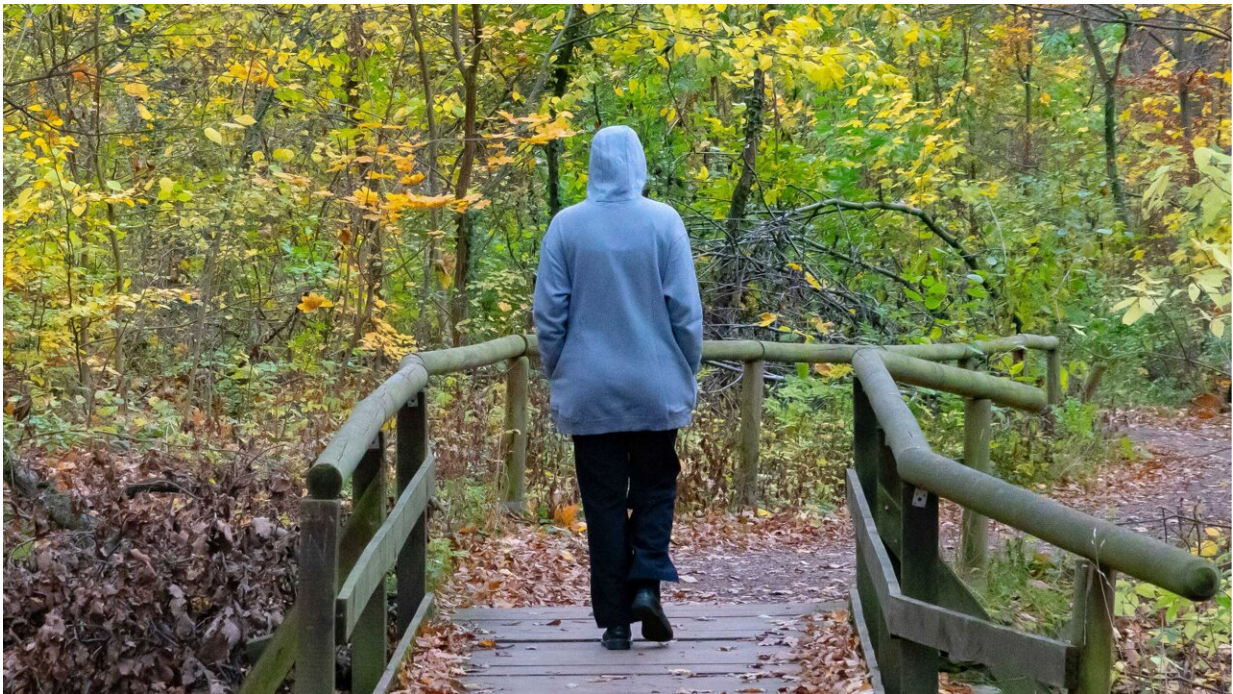


Living alone doesn't have to mean being lonely, says study

November 24 2023, by Sebastian Hollstein



Living alone does not necessarily mean isolation and loneliness, according to a recent study by the University of Jena. Credit: Jens Meyer/Uni Jena

About 20% of all Germans live alone—and the number is increasing. This trend can also be observed in most other Western countries. However, contrary to prevailing prejudices, living alone does not necessarily mean isolation and loneliness.

This is what psychologists at Friedrich Schiller University Jena have discovered in their [study](#) now published in the *International Journal of Behavioral Development*. Over a period of three years, the team surveyed about 400 people aged between 35 and 60 who live alone in the Thuringian urban centers of Erfurt, Weimar, Jena, and Gera. About a fifth of them were in a partnership.

"In research, people living alone are often compared with traditional living arrangements such as partnerships and families and are seen as a very homogeneous group that generally has a low level of well-being," says Philipp Kersten, who conducted the study. "In contrast, we wanted to acknowledge the heterogeneity of this way of life and show how the model can succeed."

Even if people who live alone in their household are at an increased risk of loneliness, they do not necessarily have to become bad-tempered hermits. On the contrary, they too can have a lively and fulfilling environment—if they take advantage of the opportunities that are available for a rich social life.

Loose networks without regular contact reduce well-being

In order to approach the group systematically, the Jena psychologists categorized them into four types. Around a third of those surveyed were particularly satisfied with having access to a large network and maintaining various social contacts on a daily basis, including family and friends as well as acquaintances such as co-workers or neighbors. An even higher level of well-being was reported by only around 10% of participants who do not have such a large social circle but are very focused on their partnership.

In [contrast](#), people with few regular contacts showed a much lower level of well-being. Around a quarter of those surveyed are only embedded in a very small social circle, which mainly consists of [family members](#).

"However, we were particularly surprised that the most dissatisfied group—around a third of the study participants—did not have such a small network. However, this is very loosely knit, resulting in few daily contacts," says Philipp Kersten. In order to take a closer look at the quantity and quality of daily contacts, the experts asked the respondents to keep a contact diary for several weeks.

Overall, the study shows that the lifestyle can be a risk factor for well-being under certain circumstances—namely if a person is poorly networked and does not utilize their contacts. It also plays a role whether people voluntarily choose this lifestyle, which about 50% of respondents stated, or whether they are generally dissatisfied with this living situation.

"But living alone is not a sentence—the art lies in shaping [social relationships](#)," says Prof. Dr. Franz J. Neyer, who is also involved in the study. The group that provided [positive feedback](#)—more than 40% of those surveyed—showed that one does not have to be lonely if one makes consistent use of opportunities for regular social contact.

More information: Philipp Kersten et al, Does living alone mean being alone? Personal networks of solo-living adults in midlife, *International Journal of Behavioral Development* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/01650254231206329](#)

Provided by Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena

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