

Social Isolation in Older Adults: A Theory Synthesis

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Objectives

1. Discuss conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of models related to social isolation
2. Present a novel social isolation specific model for use in older adult populations
3. Discuss implications for nursing practice

Older Definition of Social Isolation

- The condition of having very low or extremely limited social networks
(Berkman, 1986; Lubben & Girona, 2003; Lubben, 2003)

Social Networks

- “... the web of social relationships that surround an individual and the characteristics of those ties” (Berkman et al., 2000, p. 847).

Consequences of Limited Social Networks

- Social isolation is a serious psychosocial problem for many adults aged 65⁺ (Berkman et al., 2000)
 - All-cause mortality (Berkman & Syme 1979, Ceria et al 2001,).
 - Cardiovascular risk (Brummett et al., 2001)
 - Re-hospitalization (Mistry et al., 2001)
 - Risk of falls (Faulkner et al., 2003),
 - Cognitive decline (Beland et al., 2005)
 - Increased alcohol consumption (Hansen, 1994)

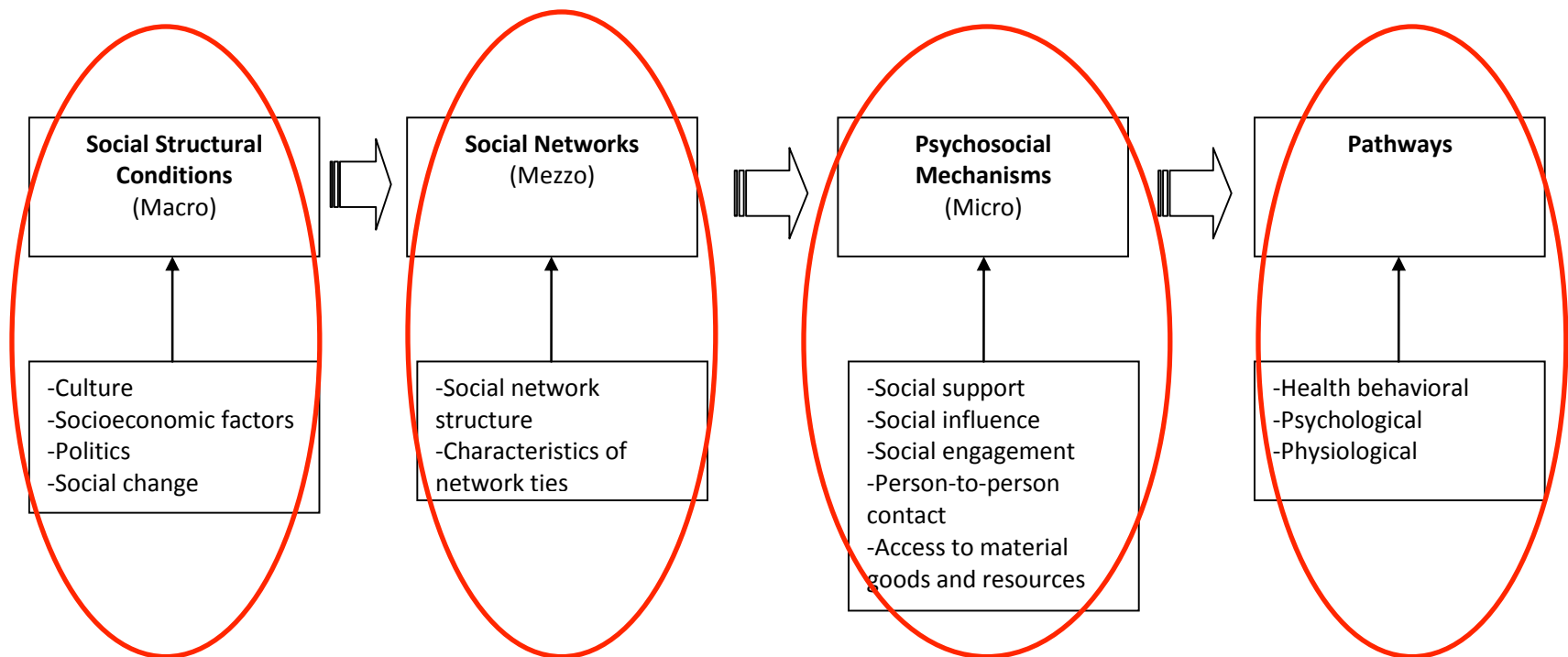


Berkman's linear public
health framework

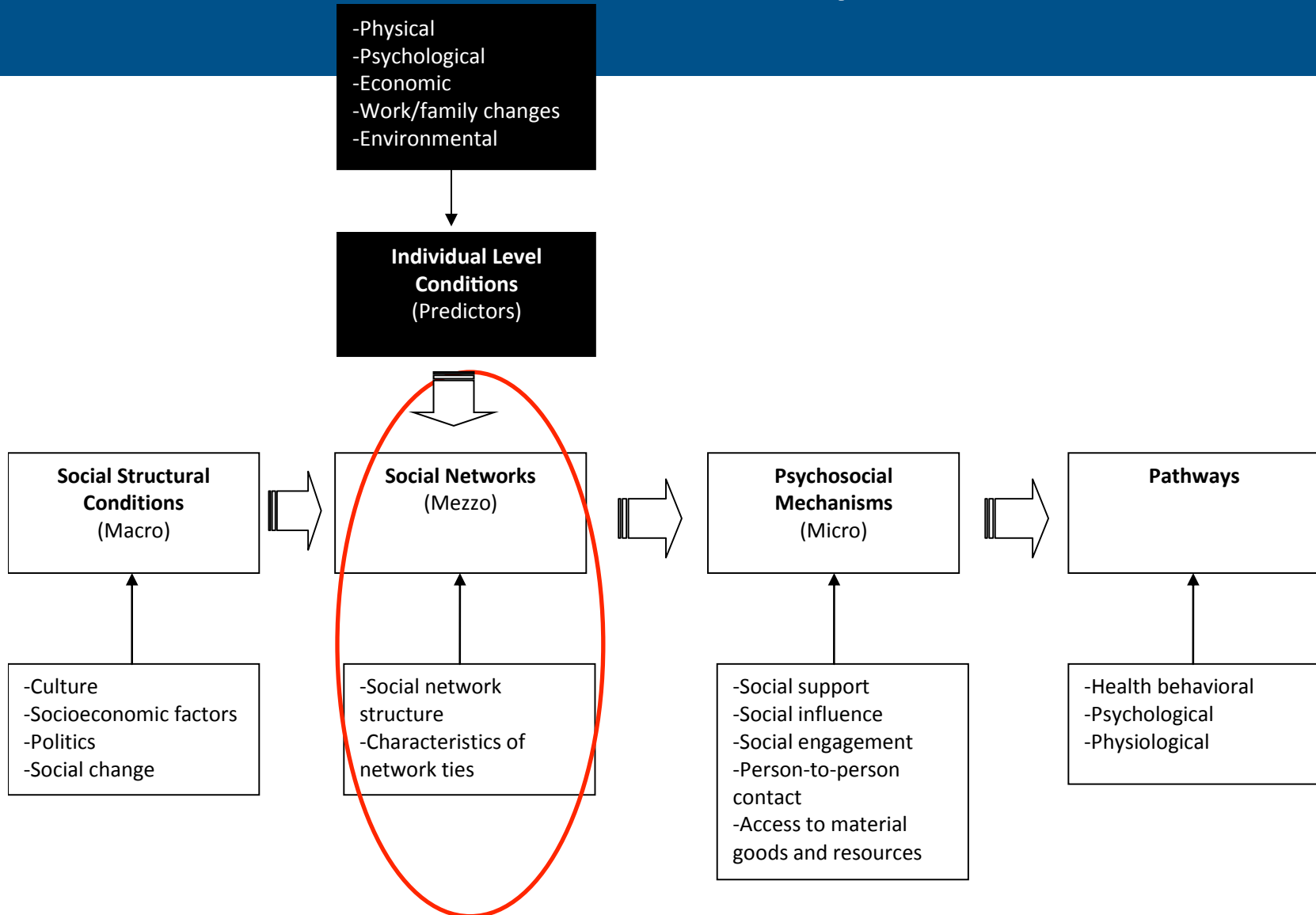
Berkman's Study Framework for Social Networks

UPSTREAM

DOWNSTREAM



Social Networks Study Framework



Independent Variable Categories

➤ **Physical**

- Overall health, change in health, BMI, co-morbidities, vision, hearing, urinary incontinence, fatigue, smoking, alcohol, visits from healthcare workers/ (caregivers)

➤ **Psychological**

- Depressive symptoms, number of household members, social activities/services, religious engagement

➤ **Economic**

- Work status

➤ **Work/family changes**

- Retirement status, life events (loss of close friend or relative, separated by move)

➤ **Environmental**

- Live alone, safety of living situation (neighborhood, building, room/ apt, and summary), siblings (still alive & had growing up)

➤ **Demographics**

- Age, gender, race, salary, education and marital status



Social Isolation:
Rethinking the Concept

The Concept

➤ Concept analysis:

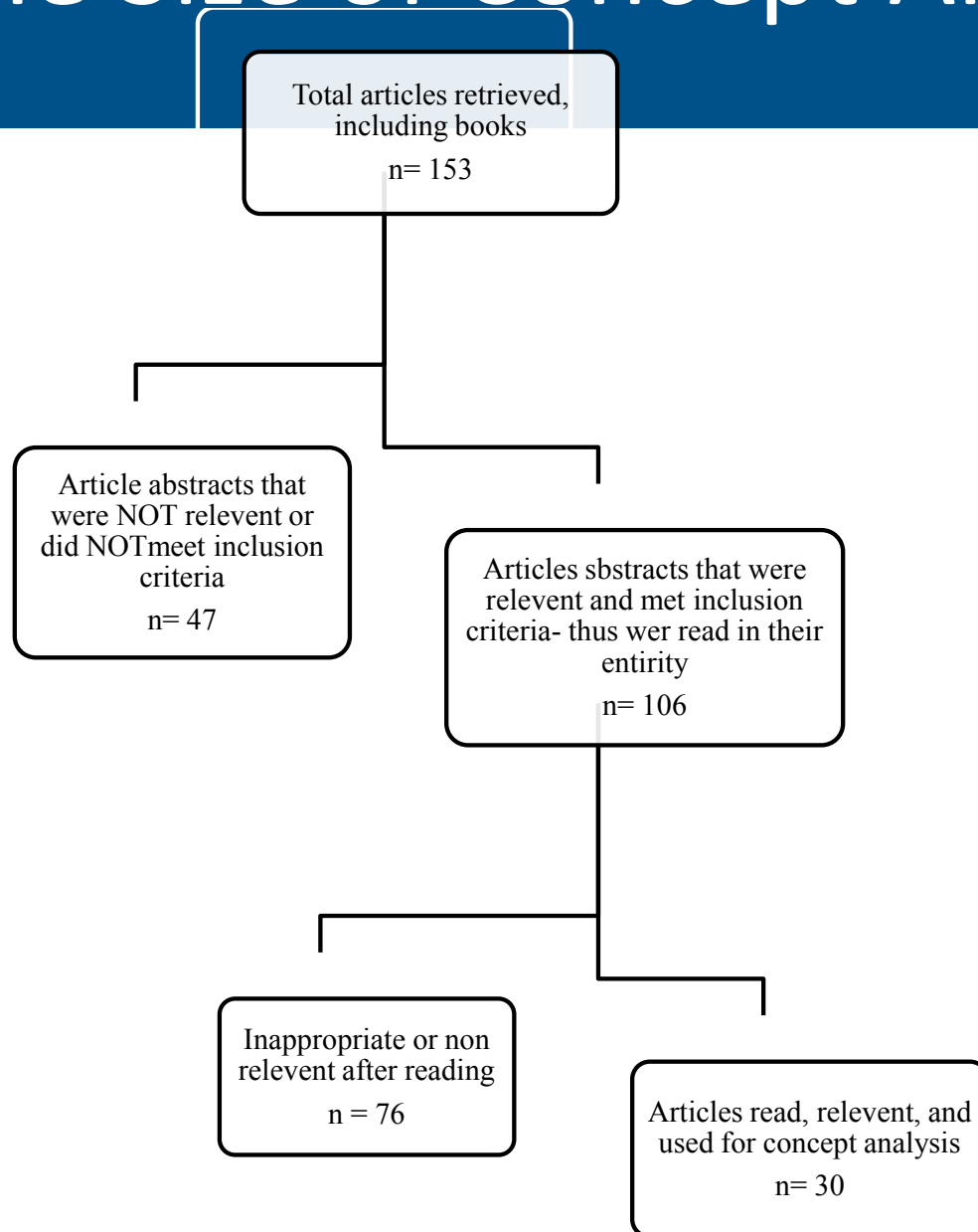
Social isolation in older adults: An evolutionary concept analysis.

Nicholson, N. (2009). Social isolation in older adults: An evolutionary concept analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 65(6) 1342-1352.

Concept Analysis Search Strategy

- CINAHL, PsycINFO, Medline databases and the Web of Science
- Key terms:
 - social isolation, social networks, older adults, elderly and social integration
- The inclusion criteria involved published material (i.e. no dissertations, theses or newspapers), for the period 1983–2007

Sample Size of Concept Analysis



Attributes From Concept Analysis of Social Isolation

- Belonging
- Social Contacts (Number)
- Quality Relationships
- Fulfilling relationships
- Engagement

Social Isolation Attributes

- **Belonging**

- “The experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that person feels themselves to be an integral part of that system of environment” (Hagerty et al, 1992, p.172)

- **Social Contacts (Number)**

- The number of individuals available to interact with by phone, in-person visits, or some other manner.

More Attributes of Social Isolation

- Quality

Relationships

- Individuals that provide both positive and negative influence on the older person. Relationships can be either health promoting or health damaging.

- Fulfilling

Relationships

- The subjective aspect of social isolation where the older person may or may not be satisfied with the relationships they have.

Even More Attributes of Social Isolation

- Engagement

- The actual act of interacting with an older adult in person or calling them on the phone.

New Definition of Social Isolation

- A state in which the individual lacks a sense of belonging socially, lacks engagement with others, has a minimal number of social contacts and they are deficient in fulfilling and quality relationships.



Development of a Theoretical
Model of Social Isolation

Reasons for Creating This Theoretical Model

- Lack of available model for social isolation
- Change of thinking about the meaning of the concept
- Refinement of thinking about the relationship of similar variables.
- Assist others

Methods

- A theory synthesis was undertaken in order to organize related concepts into a framework specific to older adults; as outlined by Walker & Avant (2005).

Search Strategy

- The following concepts were identified that had the potential to increase the understanding of social isolation:
 - Engagement
 - Belonging
 - Quality of social relationships
 - Social support
 - Social networks
 - Loneliness
 - Aloneness

Databases

- The previous keywords were entered in the databases of PsychINFO, CINAHL, and MEDLINE

Inclusion Criteria

- A. Publications written in English
- B. Samples of adults 65 and older
- C. Potential contribution to the theoretical understanding of social isolation
- D. Material published from the year 1985-2011.

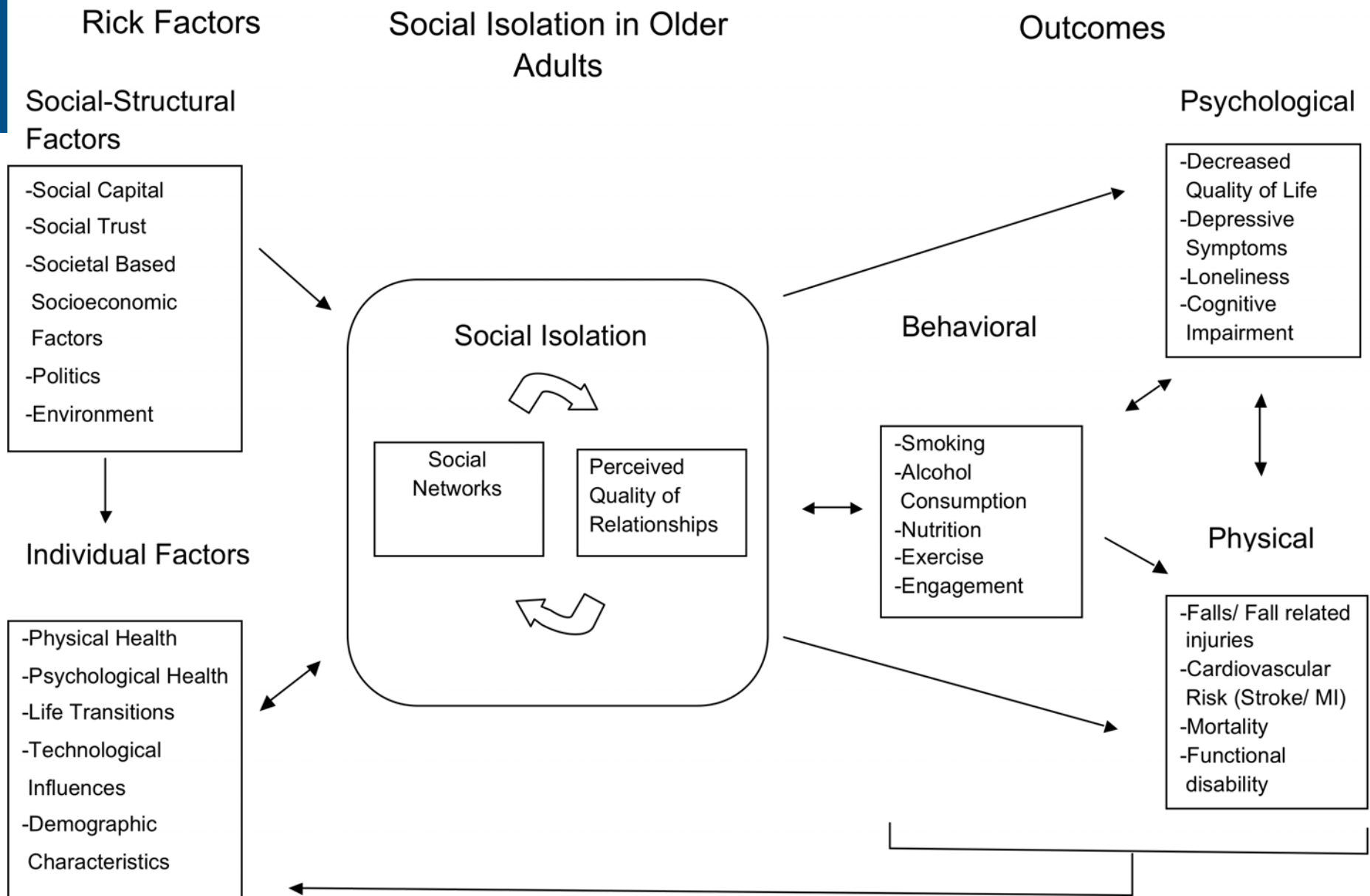
Review Process

- After inclusion criteria were applied, an initial review of article titles was undertaken.
- Following this, abstracts from remaining publications deemed relevant based on title were read.
- After irrelevant publications were discarded, remaining publications were read in their entirety to ensure their relevance to social isolation.

Findings

- The initial search uncovered 1,120 articles
- There were another 135 articles added from the reference lists for a total of a total of 1,255.
- Once inclusion criteria were applied the total number of relevant articles was brought down to 319.
- After the titles were reviewed, abstracts viewed, and articles read; this left 139 articles relevant to social isolation

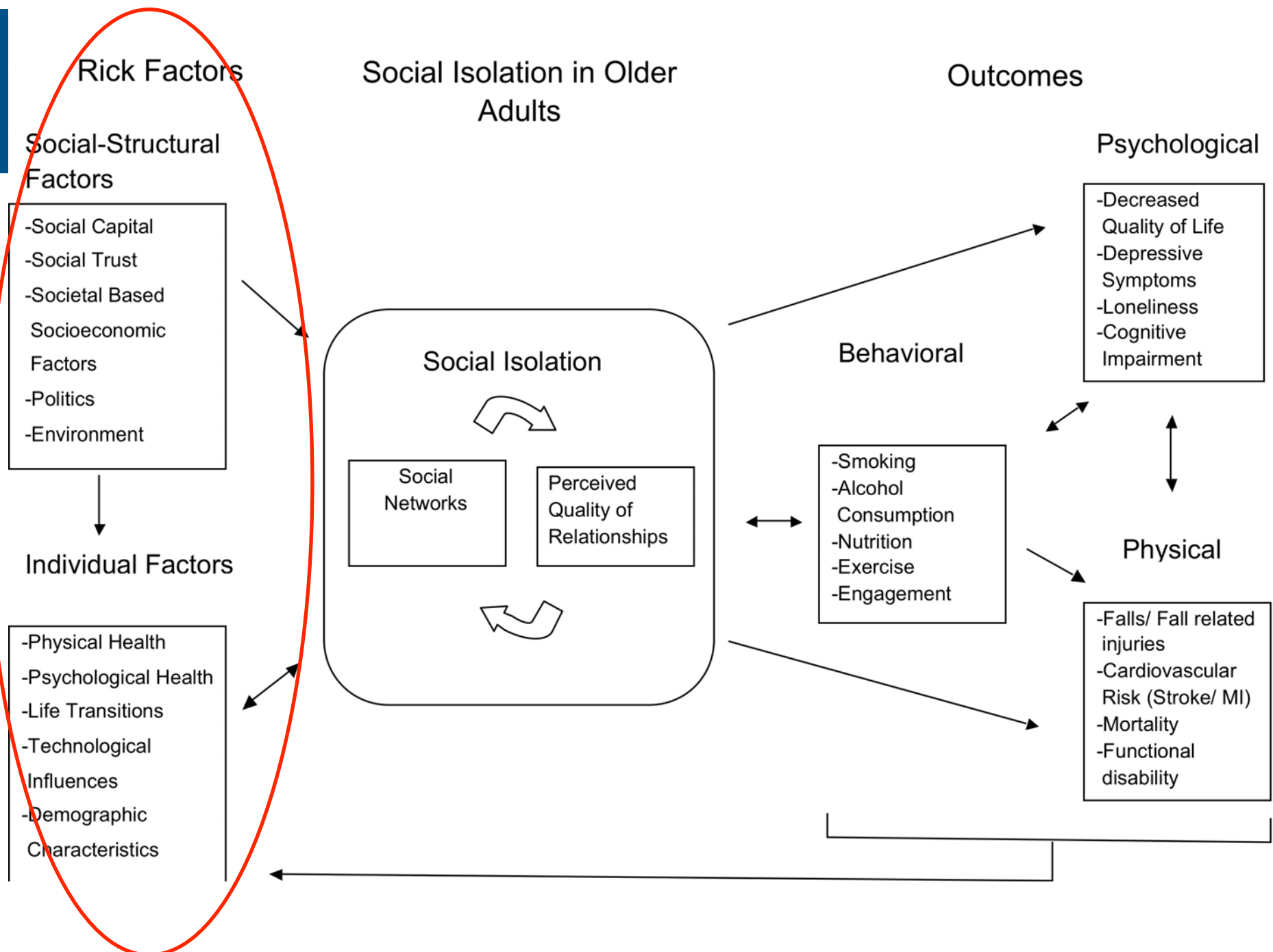
Figure 1. Proposed Social Isolation Theoretical Model



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Risk Factors

Figure 1. Proposed Social Isolation Theoretical Model



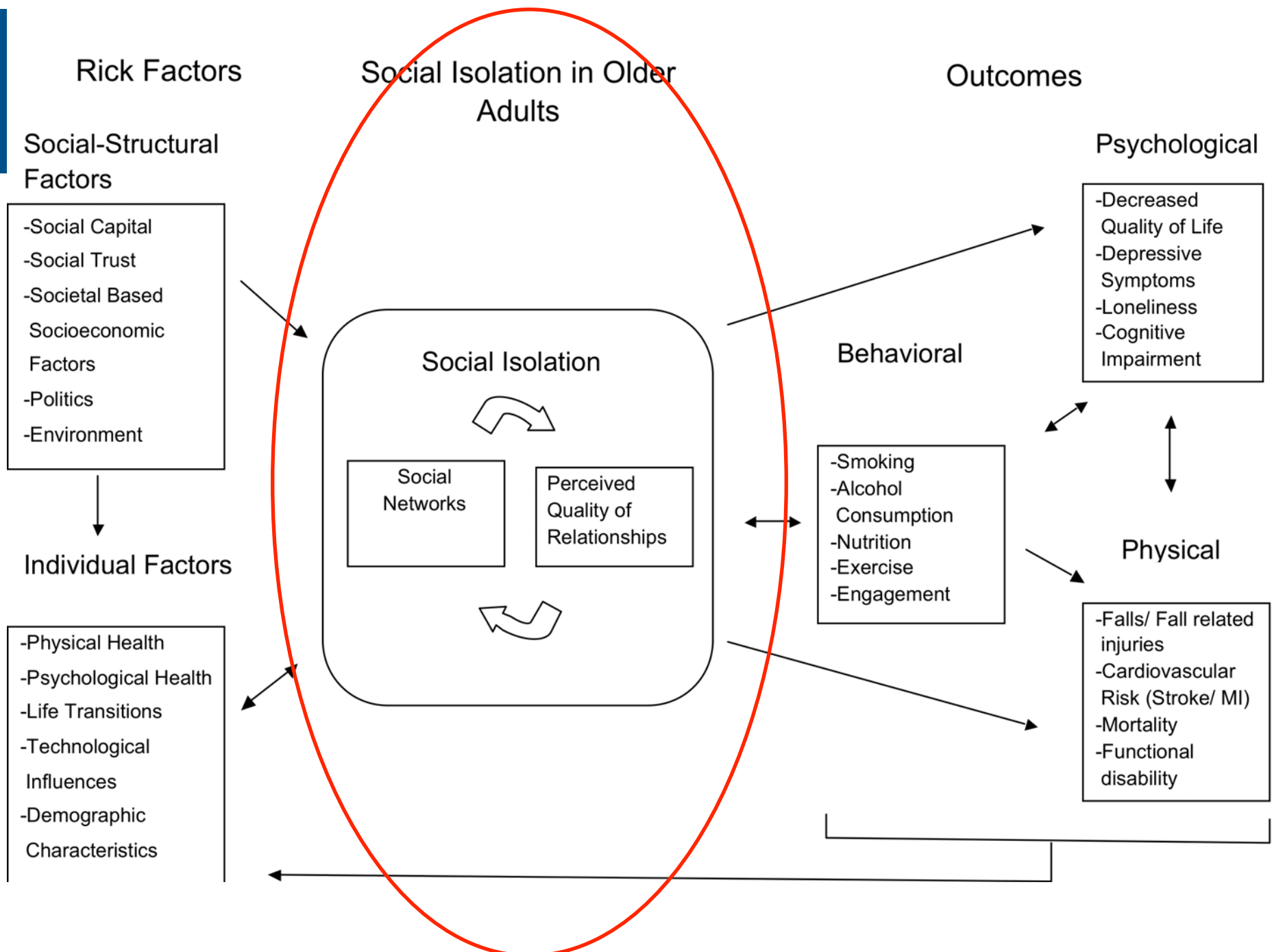
Social-Structural Factors

- 1) Social capital
- 2) Social trust
- 3) Societal based socioeconomic status
- 4) Politics
- 5) Environment

Individual Factors

- 1) Physical health
- 2) Psychological health
- 3) Life transitions
- 4) Technology
- 5) Demographic characteristics

Figure 1. Proposed Social Isolation Theoretical Model



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Social Isolation

Refinement of Thinking on What Social Isolation Means

1. Objective

- Social Contacts (Number)

2. Subjective

- Perceived Quality of Social Relationships (diminished)
 - Belonging
 - Overall Quality
 - Social support

Social Networks

- “the web of social relationships that surround an individual” (Berkman et al. 2000, p.847).
- The concept of social networks can be thought of as “the vehicle through which social support is provided ...the structure” (Langford et al. 1997, p. 97).

Perceived Quality of Relationships: Belonging

- ‘...the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that person feels themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment’ (Hagerty et al. 1992, p. 172).

Perceived Quality of Relationships: Overall Quality

- Social relationships have the potential for both health promoting and health damaging effects in older adults (Seeman 2000).
- Older adults who are in non-fulfilling relationships feel a personal isolation from others (Locher et al. 2005).

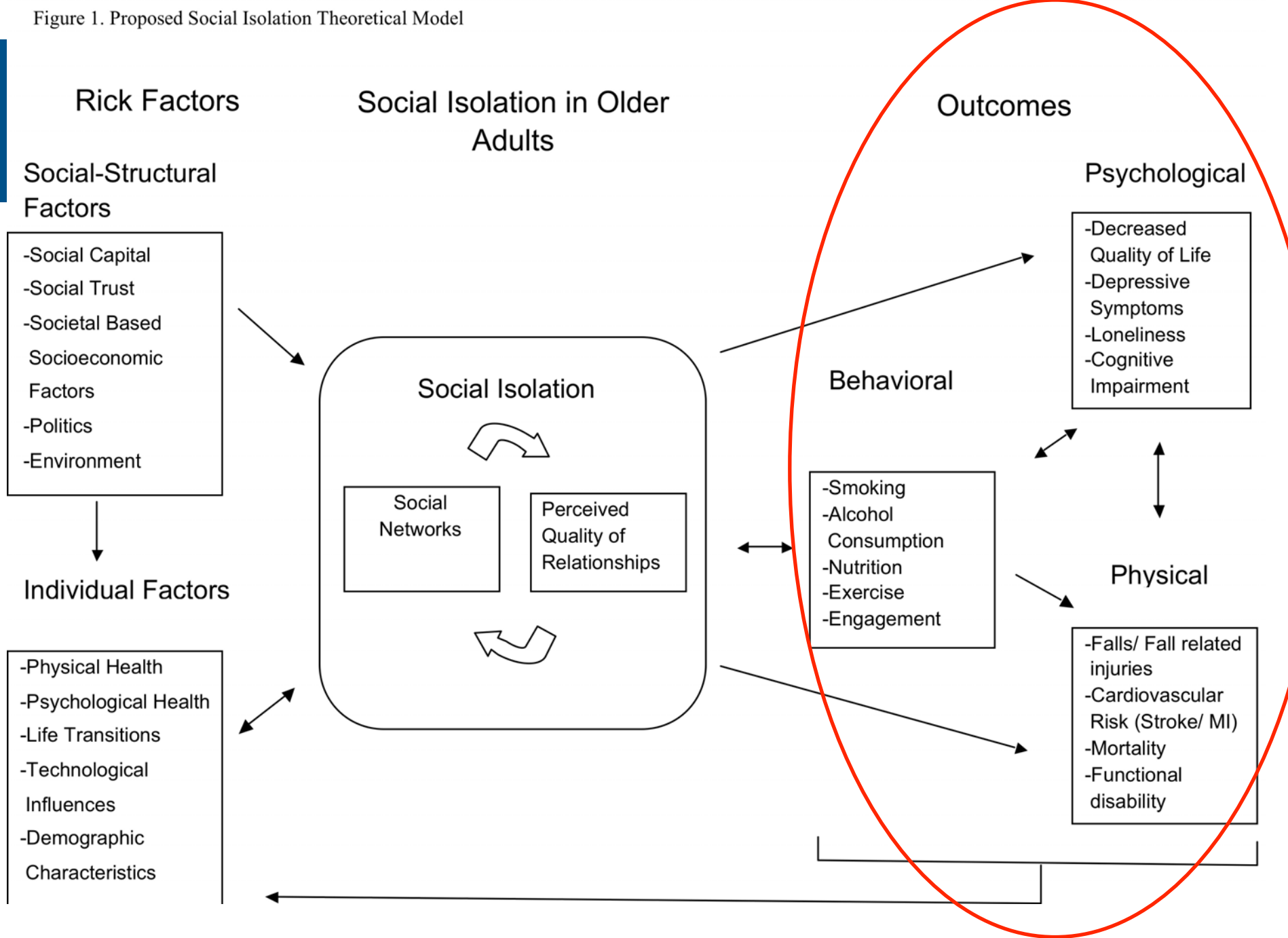
Perceived Quality of Relationships: Social Support

- Social support is defined as the interactive process in which emotional, instrumental, or financial aid is obtained from one's social network (Bowling 1991)
- Four defining attributes of social support have been proposed
 - emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support (Langford et al. 1997)

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Outcomes

Figure 1. Proposed Social Isolation Theoretical Model



Behavioral

- Social isolation impacts health independently through its impact on health behaviors
- Smoking (Eng, 2002)
- Drinking (Eng, 2002; Hanson, 1994)

Psychological

- **Decreased quality of life** (Gallicchio et al. 2007).
- **Depression** (Dorfman et al. 1995, Oxman et al. 1992).
- **Loneliness** (Perlman 1987, Walton et al. 1991; Younger 1995).
- **Increased risk of cognitive decline** (Barnes et al. 2004, Beland et al. 2005)

Physical

- **Number of falls** (Faulkner et al. 2003).
- **Risk of functional disability** (Mendes de Leon et al. 2001; Mendes de Leon et al. 2003).
- **Increased risk for all-cause mortality** (Eng et al. 2002, Berkman 1984).
- **Mortality from coronary heart disease/
stroke** (Eng et al. 2002, Brummett et al. 2001, Boden-Albala et al. 2005)

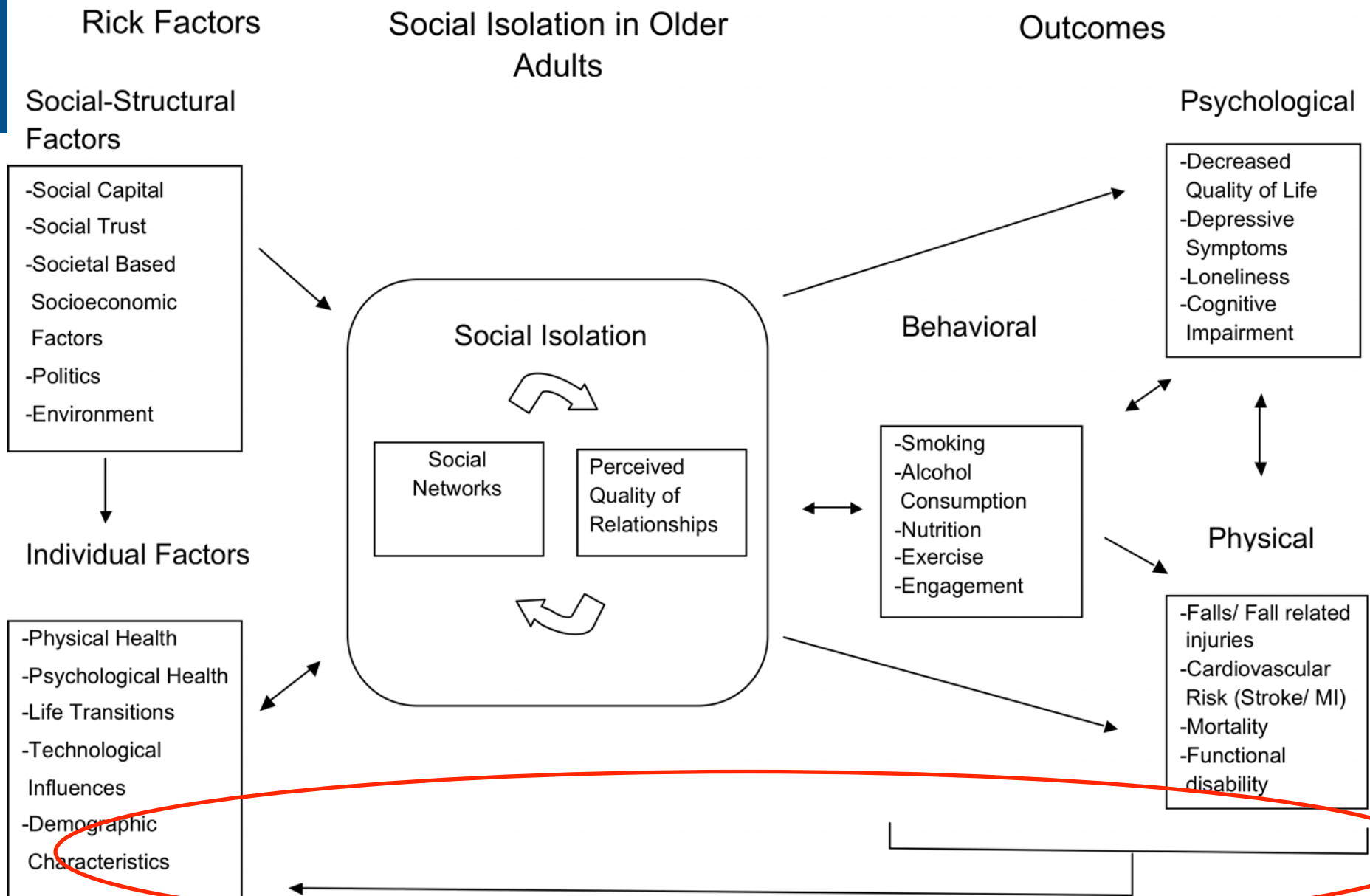


Downward Spiral

Discussion

- This model of social isolation suggests a downward spiral and detrimental health outcomes in older adults.

Figure 1. Proposed Social Isolation Theoretical Model



Discussion Cont'd

- This **model** outlines risk factors for potential assessment priorities of nurses, while at the same time taking into consideration the complex subjective and objective nature of social isolation.

Why is this an Important Issue for Nursing?

- Nurses who go into people's homes (i.e. visiting nurses) have unabated access to the most socially isolated older persons & can help identify those in need.
- Psychosocial factors such as social isolation impact the quality of life and is important information to know when determining plans of care of older persons
 - Do they have someone to check on them
 - Can they get a ride to the health care provider
 - Are there individuals who will encourage them to take medications or follow healthy preventative behaviors



Thank you

Questions & Comments

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