

The middle aged are lonelier than older and younger people

August 23 2019



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Middle-aged people are lonelier than older adults and young people, new research suggests.

Researchers analyzed data from 38,000 people in the U.K. who took part of the BBC's Loneliness Experiment last year.

The lead researchers are: Professor Christina Victor, Brunel University London, Professor Manuela Barreto, University of Exeter, and Professor Pamela Qualter, University of Manchester.

They used a new method of analyzing loneliness that looks at how often people said they felt lonely, how long the feeling of loneliness lasted and how intense it was, each aspect rated by the participants from 1 to 5.

Professor Victor told the European Sociological Association conference in Manchester, U.K., today [Friday 23 August] that by combining the scores, they found that an average of 7 percent people were on average often or always lonely.

The rate was around 7 percent for 16-24 years olds, falling to 5 percent for 25-34 year olds, before rising to 8 percent for 35-64 year olds and falling to 6 percent in those aged 65 and over.

"Traditional analyses of loneliness focus mainly on how often people feel lonely, but this obscures and underestimates experiences that might be infrequent but intense, or that last very long," said Professor Barreto.

"Taking this into account, we are also better able to understand how loneliness is experienced across the [life course](#), rather than trying to establish an absolute age at which people feel most lonely."

Professor Victor said: "Being lonely in later life is not the first time most had experienced loneliness—we found that it was often experienced throughout the course of their lives.

"Rather than focus on differences between age groups, we should focus

on how loneliness is experienced across the life course.

"Responses to questions about which period of their life has been the loneliest enables us to put [loneliness](#) in later life into a broader life-course perspective rather than seeing it in isolation from the rest of the lives of individuals."

The researchers found that when asked at what age they felt most intensely lonely, people were most likely to select their current age or slightly younger age than they were their childhood or youth.

They also found that for half of those aged 75 and over, being lonely was sometimes or always a positive experience. It was less so for younger people.

The U.K. participants were among 54,988 people who took part in the survey from 237 different countries, islands or territories.

The U.K. participants were mainly women, unmarried and living alone.

Provided by University of Exeter

Citation: The middle aged are lonelier than older and younger people (2019, August 23) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-08-middle-aged-lonelier-older-younger.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--