Britain's appointment of a minister for loneliness is an idea worth emulating

As Britain appoints the world's first ever [minister for loneliness](), a case can be made for similar focus on the issue everywhere else in the world. Loneliness has become almost the defining emotion of our times. As the world has become more connected, it has also created islands out of human beings; who have become used to a life of technologically-mediated connectedness that is not quite the sort of interpersonal connection that has defined humanity so far. This is as much a health concern as a sociological one. Loneliness has been known to cause depression, social isolation and even trigger anti-social behaviour.

It has been estimated that there are more than nine million people in Britain who always or often feel lonely. The most vulnerable groups identified are the elderly, 17 to 25-year-olds, migrants and refugees. In India, the World Health Organization in 2017 reported that 4.5% of the total population suffered from depressive disorders. The National Sample Survey Office had indicated in 2004 that 1.23 million men and 3.68 million women in India were living alone and suffered from loneliness. There is evidence to suggest that the numbers have only increased in the ensuing years.

In both urban and rural settings, families are becoming nuclear, senior citizens are living alone, more and more young people are migrating from homes for work, and living alone has become the new normal. In such a situation, focusing on mental health must become a government priority. There is still some social stigma associated with mental disorders, and seeking help for issues of depression, isolation and loneliness is still considered taboo. Awareness programmes and a government thrust on mental health will go a long way in changing that mindset and improving the life of millions of citizens. India would do well to emulate Britain's example and take the issue of loneliness seriously enough to include it in its healthcare framework.

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