

# Poetry can help people cope with loneliness or isolation, shows research

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Reading, writing and sharing poetry can help people cope with loneliness or isolation and reduce feelings of anxiety and depression, a new study shows.

Research by the University of Plymouth and Nottingham Trent University has found that many people who took to sharing, discussing and writing [poetry](#) as a means to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic experienced "demonstrable positive impact on their well-being."

The findings are based on a survey of 400 people which showed that poetry helped those experiencing common mental health symptoms as well as those suffering from grief. The research is [published](#) in the *Journal of Poetry Therapy*.

It was carried out with registered users of the website [poetryandcovid.com](#) (now archived as [poetryandcovidarchive.com](#)), who used the website to share their own poetry and/or read other people's.

Just over half (51%) of respondents indicated that reading and/or writing poetry had helped them deal with feelings of loneliness or isolation, and for a further 50% it had helped with feelings of anxiety and depression.

Around a third (34%) felt that engaging with the website helped them feel "less anxious," 24% felt that it helped them "feel better able to handle my problems," 17% expressed that it enabled them to deal with issues relating to bereavement, while 16% said it assisted with ongoing mental health symptoms.

"These results demonstrate the substantial power of poetry," said Principal Investigator Anthony Caleshu, Professor of Poetry and Creative Writing at the University of Plymouth. "Writing and reading poetry, as well as engaging with the website, had a considerable positive impact on the well-being of the participants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"In addition to supporting their health and well-being, the website informed social and cultural recovery and offered an understanding of

how poetry was being used as a mode of discourse during the pandemic. It now provides an historical archive for how people around the world used English language poetry to navigate the crisis."

More than 100,000 people from 128 countries visited the site, which featured more than 1,000 poems by more 600 authors, with most being submitted by the writers themselves.

One participant in the study wrote: "Poetry has been a lifeline throughout the pandemic, both reading and writing it, (sometimes a strong rope and other times a thin little string)."

Another wrote: "I'm looking to submit some poetry related to my father's recent passing, which was due to COVID-19. I want to capture some of the conflicting emotions I've been feeling since news of (several) promising vaccines have been reported so close to his death. I hope the piece will connect with others who have lost loved ones, but also provide hope for those who are isolated and waiting for loved ones to return home. This is my first piece of poetry."

Co-Investigator Dr. Rory Waterman, Associate Professor of Modern and Contemporary Literature at Nottingham Trent University, said, "It's likely that tethering poetry to a community-building platform, in this case the [website](#), has had a particularly positive effect on the relationship between poetry and well-being, as it's a way of bringing people together, the ice already having been broken.

"It's also likely that other modes of creative and expressive writing—trying to find the right words for experience or circumstance, and then sharing them reciprocally—may positively affect people's health in a similar way. The wider arts, including visual and performing arts, likely have comparable potential.

"This study shows that creativity, coupled with the opportunity for safe and supportive explication and discussion, can help people endure difficult times and circumstances by providing outlets through which they can work at making sense of experience."

**More information:** Anthony Caleshu et al, Poetry and COVID-19: the benefit of poetry and the poetryandcovidarchive.com website to mental health and wellbeing, *Journal of Poetry Therapy* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/08893675.2023.2250921](https://doi.org/10.1080/08893675.2023.2250921)

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