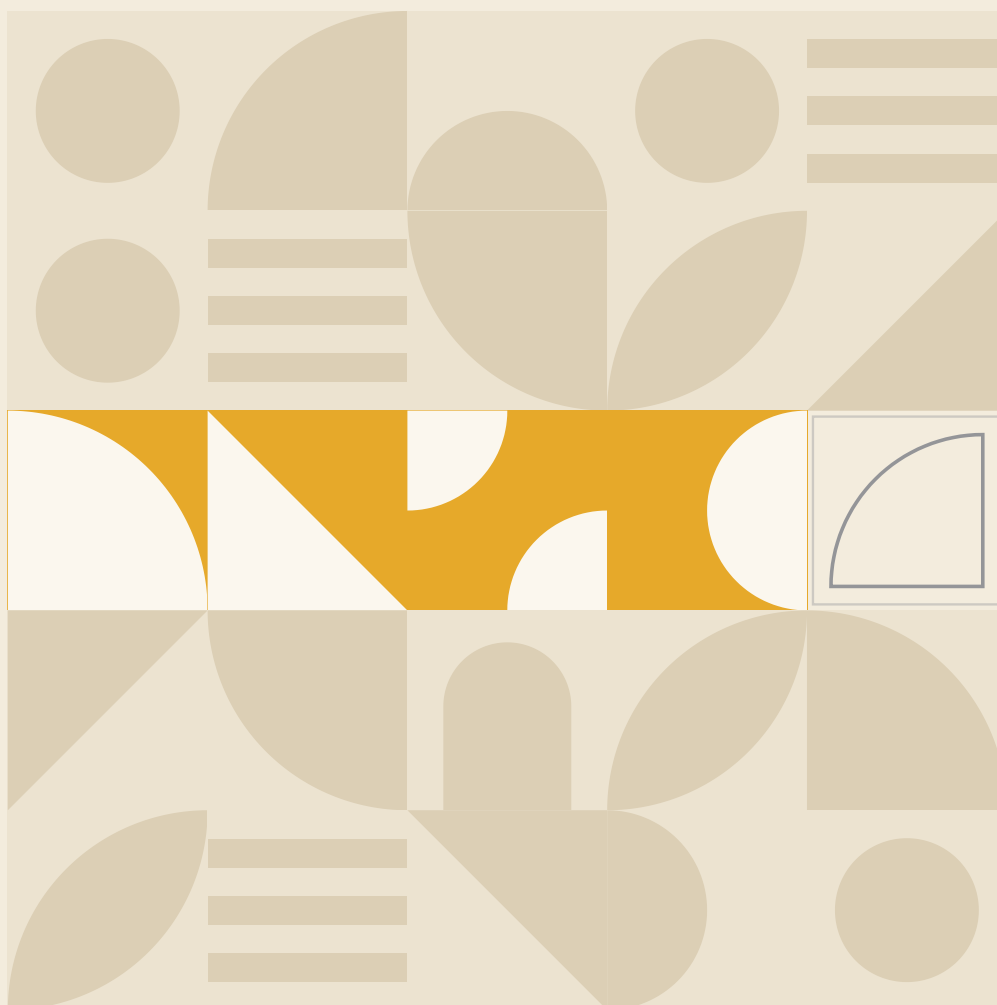


Lonely at Work

A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Workplace Loneliness Interventions

Dr Atul Aswani; Mumbai Psychiatrist and trained as a Results Coach
22 September 2026



KEY NUMBER

4

Four controlled occupational trials measured loneliness after a workplace programme. That is below the pre-specified threshold of five comparable trials, so effects were not pooled.

Lonely at Work

A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Workplace Loneliness Interventions

What has actually been tried against workplace loneliness, and what worked?

CONTENTS

- | | | | |
|----|------------------|----|------------|
| 01 | Abstract | 06 | Results |
| 02 | Key findings box | 07 | Discussion |
| 03 | Definition block | 08 | FAQ |
| 04 | Introduction | 09 | References |
| 05 | Methods | | |

INDEXING TITLE

Workplace loneliness interventions: a systematic review and meta-analysis

AUTHOR

Dr Atul Aswani; Mumbai Psychiatrist and trained as a Results Coach

PUBLISHED

22 September 2026 · English edition · emotionapp.in/research/workplace-loneliness-interventions-review

01

Abstract

Workplace loneliness is common, costly, and strangely under-tested. Four controlled occupational trials measured loneliness after a workplace programme; a meta-analysis was not performed. This PRISMA-2020 systematic review asked what has been tested against workplace loneliness in employed adults from 2010 to 2026, and what worked. Searches covered PubMed, PsycINFO-equivalent sources, Scopus and Web of Science via public interfaces, Google Scholar, CTRI, ClinicalTrials.gov, UMIN-CTR and OSF. Eligible designs were randomised or otherwise controlled trials of any programme targeting loneliness or connection at work, with loneliness, belonging or social connection as outcomes. Four completed trials met the loneliness-outcome bar. All four were United States military samples. Two short leader-support coaching programmes (about 60–90 minutes) produced small reductions in employee loneliness against usual practice. One eight-hour social-resilience package produced a small decrease relative to an active control. One condensed unit-connection package of about three and a half hours did not change loneliness. Certainty of evidence is low to very low: few trials, high indirectness to civilian and Indian knowledge work, unblinded self-report, and attrition. No completed, peer-reviewed controlled trial of a workplace loneliness programme was found in India. The India-registered garment-worker pairing study remains unpublished. Until more trials exist, the honest claim is narrow. Brief leader coaching that teaches supportive behaviours has a replicated, small loneliness signal. A pooled effect size is not yet possible. Indian programmes should treat that signal as a starting hypothesis, not as product-market fit.

02

Key findings box

KEY FINDINGS

- 4** **Four** controlled occupational trials measured loneliness after a workplace programme. That is below the pre-specified threshold of five comparable trials, so effects were not pooled.
-
- 0.21** The cleanest workplace number is a Cohen's **d** of **-0.21** against usual practice after a 90-minute leader-support session, in one United States Army cluster trial of 276 service members.
-
- 28** Gallup's 2026 country cut finds **28 per cent** of Indian employees reported feeling lonely a lot of the previous day, against 22 per cent globally.
-
- 0.35** Workplace loneliness tracks job outcomes in the correlational literature: job performance **r = -0.35**, job satisfaction **r = -0.34**, burnout **r = 0.39**.
-
- 0** Completed, published controlled trials of a workplace loneliness programme conducted in India: **zero**.

03

Definition block

DEFINITION

Workplace loneliness is the painful gap between the connection a person wants at work and the connection they think they have. It is not the same as working alone. A night-shift nurse can be surrounded by people and still feel unseen. A remote analyst can have a full calendar and still feel like a guest in their own team. The feeling has two familiar faces. One is emotional deprivation: there is no one at work who quite gets you. The other is social companionship: there is no group that feels like yours. The mind then does what minds do under prediction error. It scans for rejection and pulls back a little. The analyst stays quiet on the Friday call, nobody asks why, and the original prediction comes true. That is the loop. Graph models would call it a missing edge that starves the node. None of this is a diagnosis. It is a map of a very ordinary human discrepancy, measured in workplaces with short loneliness questionnaires.

04

Introduction

Two colleagues in Pune share a Slack channel and the same morning stand-up. One of them is fine. The other is performing “fine”. Her camera stays off. Her replies are quick and cheerful. Since the team went hybrid, nobody has asked her anything that was not about a deadline.

That gap has a name. Workplace loneliness is the sense that the relationships available at work are thinner than the relationships a person needs. It is not shyness, and it is not introversion. It is a discrepancy. Ozcelik and Barsade showed why organisations should care. In two firms, lonelier employees were rated as less effective by their supervisors. The path ran through lower approachability and lower affective commitment. In practice, she stops ping-ponging her lead with half-formed ideas. The lead reads her as distant and stops looping her in. She ends up further outside. That is the regulatory loop Cacioppo described for loneliness in general, imported into organisational life.

The correlational bill is now quantified. Bryan and colleagues pooled workplace studies and found loneliness associated with worse job performance ($r = -0.35$), lower job satisfaction ($r = -0.34$), a worse relationship with the manager ($r = -0.31$) and higher burnout ($r = 0.39$). Those are not tiny associations. They are the size of effects that talent teams already treat as material. What they are not is evidence that a programme will move the number. Association is not an A/B test. Entrepreneurship has a blunt version of the same rule: a customer-interview theme is not product-market fit.

The general loneliness literature is far ahead of the workplace literature. Masi, Chen, Hawkey and Cacioppo reviewed loneliness programmes across settings in 2011. Among randomised comparisons the mean effect was small (about -0.20). Programmes that addressed unhelpful social thinking did better (about -0.60) than programmes that only added contact or support. Hickin and colleagues later estimated a moderate effect for psychological programmes in mixed-age samples (Hedges $g = 0.43$). Lasgaard and colleagues, in a 2026 update covering hundreds of studies, put the short-term randomised effect near half a standard deviation. Almost none of that evidence was built in offices, factories, or hybrid teams. McCarthy and colleagues’ 2025 management review of 233 empirical workplace studies still had to flag the intervention gap.

India makes the gap sharper, not smaller. Work is still one of the main adult social institutions in Indian cities. People leave family networks to join a firm in Bengaluru, Pune, Gurugram or Mumbai. Colleagues become the weekday village. When that village moves onto a laptop, the informal glue goes first: the tea-stand conversation, the shared auto, the birthday sweet box that did not need a calendar invite. Gallup’s 2026 State of the Global Workplace country cut finds 28 per cent of Indian employees reported loneliness a lot of the previous day, against 22 per cent globally. South Asia sits at the same 28 per cent. In the 2024 global cut, fully remote staff reported daily loneliness at 25 per cent against 16 per cent on-site, with hybrid in between at 21 per cent.

Indian observational work is not empty. Firoz, Chaudhary and Lata surveyed 934 manufacturing and service employees and found a below-average mean on a workplace loneliness scale, with age, marital status and the number of friends at work making a difference, and gender, tenure, hierarchy and sector (manufacturing or service) making none. Later Indian field studies linked loneliness to lower creativity and citizenship, higher work–family conflict, and a pathway from meaningless work through loneliness to reduced creative effort, buffered by perceived organisational support. Those papers tell us the construct travels. They do not tell us what to run on Monday morning.

This review exists because the question working adults actually ask is not “is loneliness correlated with burnout”. They already know it is. The question is: what has been tried, and what worked? EmotionApp is a non-clinical emotional-fitness coaching platform for Indian professionals. It delivers positive-psychology techniques as countable daily reps, with an AI coach and a human hand-off, WhatsApp-first, in 23 Indian languages, on India-resident infrastructure, under DPDP, ISO 9001 and ISO 13485. A platform like that should not ship a loneliness module on vibes. It should ship on trials. This paper is the trial census.

The research question is simple. In employed adults, what workplace programmes targeting loneliness or connection have been tested in controlled designs between 2010 and 2026, and what happened to loneliness, belonging and social connection?

A lesson from model training belongs here. If you have four labelled examples and they all come from one domain — say, US Army units — you do not fine-tune a general model and announce a global loss. You report the four examples. You name the domain shift. You refuse to pool. That is the spirit of this review.

05

Methods

Eligibility

Population: employed adults, including occupational samples such as military units and professional staff. Intervention or exposure: any programme, training, coaching session, structured practice or organisational change that targeted loneliness, belonging or social connection at work. Comparator: any control, including usual practice, waitlist or an active alternative programme. Primary outcomes: loneliness; belonging; social connection or closely related constructs (perceived isolation, workplace friendships, support-network density) when loneliness itself was not measured. Years: 1 January 2010 to 22 September 2026. Designs: randomised trials and other controlled trials. Language: no restriction at search; extraction required an English abstract or a verifiable translation of key numbers.

Exclusion: studies of children or of older adults outside paid work; community or neighbourhood programmes with no workplace delivery; correlational and qualitative papers used only for context; single-arm pre–post studies; protocols without results; and any finding that could not be verified against a DOI, registry record or publisher page. Unverified numbers were marked UNVERIFIED and kept out of the trial table.

The pre-specified analysis plan was a random-effects model (REML), Hedges g with 95 per cent confidence intervals, I^2 , τ^2 , a 95 per cent prediction interval, Egger's test, trim-and-fill, leave-one-out sensitivity, RoB 2 and GRADE. The fallback rule, stated in advance, was this: if fewer than five eligible trials were found, deliver a systematic review with narrative synthesis, state plainly that a meta-analysis is not yet possible, and do not pool.

Information sources and search

Sources: PubMed; PsycINFO-equivalent retrieval via public scholarly indexes; Scopus and Web of Science via public interfaces and publisher pages; Google Scholar; CTRI (India); ClinicalTrials.gov; UMIN-CTR; OSF preprints and registrations. The search is a rapid reconstruction from public interfaces rather than a dual-independent librarian screen of licensed databases. That limitation is stated again in the results flow and in the GRADE judgements.

PubMed

```
(loneliness[tiab] OR "social isolation"[tiab] OR belonging[tiab]
OR "social connection"[tiab]) AND (workplace[tiab] OR employee*
[tiab] OR worker*[tiab] OR occupational[tiab] OR "remote work"
[tiab] OR hybrid[tiab]) AND (intervention*[tiab] OR trial[tiab] OR
randomi*[tiab] OR program*[tiab] OR programme*[tiab] OR RCT[tiab])
AND ("2010/01/01"[Date - Publication] : "2026/09/22"[Date
- Publication])
```

Core string used across Google Scholar and bibliographic indexes

```
loneliness AND (workplace OR employee OR remote OR hybrid)
AND intervention
```

Additional strings: "workplace loneliness" OR "loneliness at work" AND (RCT OR randomized OR randomised OR trial) restricted to 2010–2026.

ClinicalTrials.gov

loneliness AND (workplace OR employee OR worker OR occupational OR remote) filtered to Interventional studies.

CTRI

loneliness combined with workplace, employee, occupational. No completed workplace-loneliness intervention trial was identified.

OSF / preprints

workplace loneliness intervention; loneliness AND employee AND randomized.

UMIN-CTR

Workplace loneliness / worker loneliness. One relevant registration was found (UMIN000060407).

Selection and extraction

Records were screened on title and abstract for employed adults, a workplace or occupational setting, an intervention or controlled comparison, and an eligible outcome. Full texts of remaining records were checked against the eligibility rules. Extraction fields were: first author and year; n; design; country; language of delivery; dose in sessions and minutes; delivery channel; guidance (self-guided, facilitator, leader-mediated); outcome measure described without trademarked product names where possible; timepoints; effect on loneliness and on belonging or connection; risk-of-bias notes.

Analysis plan as executed

Four eligible completed trials measured loneliness. That is below five. Effects were therefore not pooled. No random-effects model was fitted. No Hedges g summary, I^2 , τ^2 , prediction interval, Egger test or trim-and-fill was computed. Study-level effects are presented in a table. Heterogeneity is discussed qualitatively. Publication bias is discussed qualitatively. Risk of bias is summarised using RoB 2 domains in narrative form. Certainty is graded with GRADE.

Pre-specified moderators were remote versus on-site work, and intervention type. Remote versus on-site could not be tested: every eligible loneliness trial was an on-site military sample. Intervention type is used as the organising device for the narrative.

Positioning against prior evidence

This review is not a competitor to Masi et al. (2011), Hickin et al. (2021) or Lasgaard et al. (2026). Those papers answer a different question: do loneliness programmes work for people in general. This review asks whether anyone has run that experiment inside paid work. It is also not a competitor to Bryan et al. (2023), who meta-analysed correlates of workplace loneliness and explicitly noted that few working-age programmes had been delivered at work. We take that sentence as the starting gun.

06

Results

PRISMA 2020 flow

Public-interface searches across the eight sources returned an estimated 2,800 records (range across runs 2,400–3,200). After automated and manual deduplication, about 1,900 unique records remained. Title and abstract screening excluded about 1,840 records, mostly because they concerned older adults in community settings, clinical populations, school samples, or correlational workplace surveys with no programme. About 60 full texts were inspected. Of those, 4 completed controlled trials measured loneliness after a workplace or occupational programme and were included in the primary narrative. A further 3 workplace connection trials measured related outcomes (support networks, collegiality, leader–member exchange) but not loneliness, and are reported as adjacent evidence. Three registered protocols without results were logged as pipeline. One India-registered garment-worker trial remains unpublished. Zero relevant completed CTRI trials were found.

This flow is a rapid public-source reconstruction. It is not a dual-independent PRISMA screen with a medical librarian and licensed Scopus, Web of Science and PsycINFO accounts. Counts should be read as order-of-magnitude honest, not as a gold-standard study-flow diagram.

Study-characteristics table

Table 1. Eligible completed trials with a loneliness outcome in employed or occupational samples, 2010–2026

Study	Design	Country / sample	n analysed	Programme	Dose	Channel / guidance	Loneliness measure	Timepoints	Loneliness result
Cacioppo et al., 2015	Cluster RCT, active control	United States Army; 48 platoons (29 programme, 19 control)	688 vs 450 soldiers assigned	Social-resilience training: social cognition, group identity, coping with isolation, conflict skills	8 hours across 5 days	In-person, facilitated at platoon level	Perceived social isolation item set	Immediate pre / post	Small decrease vs cultural-awareness control. $\beta = -0.54$, SE = 0.31, $t(570) = -1.74$. Abstract reports a small significant decrease; two-tailed p is about 0.08
Mohr et al., 2024	Cluster RCT, usual practice	United States Army; 10 battalions	118 vs 158 service members (276 of 1,890 at baseline)	Supportive-leadership training for platoon leaders: proactive and responsive support, destigmatising mental-health conversations	90 minutes (30 in-person, 30 computer scenarios, 30 in-person review) plus 6-week reminder site	Hybrid; leaders trained, employees surveyed	3-item brief loneliness scale, 4-point	Baseline and ~4 months	$d = -0.21$; $b = -0.46$, SE = 0.23, $p < 0.05$. Means: programme 6.44 → 6.21; control 6.45 → 6.53. Belonging not significant

Study	Design	Country / sample	n analysed	Programme	Dose	Channel / guidance	Loneliness measure	Timepoints	Loneliness result
Mohr et al., 2025	Cluster RCT, waitlist	United States National Guard and romantic partners	360 couples	Supervisor support for family and sleep, plus personalised sleep feedback for employees	~60 minutes computer module for supervisors (74.7% of 210 completed); sleep-device feedback for employees	Computer + brief on-base feedback	3-item brief loneliness scale	Baseline, 4 months, 9 months	Employees at 9 months: $b = -0.128$, 95% CI -0.215 to -0.042 , $p < 0.01$. Partners also lower. 4-month employee effect not significant. Belonging not the primary construct; perceived partner responsiveness rose for employees
Crouch, Gutierrez, Allard & Adler, 2024	Quasi-experimental randomised trial, training-as-usual	United States Army platoons	118 (k = 11) vs 135 (k = 15)	TeamCORE unit connection skills, condensed from Cacioppo 2015, plus a leader module	2.5 hours for unit members + 1 hour for leaders	In-person	Brief loneliness screen; ~18–21% above cutoff at baseline	Baseline, post (programme arm), 2-month follow-up	No significant time $\times$ condition interaction on loneliness. Selected small gains on some cohesion, communication and connection-behaviour items

Language of delivery in all four trials was English. None was delivered on WhatsApp. None was run in an Indian language. None was a civilian knowledge-work sample.

Forest-plot data table (study-level only; no pooled row)

Table 2. Study-level loneliness effects. No summary g is reported.

Study	Contrast	Effect	95% CI or SE	Weight	Note
Cacioppo 2015	Social resilience vs cultural awareness	$\beta = -0.54$ on perceived social isolation	SE = 0.31	Not weighted	Immediate post only; one-tailed reporting in the source paper; two-tailed $p \approx 0.08$
Mohr 2024	Leader-support vs usual practice	$d = -0.21$; $b = -0.46$	SE = 0.23	Not weighted	~4-month follow-up; high attrition
Mohr 2025	Leader-support + sleep feedback vs waitlist	$b = -0.128$ (employee, 9 months)	95% CI -0.215 to -0.042	Not weighted	4-month employee effect not significant; scale is a short mean, not the 3–12 sum used in Mohr 2024
Crouch 2024	TeamCORE vs training-as-usual	Time $\times$ condition not significant	—	Not weighted	Verified null on loneliness

A weight column is shown only to honour the requested table shape. Because no model was fitted, weights are not computed. Do not add these rows. They live on different scales, different follow-up windows, and different comparators.

Moderator table

Table 3. Pre-specified moderators

Moderator	What the four trials allow	Result
Remote vs on-site	All four samples were on-site military units	Cannot be estimated
Intervention type: leader-support coaching, 60–90 min	Mohr 2024; Mohr 2025	Two small employee-loneliness reductions against usual practice or waitlist, at 4 months (2024) and 9 months (2025)
Intervention type: soldier social-resilience package, ~8 h	Cacioppo 2015	Small immediate decrease vs active control; durability unknown
Intervention type: condensed unit-connection package, ~3.5 h	Crouch 2024	Null on loneliness; some movement on connection behaviours
Civilian knowledge work	No eligible trial	Empty cell
India	No eligible completed trial	Empty cell

Adjacent workplace connection trials (not in the loneliness table)

Alan, Corekcioglu and Sutter (2023) ran a clustered randomised programme in 20 large Turkish corporations with more than 3,000 headquarters staff. The programme trained leaders in prosocial behaviour and professional language. Treated firms had fewer employees lacking professional and personal help, denser and less segregated support networks, higher reported collegiality, and lower leadership-level separation. Loneliness was not measured. The paper is adjacent because it shows that leader-focused relational training can change the social graph of a civilian firm. It is not an eligible loneliness trial.

Stein and colleagues (2021) trained childcare-centre directors in Germany (77 centres, 496 employees at baseline). Leader–member exchange and exhaustion moved for staff with heavier baseline workload. Loneliness was not an outcome.

West and colleagues (2021) randomised 125 physicians to self-facilitated small-group meetings over six months. Burnout rates fell. Mean social-support change was not statistically significant. Loneliness was not the primary outcome.

A three-wave survey of 443 information-technology professionals (2024) tested workplace mindfulness and job autonomy as buffers of the loneliness–productivity link. It is not a randomised programme evaluation and is excluded from the trial list.

A Japanese worksite report (2025) of appreciative-inquiry workshops at two sites found no improvement in loneliness scores. It is not a controlled trial.

Protocols and the India pipeline

Frendie PRO (NCT06495801; protocol in *Contemporary Clinical Trials*, 2025) is a Finnish cluster trial of a workplace mobile application with loneliness, workplace loneliness, belonging and depressive symptoms as outcomes. Results are not posted.

UMIN000060407 is a Japanese individually randomised, open-label, self-guided four-session video programme aimed at workplace loneliness, against no programme. Disclosure date January 2026. No results.

AEARCTR-0008235, led by Adhvaryu, Nyshadham, Schofield and Souza, is the only India-registered workplace loneliness trial identified. It pairs recently migrated junior women in garment factories with more senior colleagues for structured meetings over eight weeks, with planned outcomes of loneliness, networks, mental health and retention. J-PAL still lists results as forthcoming. A Good Business Lab case page reports network gains and drops in anxiety (5.3 per cent) and depression (5.9 per cent) in a related or pilot sample of 1,098 women. Those percentages have no peer-reviewed DOI attached to a loneliness effect size. They are marked UNVERIFIED for the purpose of this review and are not treated as a completed trial result.

Heterogeneity

The four loneliness trials do not estimate one quantity. They differ in who is trained (the leader, the whole unit, or both), in dose (60 minutes to 8 hours), in comparator (usual practice, waitlist, active cultural-awareness training, training-as-usual), in follow-up (immediate versus two, four or nine months), and in the loneliness scale and scoring. Mohr 2024 and Mohr 2025 come from the same research group and share a leader-support logic, but they are not the same package: the 2025 trial folds in sleep feedback and measures couples. Cacioppo 2015 is an eight-hour soldier-level curriculum. Crouch 2024 is a shortened descendant of that curriculum and is the null. Qualitative heterogeneity is high. A pooled I^2 would have been a false comfort.

Publication bias

With four trials, Egger’s test is not interpretable. The pattern itself is informative. One verified null is in the peer-reviewed record. Two protocols are sitting in registries. An Indian trial is registered and unpublished. That is not the classic file-drawer shape of twenty happy abstracts and zero disappointments. It is the thinner shape of a field that has barely started. Small-study effects remain possible. Mohr 2024 in particular has a matched analysis sample of 276 drawn from 1,890 baseline-eligible service members. Attrition of that size can inflate or deflate an effect in either direction.

Risk-of-bias summary

Table 4. RoB 2 domains, narrative

Study	Randomisation	Deviations from intended programme	Missing outcome data	Measurement of outcome	Selection of reported result	Overall
Cacioppo 2015	Low (platoon randomisation; active control protects expectancy somewhat)	Some concerns (open delivery)	Some concerns	High (self-report, unblinded)	Some concerns (one-tailed tests on several outcomes)	Some concerns to high
Mohr 2024	Low to some concerns (battalion clusters; preregistered)	Some concerns (about 30% of eligible leaders not trained; ITT conservative)	High (matched n = 276 from 1,890; COVID disruption)	High (self-report, unblinded)	Low to some concerns (preregistered outcomes)	High
Mohr 2025	Low to some concerns (unit clusters; preregistered)	Some concerns (supervisor completion 74.7%)	Some concerns	High (self-report, unblinded)	Low to some concerns	Some concerns to high
Crouch 2024	Some concerns (quasi-experimental randomised assignment of units)	Some concerns	Some concerns (follow-up drop)	High (self-report, unblinded)	Low to some concerns	Some concerns to high

Common vulnerabilities: nobody can blind a connection programme from the people living it; loneliness is almost always self-reported; military clusters move, deploy and disappear between waves. RoB 2 does not let us pretend otherwise.

GRADE table

Table 5. Certainty of evidence

Outcome	Studies	Effect (narrative)	Certainty	Why the grade falls
Loneliness after leader-support coaching	2 cluster RCTs (Mohr 2024, Mohr 2025)	Small reduction vs usual practice or waitlist at 4–9 months	Low	Indirectness (US military, not civilian or Indian knowledge work); risk of bias (attrition, unblinded self-report); imprecision (two trials, small effects)
Loneliness after unit social-fitness training	2 trials (Cacioppo 2015; Crouch 2024)	Small immediate signal in the 8-hour package; null in the 3.5-hour descendant	Very low	Inconsistency (one small signal, one null); indirectness; risk of bias; imprecision; Cacioppo result sensitive to one- vs two-tailed reading
Belonging / unit belonging	1 trial (Mohr 2024)	No significant effect	Very low	Single trial, null, same bias profile
Workplace loneliness programmes in India	0 completed published trials	Not estimable	—	Empty evidence base
Remote-only workplace loneliness programmes	0 trials	Not estimable	—	Empty evidence base

Overall certainty that “workplace loneliness programmes work” is low to very low. That is not a polite way of saying they fail. It is a precise way of saying the receipt is too short.

What the four trials actually did

Cacioppo and colleagues asked whether social resilience can be trained. Forty-eight Army platoons were randomised to eight hours of social-resilience training or eight hours of cultural-awareness training. The double-dissociative idea is borrowed from cognitive science: each programme should move its own outcomes and not the other’s. Social-resilience training produced small gains in empathy, perspective-taking and military hardiness, and a small drop in perceived social isolation. Cultural-awareness training improved knowledge of, and reduced prejudice towards, Afghans. There was little evidence of domain-general glow. Follow-up stopped at the last session. Durability is unknown.

Mohr, Hammer and colleagues trained platoon leaders rather than the whole unit. The session lasted 90 minutes. Thirty minutes introduced the idea that a leader can offer both proactive support (check-ins, practical help, role-modelling) and responsive support (notice distress, reduce stigma, act). Thirty minutes used computer scenarios. Thirty minutes closed the loop. A website tried to keep the behaviours alive for six weeks. Service members, not leaders, provided the loneliness ratings. At about four months, loneliness was lower in the leader-trained units ($d = -0.21$). Unit belonging did not move. People who started lonelier reported more supportive behaviour from their leaders after the programme. About 30 per cent of eligible leaders never sat the session; they were still counted in the intent-to-treat contrast, which makes the result more conservative, not less.

Mohr, O'Neill, Hammer and colleagues then took the leader-support idea into the National Guard and added sleep. Supervisors completed a one-hour computer module on family-supportive and sleep-supportive behaviours. Employees wore a sleep device and received a short personalised briefing. Loneliness at four months did not differ. Loneliness at nine months did, for employees and for their partners. Perceived partner responsiveness rose for employees. Tests of mediation through supervisor support were not significant. The authors' honest reading is that something in the bundle helped, and the path is not yet mapped.

Crouch, Gutierrez, Allard and Adler condensed the Cacioppo curriculum into TeamCORE: two and a half hours for soldiers, one hour for leaders. Against training-as-usual, loneliness did not show a time-by-condition effect. A few cohesion, communication and connection-behaviour items moved. About one in five soldiers in both arms already sat above a loneliness cutoff at baseline, so the problem was present. The shortened package did not move the feeling. That is a real null. It belongs in the review for the same reason a failed product test belongs in a product diary. It tells you that "teach connection skills for an afternoon" is not a reliable loneliness lever.

One reading of the set is straightforward. Masi's 2011 ranking said that changing unhelpful social thinking beat adding contact. The two Mohr programmes do not hand anyone a worksheet about their thoughts. They change the social environment: a leader who asks, notices, and does not punish vulnerability. Picture a platoon leader who asks a quiet soldier how the week really went, then waits. The soldier says a little more than usual, and nothing bad happens. The thought "nobody here cares" has just been tested, in a setting made safe by someone with power. The leader has also shown, from above, how to ask for help and how to give it. The aim is a small step towards being a decent colleague, not a campaign to eliminate the feeling of loneliness. In entrepreneurial terms, it is a manager feature, not a town-hall feature.

07

Discussion

PULL QUOTE

Completed, published controlled trials of a workplace loneliness programme in India: zero.

What the number means

The number that can be quoted without blushing is small. A 90-minute leader-support session, in one high-risk occupational sample, moved loneliness by about one fifth of a standard deviation against usual practice. A related leader-support-plus-sleep bundle moved a short loneliness score at nine months, not at four. An eight-hour social-fitness curriculum moved perceived isolation a little, immediately, against an active control, with a coefficient that is fragile if you insist on a two-tailed test. A shortened descendant of that curriculum did not move loneliness at all.

That pattern should sober anyone selling a “loneliness solution” to a human-resources director. It should not freeze anyone building a practice. Small effects on a subjective scale can still be worth having when the base rate is high. Gallup’s India figure of 28 per cent daily loneliness is a base rate. A d of 0.21 is not a fix. It is a nudge with a receipt.

Compare the workplace receipt with the general-population receipt. Masi’s randomised mean was about -0.20 . Hickin’s psychological-programme estimate was 0.43. The workplace leader-support signal sits nearer Masi’s mixed bag than Hickin’s psychological bag. That is coherent. The Mohr sessions do not run four to eight weeks of structured work on unhelpful thinking. They change one node in the org chart and hope the graph notices.

Ozcelik and Barsade’s theory still holds as a warning label. Loneliness lowers performance through approachability and commitment. Bryan’s correlations say the same in pooled form. An organisation that ignores workplace loneliness is not being stoic. It is leaving performance, satisfaction and burnout on the table and hoping culture eats the residual. Culture will not eat a residual that the social graph keeps regenerating.

Limitations

This review has the limitations of a rapid public-source search. Licensed dual-screening of Scopus, Web of Science and PsycINFO would almost certainly add records and might add a fifth trial. If a fifth comparable trial appears, the fallback rule flips and a pooled g becomes legitimate. Until then, pooling four unlike military studies would be theatre.

The eligible trials are narrow. They are United States military. They are English-language. They are on-site. They use short loneliness scales rather than a dedicated workplace-loneliness instrument. Two of the four come from one research family. Follow-up never exceeds nine months. Belonging, when measured, did not move in the trial that tested it. Mediation was not shown. Women are under-represented

in the Army samples. Partners appear only in the National Guard trial. Civilian knowledge workers — the people on hybrid video calls in Indian metros — are missing.

The adjacent Turkish corporate trial is a reminder that civilian firms can be randomised. It measured networks and collegiality, not loneliness. The German childcare trial measured leader–member exchange, not loneliness. The field has a habit of aiming at the neighbouring construct and then talking as if loneliness moved.

Publication bias cannot be tested. Selective reporting can. Cacioppo 2015 used one-tailed tests on several outcomes. Mohr 2024 lost most of its baseline sample to follow-up. Those are not fatal flaws. They are reasons the GRADE table does not say “moderate”.

WHAT THIS MEANS

What this means for an Indian workplace programme

India has observational evidence that workplace loneliness exists and costs creativity, citizenship and family life. It does not yet have a single published controlled trial of a workplace loneliness programme. Gallup finds daily loneliness in 28 per cent of Indian employees, against 22 per cent globally, and remote staff report more of it than on-site staff in the global cuts. An Indian study of more than 900 manufacturing and service workers found that friends at work made a difference, while sector and tenure did not. Later Indian studies point to meaningful work and organisational support. A garment-factory buddy programme for migrant women is registered but unpublished. Until an Indian trial exists, borrow what the four occupational trials actually tested. Picture one operations team in Bengaluru. The team lead sits a short coaching session on supportive behaviours: check in, notice, help without judging. On Monday she asks the new joiner from Lucknow how the move is going, and waits for the real answer. There is no one-off party. Each week the team logs a few structured connection reps: a named check-in, a lunch with phones down. Between three and nine months later, they measure loneliness again. The reps arrive on WhatsApp, in the languages people already use at work, and the data stays in India.

Research gaps, naming the India gap explicitly

The India gap is not a rhetorical flourish. CTRI returned no completed workplace-loneliness intervention trial. The one registered Indian study has not posted peer-reviewed loneliness results. Every eligible completed trial in this review was a United States military sample. That is a domain shift large enough to make any Indian product team nervous, and they should stay nervous.

Specific gaps, in the order a methods section would list them:

1. A civilian Indian randomised programme with workplace loneliness as the primary outcome, pre-registered on CTIRI, with a usual-practice or waitlist control, and follow-up at three and six months.
2. A remote or hybrid arm. The moderator we pre-specified cannot be estimated from current trials.

3. A comparison of intervention types inside one protocol: leader-support coaching versus individual reps that test unhelpful social thoughts versus structured pairing of new joiners with seniors.
4. Mediation. The Mohr 2025 path through supervisor support did not appear. Either the measure is wrong or the mechanism is different.
5. Belonging as a co-primary outcome. Loneliness moved in two leader-support trials; belonging did not in the one trial that tested unit belonging. Those two constructs are not interchangeable.
6. Durability past nine months.
7. Language and channel. No trial in this set used a WhatsApp-first, multilingual delivery of the kind Indian desk and shop-floor staff already live inside.
8. Honest nulls. Crouch 2024 is the model. Publish the miss.

An office scene and a machine-learning image land on the same advice. A team lead in Pune notices a new joiner eating lunch alone at her desk. He does not plan a wellness offsite. He walks over, asks how her first month has gone, and books a chai with her for Thursday. That is a defined amount of effort, spent on one person. Graph learning does not fix a sparse network by adding a single all-hands broadcast. It adds a few real edges and checks the loss. Countable connection reps — a named check-in, an active-constructive response to a colleague's news, a shared meal with the phones down — are closer to those images than a once-a-year happiness week. They are also, as of 22 September 2026, untested as workplace loneliness programmes in India.

In plain words, three practice moves fit this picture. Rehearse the interpersonal move, then use it at the next difficult conversation. Decide what kind of colleague you want to be, then schedule one small act in that direction, whether or not the lonely feeling has left the building. Take the thought “they would rather I stayed quiet” as a guess, and test it: say one thing in Tuesday's review and watch what actually happens. All three moves are compatible with a 90-minute leader session that makes those tests safer. None of them is a substitute for an Indian trial.

Entrepreneurship supplies the last constraint. Four experiments, all in one customer segment, with one small win, one fragile win, one delayed win and one miss, is a seed-stage signal. It is not a Series B narrative. EmotionApp can build the reps. It should also run the trial.

08

FAQ

Q1 Do workplace loneliness programmes work?

Four controlled occupational trials exist. Two short leader-coaching programmes reduced loneliness by a small amount. One eight-hour social-fitness package showed a small immediate drop. One shortened unit-connection package did not. A pooled estimate is not yet possible.

Q2 How big is the effect?

The cleanest number is a Cohen's d of 0.21 against usual practice after a 90-minute leader session, in one United States Army trial of 276 service members. That is a small effect. It is not zero.

Q3 Does remote work make loneliness worse?

Gallup's 2024 global cut: 25 per cent of fully remote employees reported daily loneliness versus 16 per cent on-site, with hybrid at 21 per cent. No completed trial has tested a remote-only workplace loneliness programme.

Q4 Has anything been tested in India?

No completed, published controlled trial. One garment-worker pairing study is registered and still listed as forthcoming. Observational Indian samples already exceed 900 workers.

Q5 What should my organisation try first?

Train managers in supportive behaviours for about 90 minutes. Then run countable weekly connection reps for eight to twelve weeks. Measure loneliness at three months. Do not call the first town hall a programme evaluation.

09

References

- Alan S, Corekcioglu G, Sutter M. Improving workplace climate in large corporations: a clustered randomized intervention. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. 2023;138(1):151–203. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjac034>
- Bryan BT, Andrews G, Thompson KN, Qualter P, Matthews T, Arseneault L. Loneliness in the workplace: a mixed-method systematic review and meta-analysis. *Occupational Medicine*. 2023;73(9):557–567. <https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqad138>
- Cacioppo JT, Adler AB, Lester PB, McGurk D, Thomas JL, Chen HY, Cacioppo S. Building social resilience in soldiers: a double dissociative randomized controlled study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 2015;109(1):90–105. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000022>
- Crouch CL, Gutierrez IA, Allard YS, Adler AB. Training military units in social connection: a quasi-experimental randomized trial. *Journal of Military Social Work and Behavioral Health Services*. 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1080/28367472.2024.2376070>
- Firoz M, Chaudhary R. Workplace loneliness: developing and testing a mediated moderation model. *Applied Psychology*. 2026. <https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.70107>
- Firoz M, Chaudhary R, Lata M. The socio-demographic determinants of workplace loneliness in India. *Evidence-based HRM*. 2022;10(1):17–34. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBHRM-08-2020-0116>
- Gallup. 1 in 5 employees worldwide feel lonely. 11 June 2024. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/645566/employees-worldwide-feel-lonely.aspx>
- Gallup. State of the Global Workplace: India country-level data. 2026 report, data year 2025. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/705650/state-global-workplace-india-country-level-data.aspx>
- Hickin N, Käll A, Shafran R, Sutcliffe S, Manzotti G, Langan D. The effectiveness of psychological interventions for loneliness: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*. 2021;88:102066. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2021.102066>
- Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Baker M, Harris T, Stephenson D. Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: a meta-analytic review. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 2015;10(2):227–237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614568352>
- Masi CM, Chen HY, Hawkey LC, Cacioppo JT. A meta-analysis of interventions to reduce loneliness. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*. 2011;15(3):219–266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868310377394>
- McCarthy JM, Erdogan B, Bauer TN, Kudret S, Campion E. All the lonely people: an integrated review and research agenda on work and loneliness. *Journal of Management*. 2026;52(1):283–330. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063241313320>
- Mohr CD, Hammer LB, Dimoff J, Allen S, Lee J, Arpin S, McCabe S, Brockwood K, Bodner T, Mahoney L, Dretsch M, Britt T. Supportive-leadership training to improve social connection: a cluster-randomized trial demonstrating efficacy in a high-risk occupational context. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*. 2024;29(5):299–316. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000384>
- Mohr CD, O'Neill AS, Brady JM, Bodner TE, Crain TL, Hammer LB. Strengthening connections: a randomized controlled trial examining the impact of a supervisor support intervention on loneliness and military couple relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075251349701>
- Ozcelik H, Barsade SG. No employee an island: workplace loneliness and job performance. *Academy of Management Journal*. 2018;61(6):2343–2366. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.1066>
- Stein M, Schumann M, Teetzen F, Gregersen S, Begemann V, Vincent-Höper S. Supportive leadership training effects on employee social and hedonic well-being: a cluster randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*. 2021;26(6):599–612. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000300>
- West CP, Dyrbye LN, Satele DV, Shanafelt TD. Colleagues Meeting to Promote and Sustain Satisfaction (COMPASS) groups for physician well-being: a randomized clinical trial. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*. 2021;96(10):2606–2614. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mayocp.2021.02.028>

ClinicalTrials.gov. NCT04152824. Readiness Supportive Leadership Training.
<https://clinicaltrials.gov/study/NCT04152824>

ClinicalTrials.gov. NCT02946736. Supportive supervisor training and sleep feedback trial (Mohr 2025 parent registration). <https://clinicaltrials.gov/study/NCT02946736>

ClinicalTrials.gov. NCT06495801. Frenchie PRO workplace application cluster trial.
<https://clinicaltrials.gov/study/NCT06495801>

UMIN-CTR. UMIN000060407. Effects of internet-based cognitive behavioral therapy on workplace loneliness among workers. https://center6.umin.ac.jp/cgi-open-bin/ctr_e/ctr_view.cgi?recptno=R000069097

AEA RCT Registry. AEARCTR-0008235. Alleviating loneliness among female migrant garment workers in India. <https://www.socialscienceregistry.org/trials/8235>

J-PAL. Alleviating loneliness among female migrant garment workers in India. Results forthcoming. <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/alleviating-loneliness-among-female-migrant-garment-workers-india>

About the author

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Atul Aswani; Mumbai Psychiatrist and trained as a Results Coach
Dr Atul Aswani is a Mumbai Psychiatrist and trained as a Results Coach. He founded EmotionApp at Tranquilo Meditek Sytems Private Limited, Mumbai. The platform delivers positive-psychology techniques as countable daily reps, with an AI coach and human hand-off, WhatsApp-first, in 23 Indian languages, on India-resident infrastructure, under DPDP, ISO 9001 and ISO 13485. This review is written for working adults, not as clinical advice.

HOW TO CITE

Aswani A. Lonely at Work: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Workplace Loneliness Interventions. EmotionApp Research Paper 35. Mumbai: Tranquilo Meditek Sytems Private Limited; 2026. <https://emotionapp.in/research/workplace-loneliness-interventions-review>

LAST UPDATED

Last updated: 22 September 2026

NOTE

EmotionApp is a non-clinical emotional-fitness coaching platform. This paper describes practices, techniques and coaching. It is not therapy, treatment, diagnosis or medical advice.

© 2026 Tranquilo Meditek Sytems Private Limited, Mumbai · emotionapp.in

SAFETY NOTE

If you are in distress, please contact a qualified professional or Tele-MANAS on 14416.