



# The effects of social support on wellbeing of visually impaired older adults

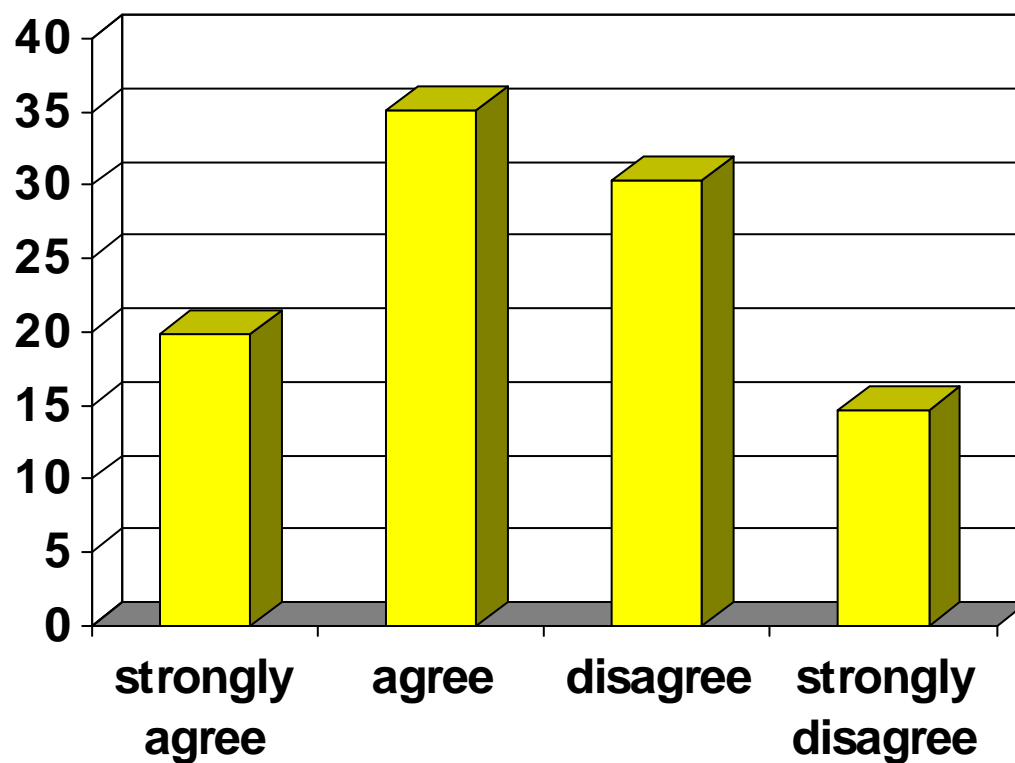
Peter Verstraten



## Main topics

- The impact of vision loss at old age
- Social support and loneliness
- Building and maintaining a personal network

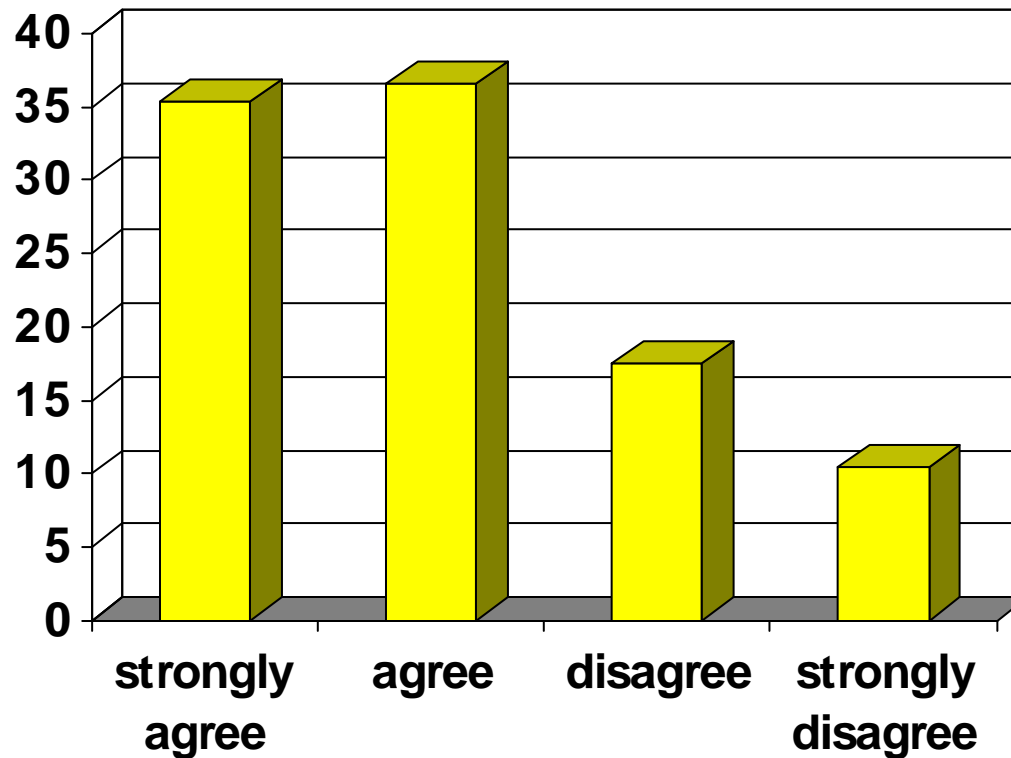
People should not expect too much from me because of my vision impairment



Agree  
55,0 %

Disagree  
45,0 %

I have to depend on sighted people to do most of the things I did for myself

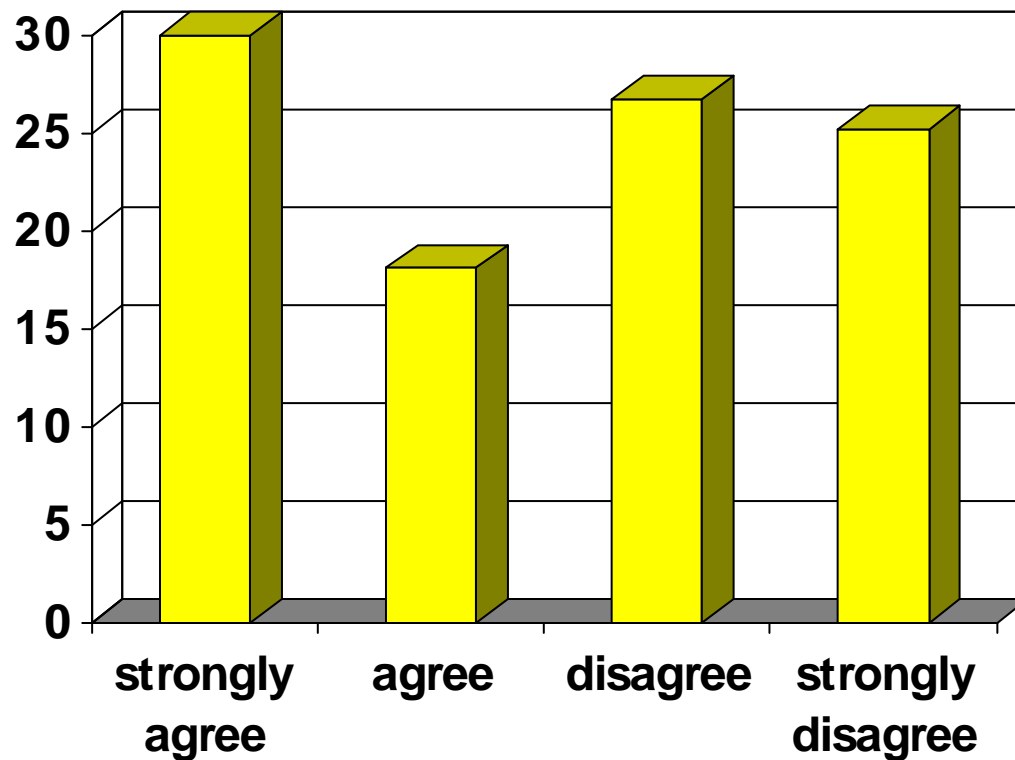


Agree  
72,0 %

Disagree  
28,0 %



I am uncomfortable making new friends because I can not always see people's faces clearly



Agree  
48,1 %

Disagree  
51,9 %

## Risks for visually impaired older adults:

- 2 x risk of falling
- 3 x risk of depression
- 4 x risk of hip fractures
- Increased chance of admission to old people's home
- 2 x risk of dying



- 30% of older adults with mild visual impairment is willing to trade years of living for a better visual acuity
- This goes for 60% of older adults with severe visual impairment or blindness.



From: **Emotional and social consequences of age-related low vision. A narrative review.**

Burmedi A, Becker S, Heyl V, Wahl H-W & Himmelsbach I.  
*Visual Impairment Research*, 2002; 4 (1): 47-71

&

From: **The psychosocial impact of sight loss on older people: An update of the evidence.**

Nyman SR, Gosney MA & Victor CR. Paper presented at  
*Vision 2008*, Montreal, Canada





- The social support network does not necessarily decrease because of vision loss
- It is not clear whether social support decreases as the visual impairment exist longer
- There is a more apparent decrease in social activities



- Social support seems to be an effective buffer for emotional and social adaptation to vision loss
- Effective social support is related with:
  - Less depressive symptoms
  - Higher life satisfaction
  - Better adaptation to vision loss



- Size of the social network seems less important than quality of that network
- Own children most important sources of support for older couples
- Friends more important to older people who live alone
- Both sources have their own quality
- The amount of support is not related to marital status or widowhood



- Summarizing, it is shown that social support seems to be an effective buffer in alleviating the psychosocial consequences of vision loss at old age



## Loneliness

- Prevalence varies from 40% to 60% loneliness among visually impaired older adults
- The chance on loneliness increases with the severity and the duration of the visual impairment

## Study in the province of Limburg

- 44% loneliness among the population of 20–75 years of age
- 61% among those with visual impairments (of whom 70% in the age group of 50 - 75)

## Own research: Brinkmann, Verstraten, Stevens & Schouten

- 138 visually impaired older adults (age > 55), telephone interviews, at the moment of entering a Sensis regional rehabilitation centre, with:
  - Loneliness scale
  - Adaptation to Vision Loss scale (AVL)
  - Social Support Scale (SSL-I)
  - Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS)



## Conclusions observational study

- 54% loneliness among partially sighted and blind people of 55 years and older





## Conclusions observational study

### Lonely elderly with visual impairment:

- Show a poorer adaptation to vision loss
- Show less received social support
- Show more feelings of depression



## Three research questions regarding social support and loneliness

- Is the level of social support related to the level of loneliness?
- Is the level of social support related to the type (dimension) of loneliness: emotional loneliness and social loneliness?
- Is the type of social support (everyday social support, problem situations support, esteem support) related to the type of loneliness?



# Loneliness

- Emotional loneliness is experienced when an individual misses an intimate relationship
- Social loneliness is experienced when one lacks desired contact with a circle of friends with whom one shares interests and ideas



# Social support

- **Everyday support:** when people invite you to a party or a dinner, drop in for a visit, show you that they are fond of you, are interested in you
- **Social support in problem situations:** when people comfort you, provide you with help in special circumstances (illness, moving), reassure you, give you good advice
- **Esteem support:** when people pay you a compliment, confide in you, ask you for help or advice, emphasize your strong points

# Social support and loneliness (1)

<b>Social support</b>	<b>High (30-46)</b>	<b>Medium (27-29)</b>	<b>Low (13-26)</b>
	Reference	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
<b>Loneliness (3-11)</b>	N=51	N=33	N=54
Number (%)	20 (39)	16 (48)	36 (67)
Unadjusted	1	1.5 (0.6-3.5)	<b>3.1 (1.4-6.9)</b>
Adjusted for age, gender, education	1	1.4 (0.5-3.6)	<b>3.0 (1.3-7.0)</b>
<b>Moderate loneliness (3-8)</b>	N=49	N=32	N=42
Number (%)	18 (37)	15 (47)	24 (57)
Unadjusted	1	1.5 (0.6-3.8)	<b>2.3 (1.0-5.3)</b>
Adjusted for age, gender, education	1	1.6 (0.6-4.2)	<b>2.4 (1.0-5.9)</b>
<b>Extreme loneliness (9-11)</b>	N=33	N=18	N=30
Number (%)	2 (6)	1 (6)	12 (40)
Unadjusted	1	0.9 (0.1-10.8)	<b>10.3 (2.1-51.5)</b>
Adjusted for age, gender, education	1	0.8 (0.1-10.8)	<b>10.4 (1.6-67.3)</b>

# Social support and loneliness (2)

<b>Social support</b>	<b>High (30-46)</b>	<b>Medium (27-29)</b>	<b>Low (13-26)</b>
	Reference	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
<b>Loneliness (3-11)</b>	N=51	N=33	N=54
Number (%)	20 (39)	16 (48)	36 (67)
Unadjusted	1	1.5 (0.6-3.5)	<b>3.1 (1.4-6.9)</b>
Adjusted for age, gender, education	1	1.4 (0.5-3.6)	<b>3.0 (1.3-7.0)</b>
<b>Emotional loneliness</b>	N=51	N=33	N=54
Number (%)	23 (45)	17 (52)	36 (67)
Unadjusted	1	1.3 (0.5-3.1)	<b>2.4 (1.1-5.4)</b>
Adjusted for age, gender, education	1	1.2 (0.4-3.1)	<b>2.4 (1.0-5.7)</b>
<b>Social loneliness</b>	N=51	N=33	N=54
Number (%)	10 (20)	9 (27)	29 (54)
Unadjusted	1	1.5 (0.5-4.3)	<b>4.8 (2.0-11.4)</b>
Adjusted for age, gender, education	1	1.8 (0.6-5.7)	<b>5.8 (2.1-15.7)</b>



# Everyday social support and loneliness

Everyday social support	High (11-16)	Medium (10)	Low (4-9)
	Reference	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
<b>Loneliness (3-11)</b>	N=62	N=20	N=56
Number (%)	23 (37)	11 (55)	38 (68)
Unadjusted	1	<b>2.1 (0.7-5.8)</b>	<b>3.6 (1.7-7.7)</b>
Adjusted for age, gender, education	1	<b>2.3 (0.8-6.8)</b>	<b>3.6 (1.6-8.2)</b>
<b>Emotional loneliness</b>	N=62	N=20	N=56
Number (%)	30 (48)	10 (50)	36 (64)
Unadjusted	1	1.1 (0.4-2.9)	1.9 (0.9-4.0)
Adjusted for age, gender, education	1	1.2 (0.4-3.5)	1.9 (0.8-4.4)
<b>Social loneliness</b>	N=62	N=20	N=56
Number (%)	9 (15)	10 (50)	29 (52)
Unadjusted	1	<b>5.9 (1.9-18.2)</b>	<b>6.3 (2.6-15.2)</b>
Adjusted for age, gender, education	1	<b>5.0 (1.4-17.5)</b>	<b>8.6 (3.0-24.3)</b>



# Problem situations support and loneliness

<b>Problem support</b>	<b>High (10-15)</b>	<b>Medium (9)</b>	<b>Low (4-8)</b>
	Reference	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
<b>Loneliness (3-11)</b>	N=47	N=25	N=66
Number (%)	25 (53)	12 (48)	35 (53)
Unadjusted	1	0.8 (0.2-2.1)	1.0 (0.5-2.1)
Adjusted for age, gender, education	1	0.6 (0.2-1.8)	0.8 (0.4-1.8)
<b>Emotional loneliness</b>	N=47	N=25	N=66
Number (%)	25 (53)	15 (60)	36 (55)
Unadjusted	1	1.3 (0.5-3.5)	1.1 (0.5-2.2)
Adjusted for age, gender, education	1	1.0 (0.3-3.0)	0.8 (0.4-1.9)
<b>Social loneliness</b>	N=47	N=25	N=66
Number (%)	13 (28)	9 (36)	26 (39)
Unadjusted	1	1.5 (0.5-4.2)	1.7 (0.8-3.8)
Adjusted for age, gender, education	1	1.0 (0.3-3.0)	1.7 (0.7-4.0)



# Esteem support and loneliness

<b>Esteem support</b>	<b>High (10-16)</b>	<b>Medium (9)</b>	<b>Low (4-8)</b>
	Reference	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
<b>Loneliness (3-11)</b>	N=59	N=20	N=59
Number (%)	25 (42)	11 (55)	36 (61)
Unadjusted	1	1.7 (0.6-4.6)	<b>2.1 (1.0-4.4)</b>
Adjusted for age, gender, education	1	1.7 (0.6-5.0)	<b>2.1 (0.0-4.7)</b>
<b>Emotional loneliness</b>	N=59	N=20	N=59
Number (%)	27 (46)	10 (50)	39 (66)
Unadjusted	1	1.2 (0.4-3.3)	<b>2.3 (1.1-4.9)</b>
Adjusted for age, gender, education	1	1.1 (0.4-3.3)	<b>2.3 (1.0-5.2)</b>
<b>Social loneliness</b>	N=59	N=20	N=59
Number (%)	16 (27)	6 (30)	26 (44)
Unadjusted	1	1.2 (0.4-3.5)	<b>2.1 (1.0-4.6)</b>
Adjusted for age, gender, education	1	1.2 (0.4-3.9)	<b>2.2 (0.9-5.2)</b>



# Social support and adaptation to vision loss

- A positive correlation between social support and overall adaptation to vision loss
- A trend between social support and social adaptation
- However, no correlation found between social support and psychological adaptation

# Interim conclusions

- Our research shows the importance of social support for adapting to vision loss at old age
- From a rehabilitation point of view it is important to invest in mobilizing social support, especially everyday social support and esteem support
- We agree with recommendations of Burmedi et al. that there is need for:
  - Longitudinal research
  - More complex data analyses for simultaneous outcome measures
  - Theoretical foundation for the causality in found relations between different factors
  - Comparisons with other groups



# Building and maintaining a personal network

A training programme for visually impaired older adults



## Aims of the programme

- Extend the concept of friendship
- Develop an active approach to friendship
- Develop a sense of self-esteem as a friend

# Programme features

- Emphasis on self-esteem
- Ten weekly meetings
- Eight participants on average
- Homework assignments
- Group discussions and role plays



# 10 lessons

1. Getting acquainted
2. The many sides of friendship
3. Self-esteem and friendship
4. A convoy of relationships
5. Making new contacts
6. How acquaintances become friends



# 10 lessons

- 7. From superficial to deeper contact
- 8. Personal boundaries and conflicts in friendship
- 9. Central thoughts about the self
- 10. Goals in friendship
- +
- 11. Reunion meeting



## Conclusion intervention study

- Our results show a positive effect of the intervention on diminishing loneliness among visually impaired elderly
- Short term
  - 44% improvement in control group
  - 74% improvement in intervention group
- Long term
  - 44% improvement in control group
  - 70% improvement in intervention group



## Scheme of the workshop

- Reflection on loneliness and friendship
- Starting points of the programme
- Presentation of all lessons
- Many exercises
- Selection criteria / loneliness scale



## Aims of the workshop

- An understanding of loneliness
- Ability to identify client for the network programme
- Ability to conduct the network programme
- Ability to evaluate the results



# Manual

## Building and maintaining a personal network

A training programme for visually impaired older adults

- Available in Dutch (2005) and in English (2007)
- Order at [www.sensis.nl](http://www.sensis.nl)
- Available in German (2009)
- Order at [www.bfw-halle.org](http://www.bfw-halle.org)
- Or: [pverstraten@sensis.nl](mailto:pverstraten@sensis.nl)



# Conclusions

- Social support effective in alleviating psychosocial consequences of vision loss
- High prevalence of loneliness (54%)
- Clear relation between low levels of social support and loneliness
- Positive relation between social support and adaptation to vision loss
- Empowerment with regard to building and maintaining personal network

## Contact



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Visio, Sensis and De Brink are joining forces.

From January 1, 2010 onwards we will continue under the new name of **Royal Dutch Visio**, centre of expertise for visually impaired people

