LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

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Abstract:	*THIS PAPER PRESENTS THE RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON LONELINESS. DATA WERE COLLECTED BY APPLYING AN INTERVIEW GUIDE, TO WHICH SPECIALISTS RESPONDED. THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH REFER TO WE DEFINE LONELINESS, WHAT ARE THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF LONELINESS, THE METHODS OF INTERVENTION. THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY HIGHLIGHT THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING SOCIAL SERVICES, ESPECIALLY FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE.*
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Introduction

This article refers to a much extended theme in which loneliness, as a condition, is treated theologically, philosophically, philosophically phenomenologically (Yanguas, Pinazo-Henandis & Tarazona-Santabalbina, 2018) and psycho-socially (Franklin, Tranter, 2021; Larchet, 2018), as a manifestation of a contemporary social malady.

The three reference directions: The Philochalia of Loneliness, The Phenomenology of Loneliness, The Technicalisation of Loneliness, can finally make the difference between loneliness as an agapic space chosen for the other, for communion, and loneliness as a harmful effect of the perversion of the soul and body, organic, of man.

The work is by content a call to see and hear ourselves before utterance and face. Philosophically the ego manifests itself theologically, as a nomad towards the other ego. The theme of loneliness, considered to be the disease of the century, is being researched by psychologists, psychotherapists, sociologists, opinion formers, theologians, precisely because it has become a disease,

paradoxically, unrecognised, although evident in its effects. In this article I will address the psycho-social aspects of loneliness with implications for social work.

Theoretical Framework

Existence remains an adventure of thought and life, in which the mystery of death and love are subject to the tensions and pressures of man's desire to claim his full place in the comprehensive worldview. It is the central idea of Jacques Ellul, a Christian, that Adrian Lemeni puts in the study of his book, *The Inhuman Technicality of Life*. Nature is contained in its presence by inspiring forces. He considers that a global action is a creed in which all the protagonists of creation meet. In his work, Jacques Ellul is not against technology, but he analyses and expresses with lucidity what technology implies in today's society, i.e. the technical rationalisation of thought and all that this process entails in economic, political and environmental terms. Moreover, technologies form a system that "parasitizes life until it replaces it" (Lemeni, 2022, p. 22).

In The Century of Loneliness (2021), Noreena Hertz takes an x-ray of the phenomenon of loneliness, which has become a modern disease, arguing the causes, effects and proposals for remedies. Her approach is a sociological one, a vision anchored in the concrete social plane, in which we encounter man, the community, society, with its psycho-social manifestations, loneliness.

I highlight just a few ideas from this social study to argue the condition of modern man to be alone: The majority profile of customers on social marketing platforms, is that of the solid career man, aged 30-40, single, who spends most of his time at work; three out of five adults in the United States reported feeling lonely in the wake of the social recession just before the pandemic; in Germany "two-thirds of the population consider loneliness a serious problem" (Hertz, 2021, p. 10); in Sweden, a quarter of citizens say they often feel lonely; in Switzerland, two out of five say they often or always feel lonely; in the UK, the situation is deeper, so much so that in 2018 a Minister for Loneliness was set up. One in eight Brits don't even have a friend, three quarters of people say they don't know the names of their neighbours, 60% of employees say they feel lonely at work, and the list goes on. Young people say they feel lonely and have no friends. Elderly people are the most aggressively affected social category, 60% of elderly people in nursing homes said they had not received any visitors. Television is the only company for two-fifths of Britain's elderly. Loneliness is therefore a global crisis of the human social condition. It in turn triggers other crises: an emotional health crisis, which affects the physical and psychological; an economic crisis, because loneliness triggers illnesses which require costs; a political crisis, because it results in estrangement which breeds division and extremism.

Solitude is not the classically defined solitude, where you retreat to be with yourself, even if you are surrounded by people. Loneliness in the 21st century is complex, with effects on all levels, it is a social phenomenon. It is an existential state that has been generated and cultivated by the entire economic, political and social mechanism, starting with globalisation, technicalisation, demographic change, austerity and the Covid 19 pandemic. Its effects also extend to changes in professional relations, between co-workers, between colleagues, between bosses and subordinates, between managers and employees. Another major factor is structural and institutional discrimination, factors such as the large-scale migration of the population from rural to urban areas (Iosif, 2017), mobility due to reorganisation in institutions, in the workplace (Iosif, 2010) and changes in lifestyle (liability) have also influenced this process (Costache, 2013). As seen in the influence of the inhuman technicalisation of life, digitalisation is one of the most influential factors, as it substitutes the face-to-face relationship for a screen through which the energy of life cannot penetrate.

Noreena Hertz brings in the study in this book also proposals to restore the spirit of community and communion, but on which the present theme will not dwell.

Loneliness, the central theme of the work, is found above all in categories of people who are in difficulty and existential risk, although the national system of special protection and social assistance, through social policies, i.e. social benefits and social assistance services, and the institutional framework, is imperatively involved. The reality is one that outlines the very obvious loneliness syndrome. The most affected category in terms of quantity is the elderly

Loneliness in the EU

The European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and Knowledge Service report 2021 provides data showing trends in loneliness influenced by the pandemic, but with repercussions beyond the critical period.

According to the report, people who are alone all or most of the time have a 20% higher risk of suffering from symptoms of depression. "*Loneliness is not just an intimate or personal problem. It can hinder social cohesion and can be seen as a social problem and treated as such,*" the European Commission report states. The report shows the situation in EU countries as follows: Ireland- 18-20%; Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg-16-17%; *Romania*, France, Sweden-14-16%; Poland, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia- 13-14%; Hungary, Slovakia, Finland, Lithuania, Germany, Italy, Portugal- 12-13%; Spain, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Austria, Slovenia, Croația-9-10%.
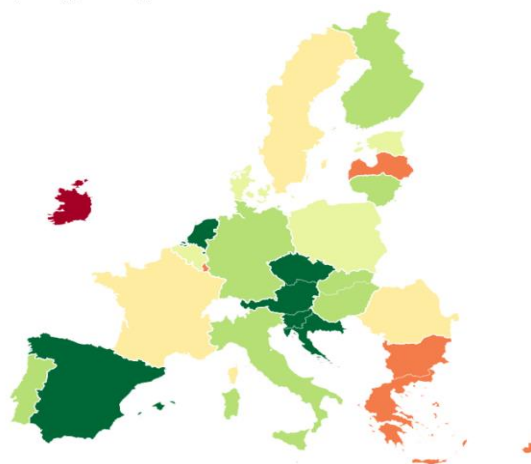

Fig. 1. How widespread is loneliness in the EU.

Certain cultural factors play an important role in loneliness, in addition to personal life events. Heavy use of social media has also been associated with an increase in loneliness and a lack of intimacy and quality of offline interactions. "*Favourable economic situations, as well as the quantity and quality of social interactions, are key in preventing loneliness*" The report notes, however, that the effects of loneliness vary by age, with older people more affected.

Research shows that loneliness and social isolation have detrimental repercussions on mental and physical health, as well as significant consequences for social cohesion and community trust. Both loneliness and social isolation are therefore increasingly recognised as critical public health issues that deserve attention and effective intervention strategies need to be addressed. The COVID-19 pandemic has also dramatically reshaped the lives and social practices of Europeans.În literatură, singurătatea are un caracter subiectiv puternic. Este vorba despre a măsura discrepanța dintre sistemul relațional dorit și cel real al unei persoane.

This cognitive discrepancy is experienced as a profoundly negative experience. Loneliness is therefore not only about having few social contacts per se, but also about the perception of the quality

of these relationships. Loneliness is not about being alone, but about feeling lonely. In this sense, loneliness is different from social loneliness, which means isolation, and has an objective meaning, which means the absence of relationships with other people or a small number of people. Objective loneliness is a voluntary act, which can also mean the presence of positive feelings.

Socially isolated people are not necessarily lonely, and lonely people are not necessarily socially isolated. In addition to the general concept, the academic literature identifies several forms of loneliness. For example, loneliness is defined as transient when it involves occasional feelings of loneliness, situational if it is triggered by specific life events (such as losing a partner or moving to a new city), and chronic when the lack of satisfying relationships persists for long periods of time. Another important issue is the distinction between social and emotional loneliness. The latter stems from the lack of an intimate relationship (e.g. a romantic partner), while the former is associated with the perceived absence of an extended social network (e.g. friend or neighbours). According to this approach, feelings of anxiety and isolation arise with emotional loneliness, whereas social loneliness is associated with purposelessness and marginality. (Holt-Lunstad, Birmingham and Jones 2008).

Methodological Framework

The empirical research presents the opinion of the interviewed specialists, representative of the study directions in this study: priest, social worker of a long-term care home, philosopher, psychotherapist and an interview with a carer of a long-term care home resident.

The aim is to obtain information from the interviewees on the topic around which the interview is built.

The interview used in this research, is an unstructured scientific type interview. Open-ended discussions were set up, with people targeted for the research. The questions common to the five interviews focused on defining the term loneliness, identifying the causes and effects of loneliness, ways of intervention/treatment and answering the question: is loneliness a social phenomenon?

Findings

The research results concluded the following:

The confessor considers loneliness as the inability of man to discover his vocation. The causes are: ignorance, lack of self-knowledge, or the opposite: pride, pride. The effects are: poverty of soul, depression, hopelessness. The remedy would be: self-knowledge, of the human call to likeness with the divine.

Philosopher considers loneliness as a subject for social research, going into the area of psychology, which makes a trend, an ethos of these times, in which man even belonging to the social feels lonely. It is not possible to give a definition, but it is possible to say its effects, because it has been known since Aristotle that the community prevails, or that separation from it creates negative effects. First there is the community and then the individual. Philosophical thinking goes to effects, and calls them harmful defects. The individual is excluded or self-excluded. Power is given by the community. In the community the individual manifests his power. This unmanifested power will lead to null development, which breeds resentment. Rather a moral one, as Nietzsche would say. Man does not show himself, it is about this power: to whom do you show yourself, by what do you show yourself, who sees you? An insidious, complex feeling, which undermines you to the core. Power gives feeling. In community I have feeling. The causes would be, referring again to Nietzsche, the lack of "strong" power, those who impose the law, and the weak obey. In obedience a tear is created, which gives resentment. Loneliness is based on feeling and it subsists as long as resentment exists. Lack of relationship creates loneliness. To resentment is added suspicion, fear of relationship, aspects of the irrational, which psychology deals with, but also philosophy, which discusses the rational through the

irrational. It finds them, looks into causality, and from this analysis, ultimately results the limitation in finding answers. Loneliness appears as an outside condition, or the one you choose. Philosophy can be a guide because it shows you the causes and then it can be a healing process. Loneliness is a social phenomenon, but first it is an individual event. Loneliness affects us and brings out in us what we don't know we have. The reason why I will never be alone again, the philosopher finally declares, is my child in my heart and my thought will always be the child. Modern social work, says the philosopher, is to be ready to intervene, to stand by and watch.

- *The psychotherapist* says: technically and theoretically loneliness is the absence of relationship. The foundation of relationship is relationship with yourself. In the Christian key our mission is to have a living relationship with God not with an idea in our head. The monastic ideal is one of solitude, but it is not solitude per se. Loneliness is that of a man in the middle of the city who is not in touch with himself, with his desires. By being in touch with the precious things deep inside, you can turn to the other. We live in a society of compliance, of good guys, but in fact our goodness is not taken as good and frustration arises. Unseen, conditioned sacrifice will breed cancer. Give the example of the newspaper obituaries in which the man who sacrificed his last moment, ill, to go to work and look after his colleagues, died of the disease. The cause was not exhaustion but the fact that he gave himself out of a need not to be. To be of use is anaesthetic. It confuses the wound of abandonment with being a good guy. time with Him. Likewise, I can experience my relationship with others as a space of relationship or abandonment. Living solitude to make room for God is another way of looking at solitude. The medication would be: the path to holiness is the path of establishing stability, which makes my progress stable, not missing the mark, not deviating from the path. I am called and always have to give and receive.

- *The social worker,* in his experience, has observed the manifestation of loneliness in those who come from extended families, who are cut off from their environment, who have had family relationships. Versus those who have been alone all their lives and who feel good when they come to the care centre, where they meet people and can be in a relationship with them, where they are no longer alone.

- *The helper:* suffers from loneliness due to the limitation of the roles they enhance. Neglect of own life, substitution from the other is aggressively dominant. The beginning is one that freezes him in the problem of the other, but in time he feels the lack of his own identity. Resignation is equally aggressive at some point, and acceptance implies a committed, responsible journey towards self. Sees personal existential mission in relationship with God, which brings some peace and genuine empathy.

Conclusions

From the interviews conducted, we can see our relationship with ourselves and with others, from which we deduce the tensions that create illnesses or heal wounds that we know more or less. But both the philosopher and the psychotherapist fix the relationship as a fundamental element in any approach. The spiritualist claims that separation from God is the cause of all illnesses of soul and body. In relationship with God, illness is no longer a burden, but a way of healing the soul and spiritual progress on the path to salvation.

From the research carried out at the elderly care centre, it is clear that the socio-economic, cultural environment in which the beneficiaries live the majority of their lives and a centre will be assimilated into their mentality according to this fact.

As a conclusion, the relationship, with ourselves, with God, with others, is a theme that defines loneliness, which can be beneficial or harmful, depending on how we situate ourselves in relation to

it. It can be the result of a distancing, which, if we are aware of it, reveals who, how, we are. It can be an ally even when it seems to want to harm us. In reality, it does not exist, it has no power unless we invest it with power.

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