

**Pilot Project:** Identifying Racial Disparities of Dementia: The Role of Social Isolation and Social Technology Use

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### **Abstract**

Social isolation and loneliness are highly prevalent among the current generation of senior citizens. Feelings of loneliness and social isolation have been linked to declines in cognitive functioning and increased risk of dementia. Racial and rural disparities in social isolation and loneliness may lead to disparities in downstream cognitive health outcomes. It is therefore important to identify ways that may reduce social isolation and loneliness among older adults. One possible way to reduce social isolation and loneliness is the use of social technology, such as Facebook and Skype, to connect with others. Consequently, the current study examines racial and rural disparities in the interaction between social isolation and social technology use on dementia using the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) dataset. It is anticipated that the detrimental effects of social isolation on dementia risk will be greater in minority groups and rural-living individuals compared to Caucasians and urban dwellers. Technology usage is also expected to be lower in minority groups and rural dwelling individuals. The overarching hypothesis is that lower social technology use and greater social isolation may be associated with higher dementia symptoms in these disadvantaged groups. Preliminary results demonstrate a positive relationship between perceived positive social support and use of social media to connect with others, which is consistent with past research findings. Examination of potential racial and rural disparities in these relationships are currently underway.