

# Loneliness leads to higher risk of future unemployment, study finds

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Experiencing loneliness appears to lead to a higher risk of future unemployment, according to new research.

Previous research has established that being unemployed can cause [loneliness](#), however the new study from the University of Exeter is the first to directly explore whether the opposite also applies across the working age population. Published in *BMC Public Health*, the study found that people who reported "feeling lonely often" were significantly more likely to encounter unemployment later. Their analysis also confirmed previous findings that the reverse is true—people who were unemployed were more likely to experience loneliness later.

Lead author Nia Morrish, of the University of Exeter, said, "Given the persisting and potentially scarring effects of both loneliness and unemployment on health and the economy, prevention of both experiences is key. Decreased loneliness could mitigate unemployment, and employment abate loneliness, which may in turn relate positively to other factors including health and quality of life. Thus, particular attention should be paid to loneliness with additional support from employers and government to improve health and well-being. Our research was largely conducted pre-pandemic, however we suspect this issue may be even more pressing, with more people working from home and potentially experiencing [isolation](#) because of anxieties around COVID."

The research analyzed largely pre-pandemic data from more than 15,000 people in the Understanding Society Household Longitudinal Study. The team analyzed responses from the participants during 2017-2019, then from 2018-2020, controlling for factors including age, gender, ethnicity, education, marital status, household composition, number of own children in household and region.

Senior author Professor Antonieta Medina-Lara said, "Loneliness is an incredibly important societal problem, which is often thought about in terms of the impact on mental health and well-being only. Our findings indicate that there may also be wider implications, which could have

negative impacts for individuals and the economy. We need to explore this further, and it could lay the foundations for employers or policy makers to tackle loneliness with a view to keeping more people in work."

Paper co-author Dr. Ruben Mujica-Mota, Associate Professor of Health Economics in the University of Leeds' School of Medicine, said, "While previous research has shown that [unemployment](#) can cause loneliness, ours is the first study to identify that lonely people of any working age are at greater risk of becoming unemployed. Our findings show that these two issues can interact and create a self-fulfilling, negative cycle. There is a need for greater recognition of the wider societal impacts of loneliness in the working age population."

The research involved collaboration with Leeds University.

**More information:** Understanding the effect of loneliness on unemployment: propensity score matching, *BMC Public Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-022-13107](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-13107)

Provided by University of Exeter

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