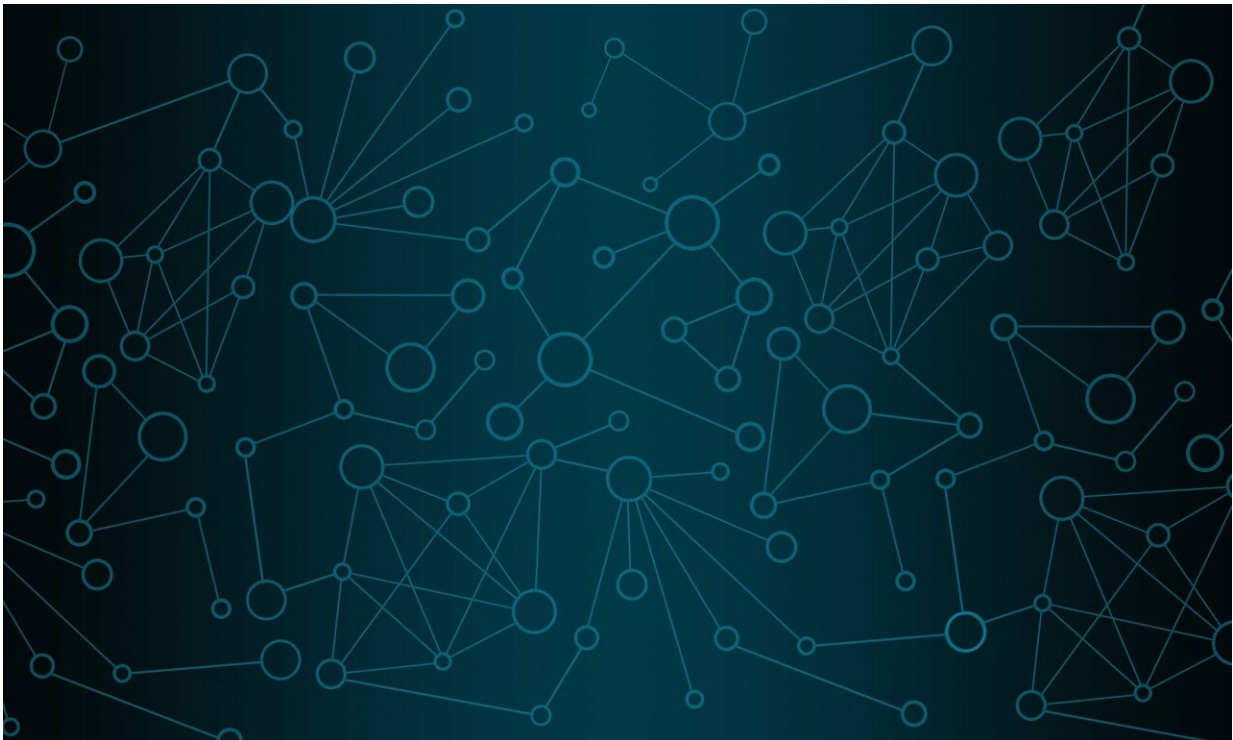


Psychologist suggests negative impact of pandemic on friendships likely to be fleeting

August 27 2020, by Bob Yirka



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Robin Ian MacDonald Dunbar, a psychologist at the University of Oxford, has conducted a review of the literature and concluded that the impact of the pandemic on friendships is likely to be fleeting. He has published a paper in *Proceedings of the Royal Society A* outlining his research and findings, and his theories regarding the impact of the

pandemic on social networks.

The global [pandemic](#) has led to a large number of changes in countries and in the behaviors of citizens—lockdowns have led to loneliness and civil disobedience. The death of loved ones has left many feeling lost and confused—and the fragility of modern society has been laid bare, leaving many to question the beliefs they once held regarding the world. In this new effort, Dunbar began by wondering what might become of the social networks that people have built up—how would the bonds between families or friends fare when people are forced apart?

To find some answers, Dunbar scoured the literature looking for study results that might shed light on conditions that have never been seen before. In so doing, he found that most people have a smaller [network](#) than might be assumed—the average being just 150 people (the maximum number a person's brain is capable of including). And the degree of bondedness in such a network varies depending on critical factors such as time invested on a regular basis and trust.

He also found evidence that time apart from [family members](#) does not tend to diminish the strength of bonds. Time apart from friends is another matter. Some studies showed that friendship bonds can begin to diminish in as little as three months if people are not able to meet in person. But on a more positive note, they also showed that such friendships can be restored once people are free to socialize again. He notes that once the pandemic is over (due to a deployment of a vaccine), people are likely to be awkward with one another for a short time, but if people put in the effort, the bonds that became frayed will likely become strong once again. He concludes by noting that another impact of the pandemic is new people being added to social circles as some are removed, perhaps leading to new long-lasting [friendships](#).

More information: R. I. M. Dunbar. Structure and function in human

and primate social networks: implications for diffusion, network stability and health, *Proceedings of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences* (2020). [DOI: 10.1098/rspa.2020.0446](https://doi.org/10.1098/rspa.2020.0446)

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