

People living in dense parts of UK cities found to be more lonely

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A team of researchers from the University of Hong Kong and one from Oxford University has found that people who live in the denser parts of U.K. cities tend to be lonelier than people living in more open areas. In

their paper published in the journal *Landscape and Urban Planning*, the group describes their study of health data for people in the U.K. and what they found.

Prior research has shown that feelings of isolation can cause [loneliness](#), which can lead to depression. In this new effort, the researchers wondered if people living in different parts of major cities experience different degrees of loneliness based in part on where they live. To find out, they turned to the UK Biobank—a repository of health information that has been compiled as part of large term [genetic studies](#).

The researchers studied the records of 406,000 people living in major U.K. cities, focusing on answers given to questions about loneliness and comparing those answers to the places where the people were living.

The researchers found a pattern. Those living in closely packed apartment complexes reported feeling lonelier than people living in places with more space between living quarters. More specifically, they found that loneliness increased by 2.8% for each additional 1000 [housing units](#) within a kilometer of where people lived, and self-isolation rose by 11.4%.

The researchers also found that when controlling for such factors as gender, health, age or socioeconomic factors that the impact of living in dense parts of cities was more pronounced for men and for people who had retired. Men living in the densest parts of cities were found to be 23.5% more lonely than men living in the least dense parts of cities.

The researchers did not find any evidence showing why living in more densely packed parts of cities might be contributing to loneliness but suggest it is likely tied to lack of privacy and a sense of people feeling like they have less control over their lives.

The researchers suggest that their study shows that loneliness is endemic in densely packed [city](#) areas and that it could be reduced if [city planners](#) took into account the impact of dense housing on the people that live in such areas.

More information: Ka Yan Lai et al, Calculating a national Anomie Density Ratio: Measuring the patterns of loneliness and social isolation across the UK's residential density gradient using results from the UK Biobank study, *Landscape and Urban Planning* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.landurbplan.2021.104194](#)

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