

# Economic Impacts of Loneliness and Interventions to Address Loneliness in Young Adults: A Scoping Review



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## BACKGROUND

- Loneliness is understood as a subjective state of negative feelings resulting from a perceived discrepancy between desired and achieved levels of social relationships (Perlman & Peplau, 1982).
- Young adults are currently the loneliest demographic in many Western societies, with loneliness levels rising globally (Twenge, 2021). For example, in Canada, 23% of young adults (15-24 yrs) report always or often feeling lonely (Statistics Canada, 2021).
- The economic consequences of loneliness among young adults are increasingly being recognized, however, little is known about the extent and mechanisms through which loneliness impacts economic outcomes as well as the interventions to address this issue (Mihalopoulos et al., 2020).

## OBJECTIVE & RESEARCH QUESTION

- Objective:** To take stock of the available evidence, highlighting gaps and areas for future research.
- Research question:** What has been reported in the literature regarding the economic impacts of loneliness as well as interventions to reduce loneliness among young adults (15-35 yrs) in Canada & internationally?

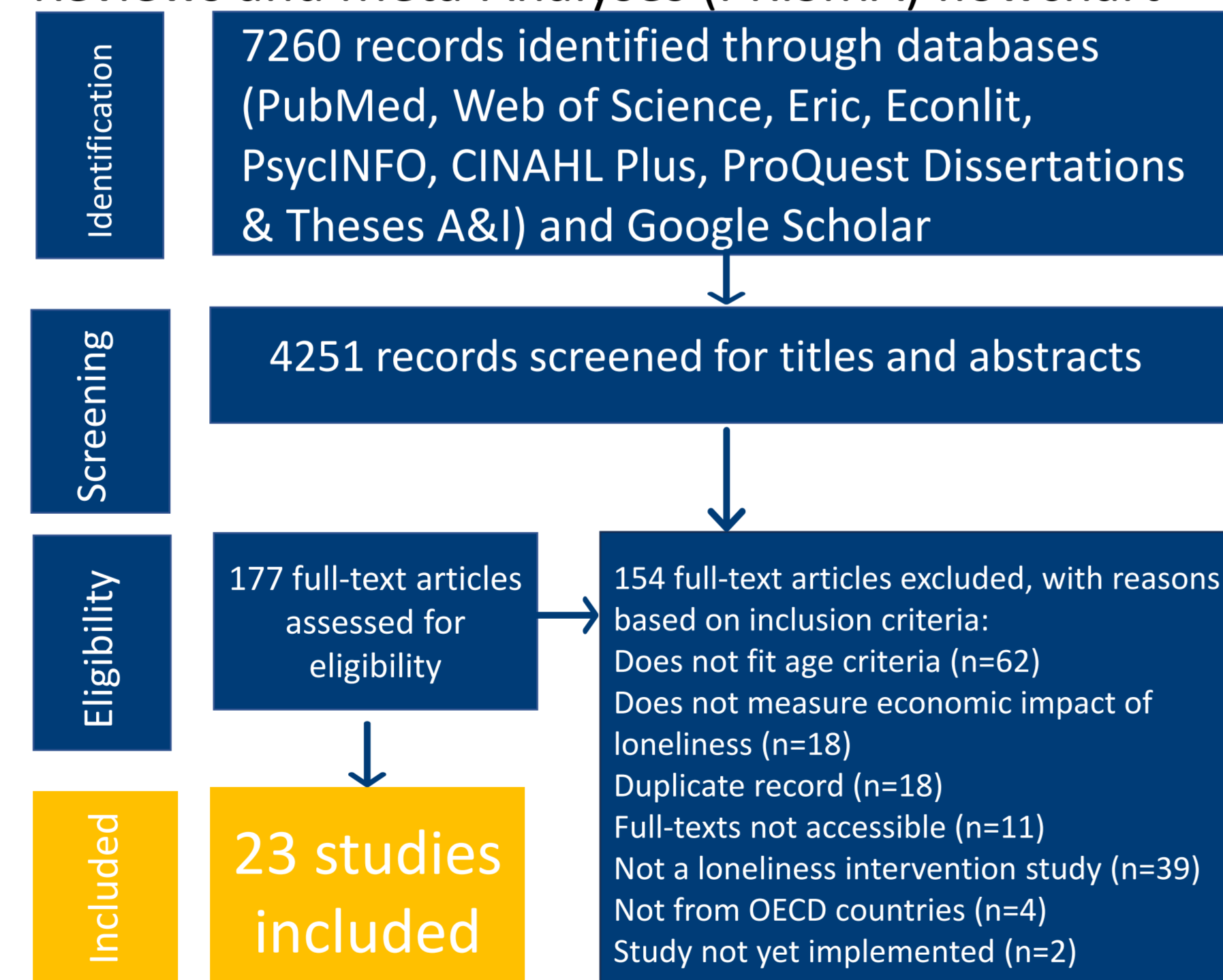
## METHODS

- Design:** Arksey & O'Malley (2005) 5-step framework: (1) identify the research question, (2) identify relevant studies, (3) select relevant studies, (4) chart the data, and (5) collate, summarize, and report the results.
- Inclusion Criteria:** the concept of loneliness is defined and measured using validated tools (e.g., University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Loneliness Scale); loneliness is the independent variable for studies measuring economic impact and the dependent variable for studies measuring interventions, limited to peer-reviewed articles and grey literature focused on young adults (15-35) from OECD countries, published in English or French between January 2012 and June 2022.
- Process:** The search strategy used a combination of keywords and Medical Subject Headings terms in databases. Studies were screened for inclusion based on titles/abstracts, and then full text, by three independent authors; disagreements were resolved by a fourth reviewer (Fig. 1 & Fig. 2). Extracted data analysed using narrative synthesis approach.

Figure 1: Determinants used in search strategy to describe population, concept, and context (PCC)

PCC Element	Determinant
Population	Young adults 15-35
Concept	Loneliness, Economic Outcome (e.g., labor market outcomes, education, healthcare expenditures), Intervention
Context	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries

Figure 2: Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart



## REFERENCES

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Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation Conference  
 University of Lethbridge  
 June 20th - 23rd 2023  
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Figure 3: Geographical location of included study (N=23)

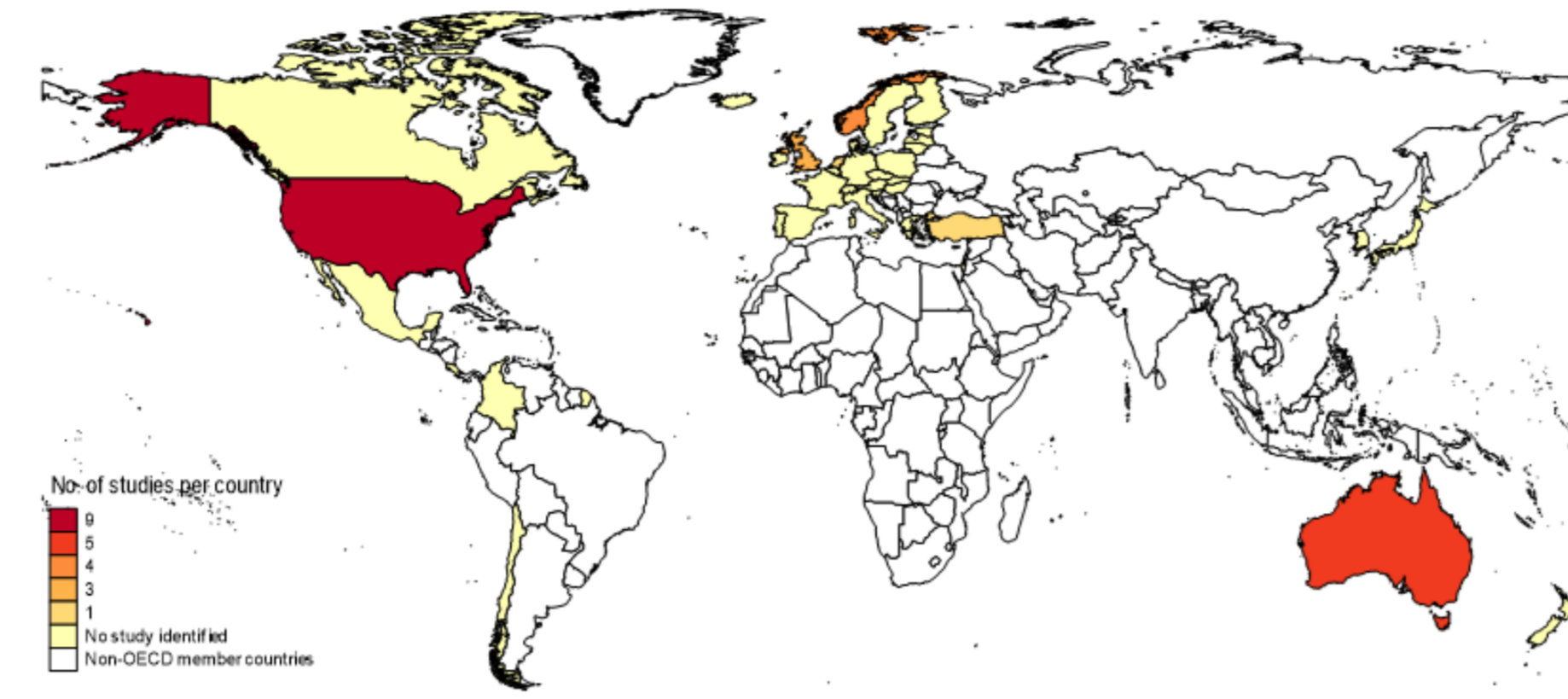


Figure 6: Included study by year of publication (N=23)

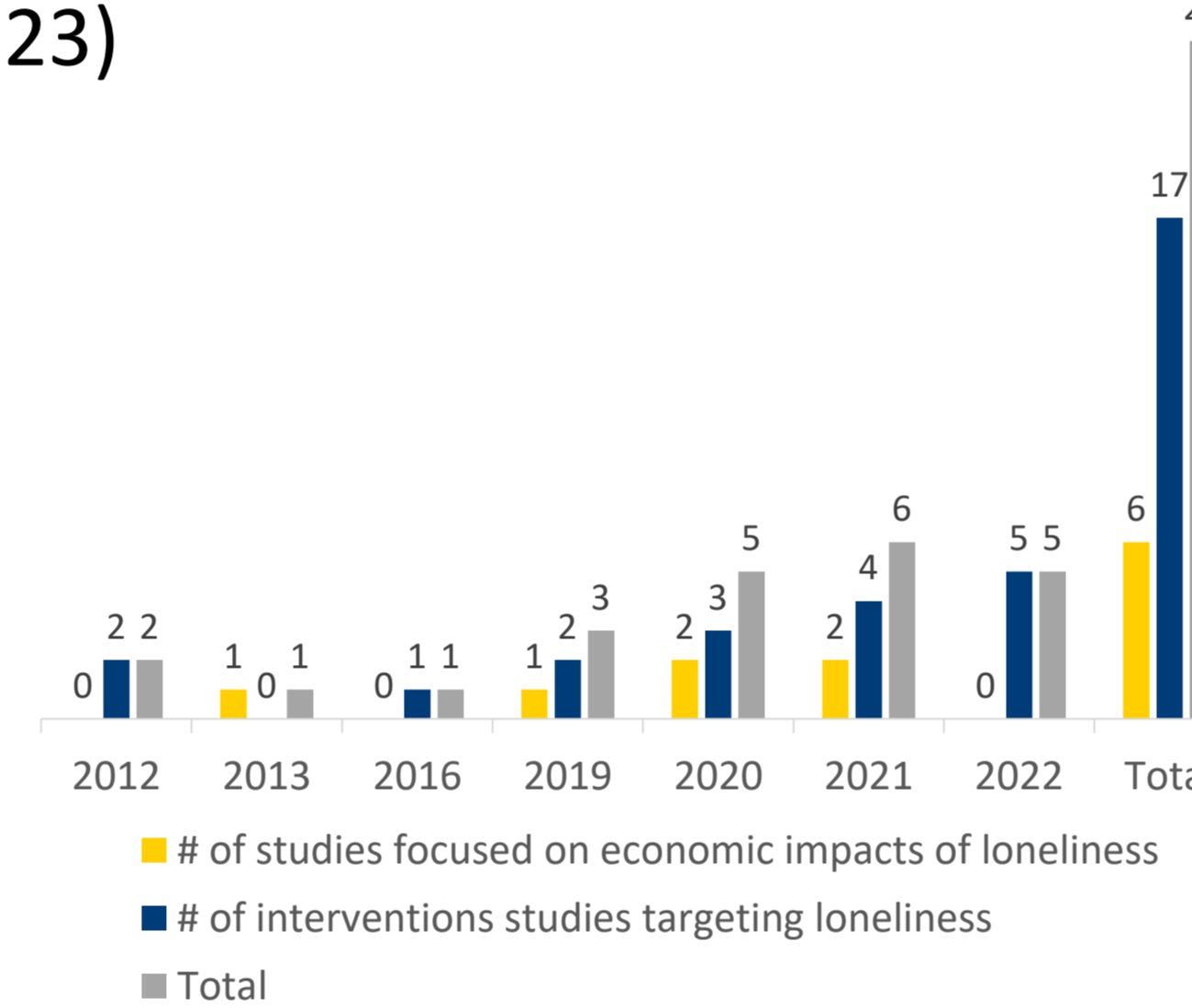
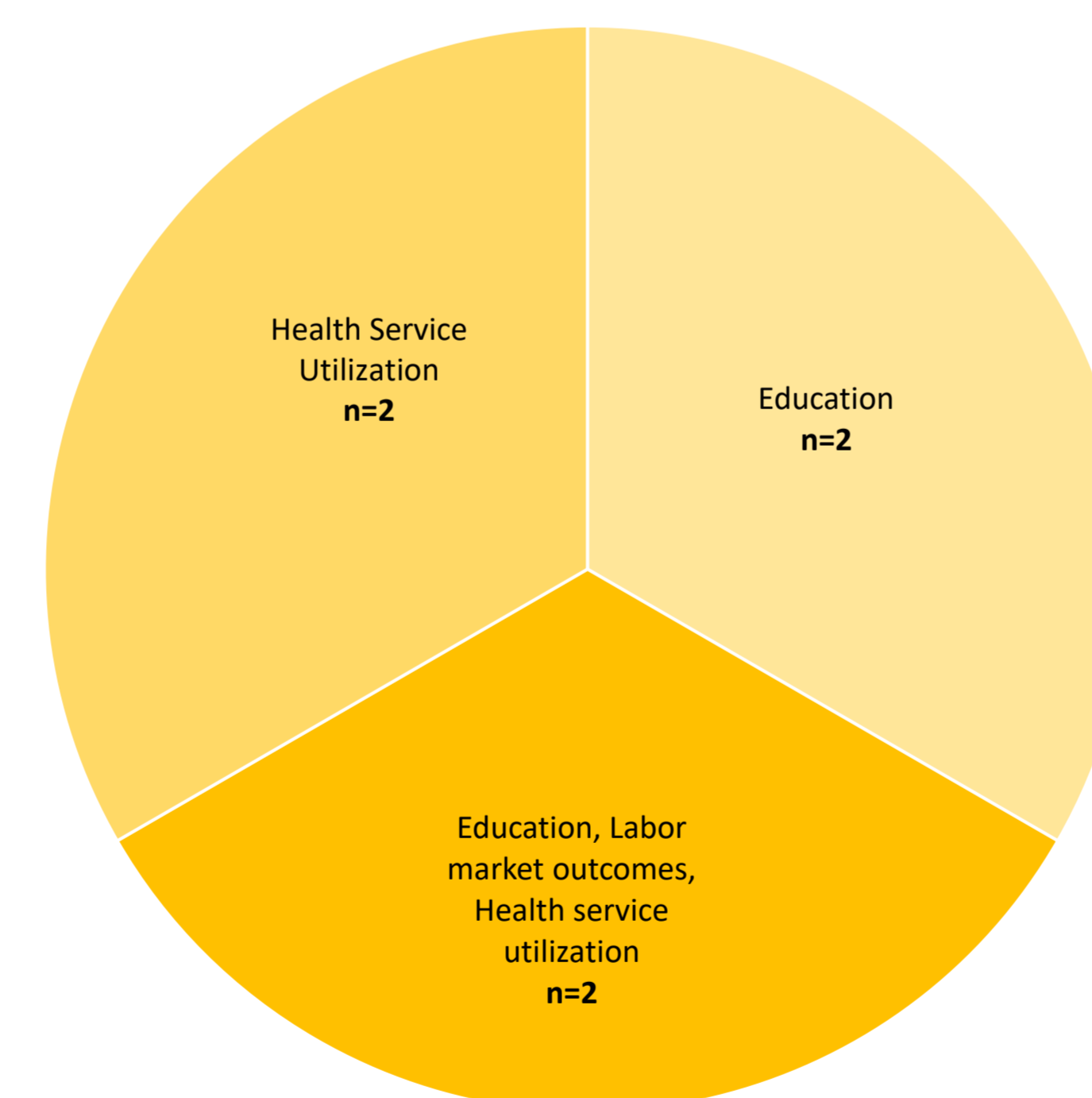


Figure 9: Economic outcomes dimensions (n=6)



## CONCLUSION

- Research assessing the economic implications of loneliness among young adults is at an infancy stage.
- There is a lack of Canadian literature on economic impacts of loneliness in young adults. The few studies that assessed the impact of loneliness on economic outcomes were done in Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- Loneliness was found to be directly associated with fewer employment opportunities, lower income, and lower academic achievement.
- Interventions to address loneliness in young adults included cognitive behavioral therapy, stress management, social facilitation, social support, and skills development.

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## RESULTS

Figure 4: Included studies by purpose (N=23)

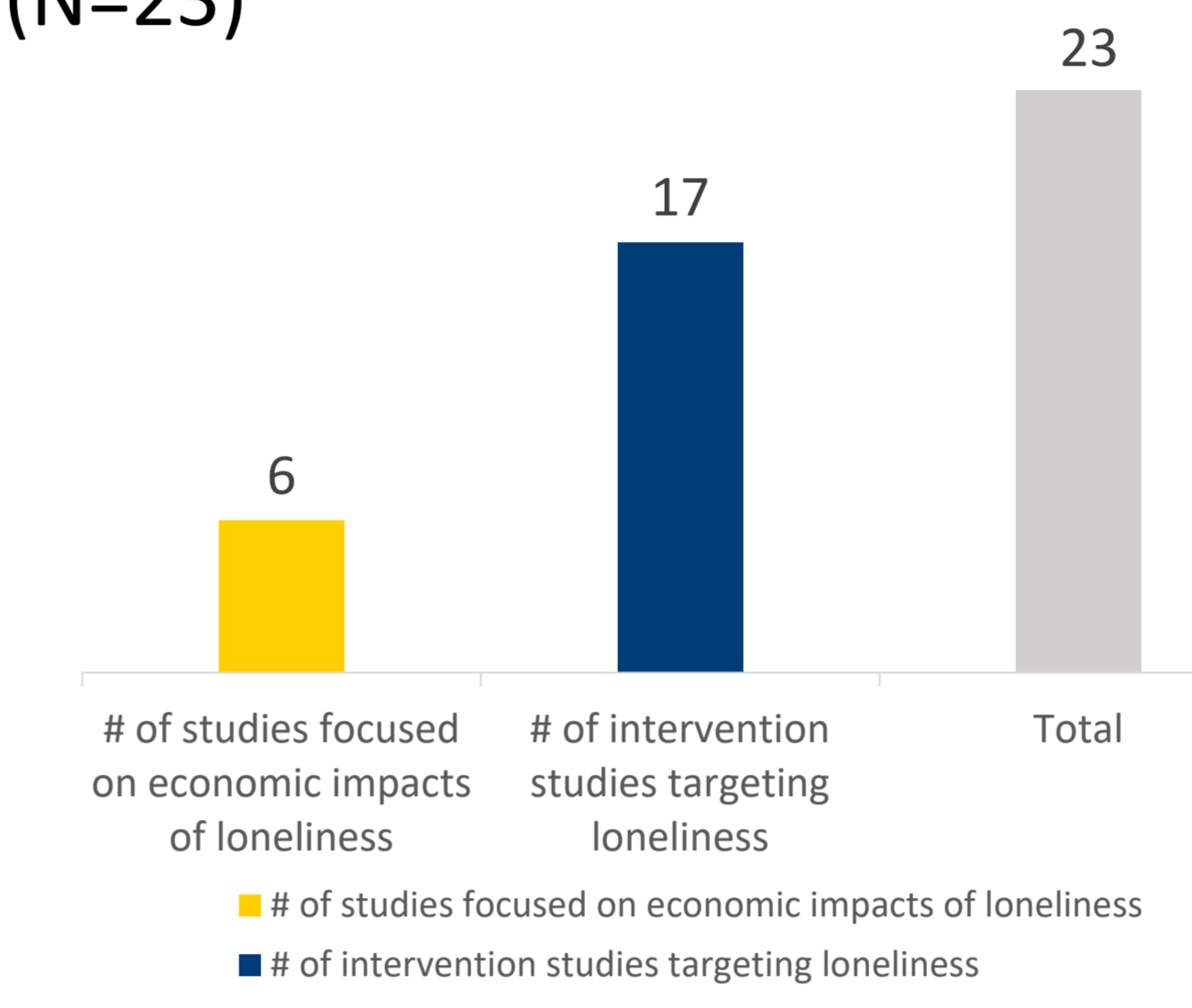


Figure 7: Characteristics of studies (% , N=23)

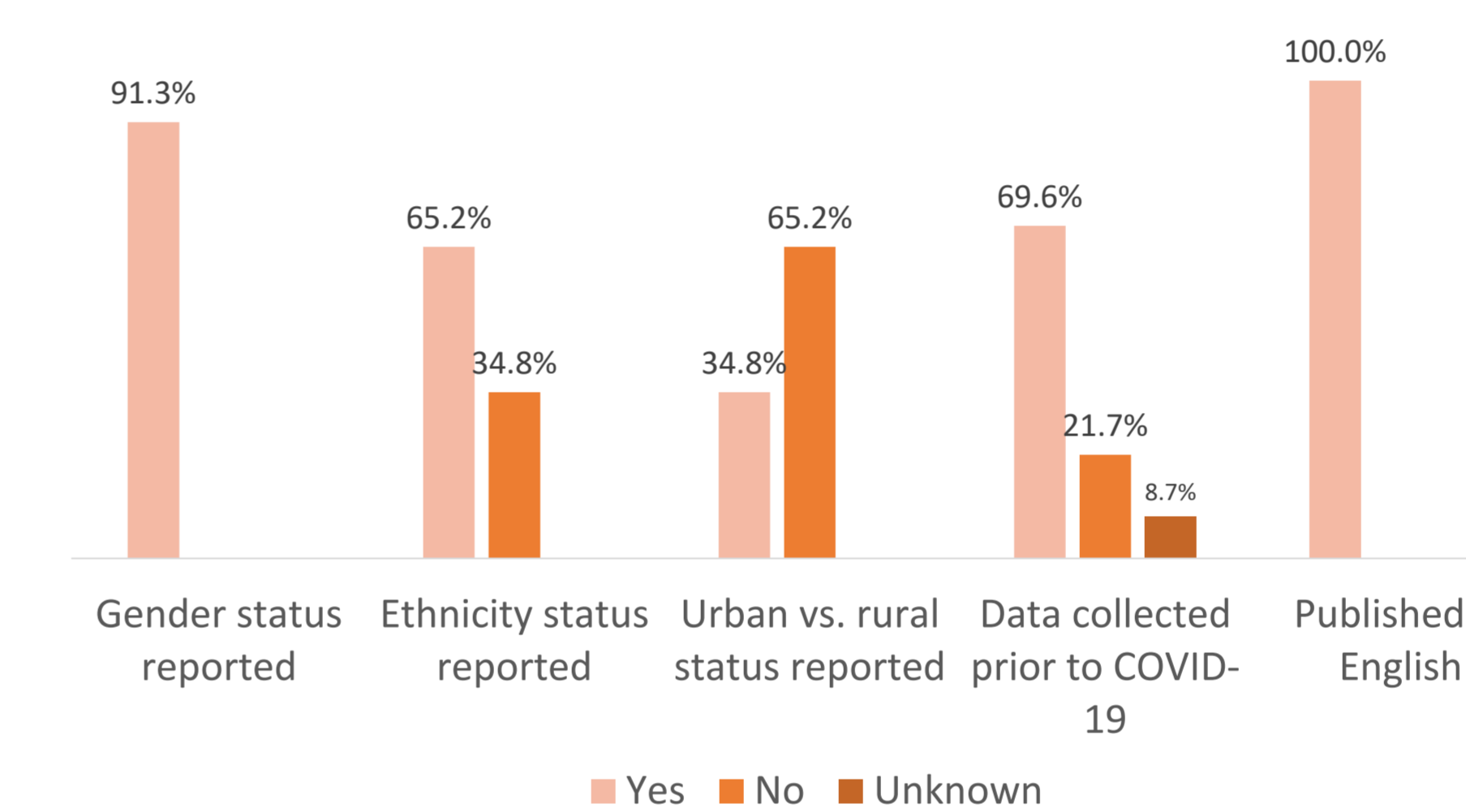


Figure 10: Interventions to reduce loneliness among young adults (n=17)

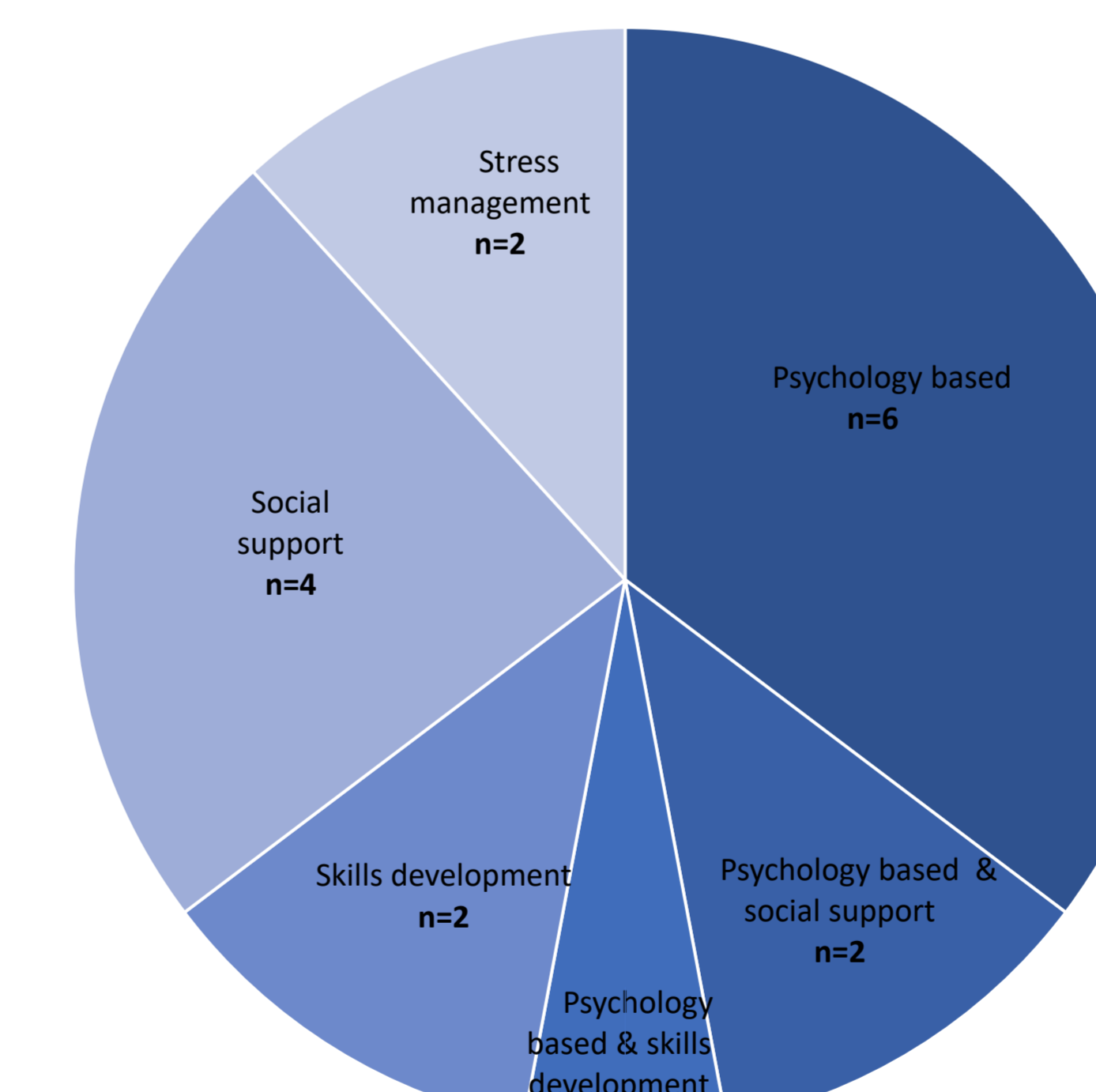


Figure 5: Included studies by country (N=23)

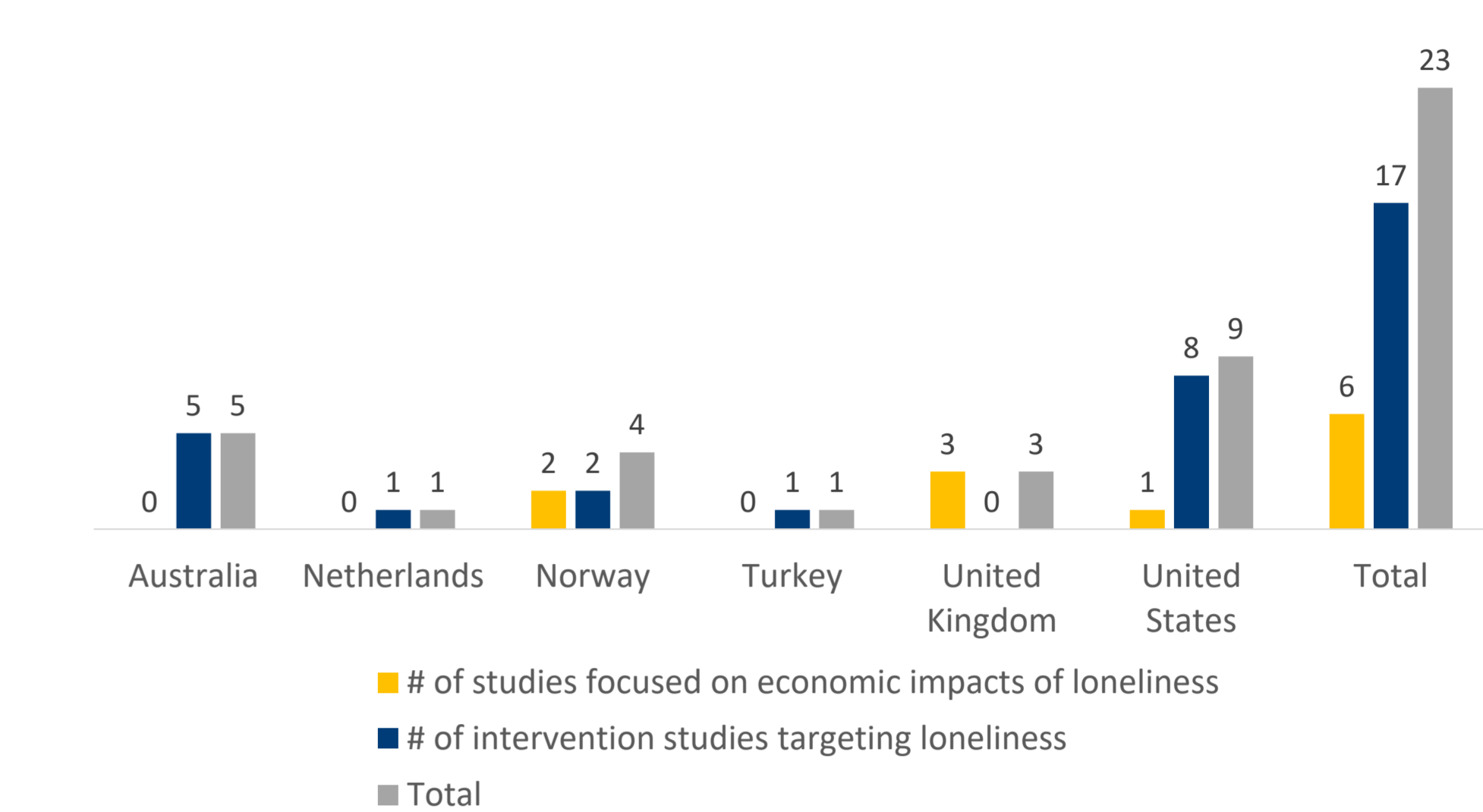


Figure 8: Included studies by loneliness measurement tool (N=23)

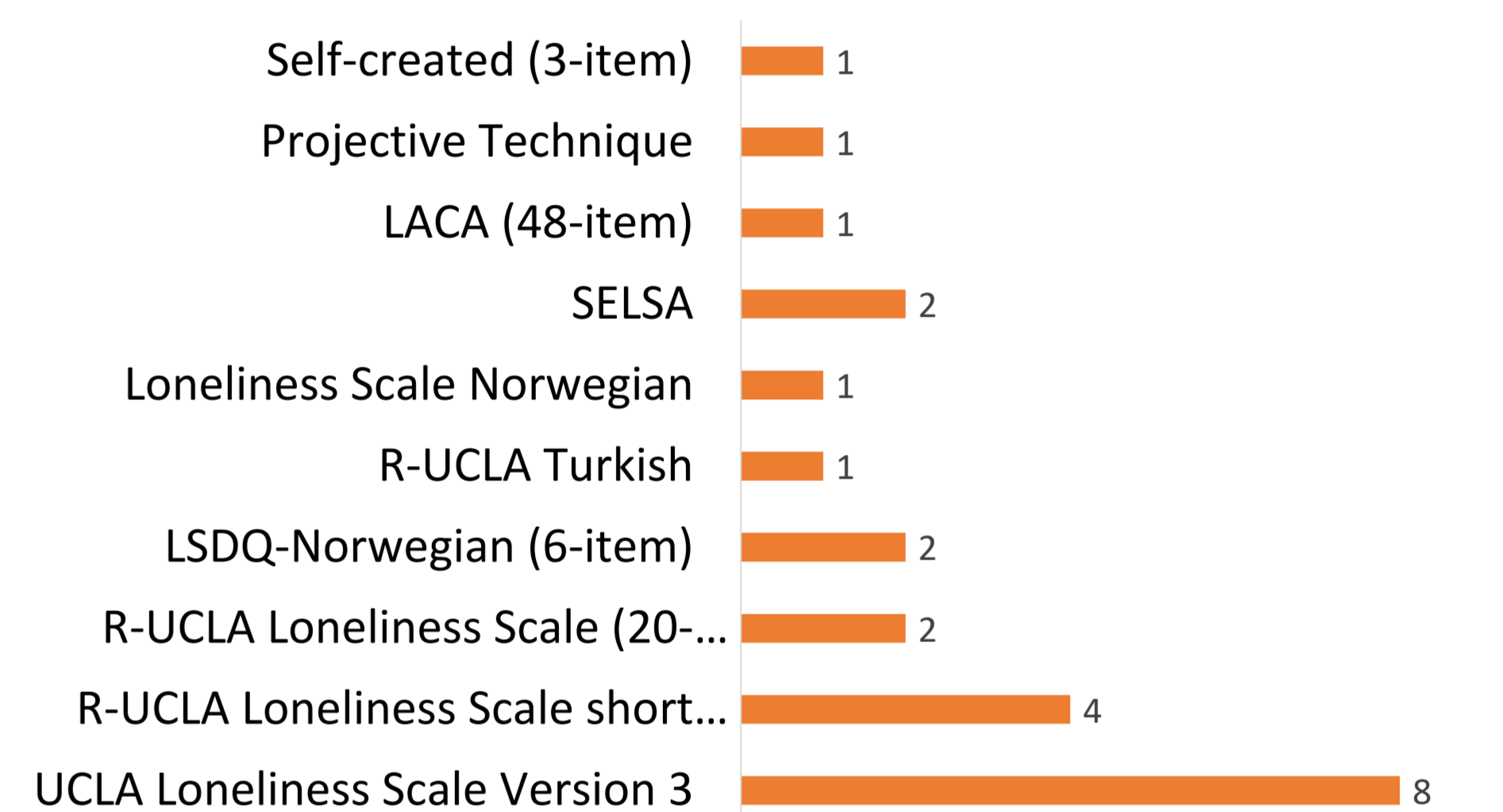


Figure 11: The negative economic impacts of loneliness and current intervention strategies

- Intention to quit upper secondary education
- General practitioner utilization & frequency
- Community & university mental health utilization
- Antidepressant prescription
- Annual income
- Psychology based interventions** aim to adapt, improve, or change cognitive patterns.
- Social support interventions** facilitate social interaction, identity, and companionship.
- Skills development interventions** teach social, romantic, and emotional-processing strategies to address deficits in coping and social skills.
- Stress management interventions** attempt to decrease the negative stress response attributed to loneliness.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Harness the power of existing data and develop new surveys using standardized tools to measure and monitor loneliness and economic outcome indicators.
- Design and implement a Canadian longitudinal study to address our gap in knowledge on the effects of loneliness across the life course and economic consequences linked to loneliness among young Canadians.
- Support further research on loneliness to help inform best-practices and policies on managing the increase of loneliness following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Develop initiatives and programming to encourage prosocial behavior involving all levels of government, organizations, communities, and education sectors.

## Acknowledgements:

Funding for this project was provided by the Social Science & Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Employment and Social Development Canada & the Prentice Institute for Global Population and Economy

