

**‘Saying Hello Everyday’: Towards the enhancement of social capital among lonely and isolated older people in industrial societies** - Professor Steven Shardlow

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**Abstract:** This paper will explore the need to develop structures that support, maintain and enhance social capital in forms that can be accessed by older people.

Being an older person in an industrialised society can be a challenging experience. The loosening of family bonds, geographical dispersal of family members and cultural dominance of what has been termed ‘youth culture’ combined with a loss of social esteem given to those beyond working age in conjunction with some of the inevitabilities of the ageing process; loss of friendships, declining physical abilities; increased likelihood of chronic ill health and loss of lifetime partners can all contribute to a sense of loneliness and isolation for the older person. Not that this is the whole story! There are many compensations for older people, especially those who enjoy financial security, which provides a high standard of living.

Against this backdrop, this paper will present the findings from the largest qualitative study to be undertaken in England of how older people cope with loneliness and isolation. The emphasis of these findings will not be upon the nature of loneliness and isolation or the emotional, psychological and cognitive aspects of the experience but rather upon the positive coping strategies that older people use. Particular attention will be paid to the importance of health and social care services; perhaps surprisingly these services assume less importance than might be presumed.

There are direct applications of these findings for policy makers and academics, as this study provides a case study of the extent of social capital and how it is actually used by a particular, but not homogenous social group. The challenge, therefore, is to consider the policy and theoretical implications of the need to further develop the stock of social capital - specific to the needs of older people - and increase opportunities for access to that capital by older people. The achievement of such an objective will at policy level require collaborative approaches that engage many organisations; at a theoretical level interdisciplinary theorisation will be required.

**Speaker:** Professor Steven M. Shardlow PhD is foundation holder of the Chair of Social Work at the University of Salford, England, where he is the Director of the Institute for Health and Social Care Research. He has held academic appointments in Norway and Italy. He is the founding Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Social Work*. Previously he has worked as a social work practitioner and manager. He has worked extensively in international social work, through research, consultancy and development work. Current research interests are in the following areas: welfare and social capital, evidence-based policy and practice, professional ethics, comparative practice in the social professions, and professional education. He has published widely in these fields, including fourteen books, and his work has been translated into several languages.