of social isolation

measures, increase individual and social welfare, and enable more transparent and just strategies to reduce the burden associated with pandemics.

Objectives and study parts: We will use a mixed methods approach to fill the existing research gap. The aim is to provide an in-depth exploration into the experiences of people affected by loneliness in order to identify types and justifications of loneliness prevention and alleviation interventions that can inform PMPs.

#### Financed by

Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

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4662564	Elger, Bernice Simone	Lederman Zohar	Rambam Health Care Campus, Haifa, Israel	01.02.2023	30.06.2026
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4662571	Elger, Bernice Simone	Iten, Anne	Eidgenössische Kommission für Pandemievorbereitung und -bewältigung (EKP)	01.02.2023	30.06.2026
4662572	Elger, Bernice Simone	Piffaretti, J. C.	Eidgenössische Kommission für Pandemievorbereitung und -bewältigung (EKP)	01.02.2023	30.06.2026