‘I get a Little Help from my Friends’
Adults with intellectual disability discuss loneliness
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Method

- Loneliness Scale

- Semi-structures interviews:
  - Personal profile and demographics
  - Daily activities and occupation
  - Personal networks
  - Friendships
    - Background
    - Description
    - Experience
Participants

- 51 people with intellectual disability with limited to intermittent support needs
  - 22 male
  - 29 female
  - Age range 16 – 52 yrs
  - 42 attending Technical and Further Education college (TAFE)
  - 9 supported employment

(Assessed through records and Scales of Independent Behaviour-Revised)
Deduction from the literature

- Although people with intellectual disability more physically integrated and have opportunity for activities in their neighbourhoods and towns most are still not really part of their communities.
Question

- Do people with intellectual disability experience social isolation and if so does this give rise to an experience of loneliness?

- If loneliness is a consequence how do people with intellectual disability conceptualise this and what would they like to do about it?
Loneliness

- Loneliness an unpleasant experience arising from insufficient social interaction.
- It is a personal experience independent of either quantity or duration of social interaction.

(Peplau & Perlman 1982)
Loneliness Scale

- Asher & Wheeler 1985
- 15 core questions modified to read as first person questions
- Scale modified from 3 point to 5 point scale – card sorting response
Semi structured interviews

- Personal profile and demographics (confirmed by parents / teachers etc)
- Daily activities and occupation
- Personal networks
- Friendships
  - Background
  - Description of best friend
  - Experience of friendships

- Interviews of ‘Most lonely’ and ‘Least lonely’ groups (6 in each) analysed in detail
Findings

- Participants who attended special school reported higher levels of loneliness than those who attended mainstream school.

- Participants whose primary day activity was TAFE reported higher levels of loneliness than those whose primary day activity was employment.
Ratings of loneliness decreased as reported duration of contact with friends increased.

Older people reported lower frequency of social activity.

Demographic factors did not significantly impact Loneliness scores.

No significant relationship between loneliness rating and the number of participants in a person’s social network or the frequency of contact.
5 of 6 ‘Most lonely’ people were female
- Describe friend as a loyal confident who can be trusted, can talk openly and honestly about problems
- Had a friend but frequency of contact not meeting their socio-emotional needs

5 of 6 ‘Least lonely’ people were male
- Describe friend as someone to share activities with
- High frequency of contact with friend
- Friend connects them with others – practical support

Description consistent with gender stereotypes of friendships in general population
Distinct differences between perspectives and experiences of those in Most lonely and Least lonely group
  - Description of friendships
  - Expectations they had of friends
  - Personal experience in establishing, negotiating and maintaining friendships

Loneliness least evident among those who perceived themselves to be part of a network of people each fulfilling a specific need

Networks which included people with and people without an intellectual disability most effective in meeting people’s social and emotional needs
Many of the most lonely had difficulty maintaining relationships with people from their past who have intellectual disability.

Loneliness reported where there was discrepancies between expectation and experience.
- Scale reliable for assessment and monitoring of loneliness experienced by adults with disability in receipt of services

- Scale could be used to evaluate effectiveness of programmes implemented to enhance quality of life