

Research reveals the complexity of loneliness during lockdown

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A study exploring loneliness and solitude during lockdown highlights how different people experienced social restrictions as either "hell or bliss."

The study, published in *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* and by researchers from the University of York, gathered stories of lockdown loneliness from 70 participants aged between 17 and 73, in order to explore how various forms of loneliness affected people in different ways.

Loneliness has been identified as a major public health issue in the U.K., with a Minister for Loneliness first appointed in 2018.

The findings of the research add to a growing body of evidence that there is no "one size fits all" solution to the problem, but rather a need to take an individual approach, the authors of the study say.

Rowena Leary, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Education at the University of York, said: "One of the most striking findings of our study was how different people are, with individuals experiencing the same situations as hell or bliss.

"Lockdown was an extraordinary event and presented a fascinating opportunity to explore how people of all ages experience loneliness.

"Prior to lockdown there was a lot of emphasis on loneliness in [older generations](#), but we now know that other demographics and particularly [young people](#) are also at risk. Our study emphasizes the need to look at how loneliness can affect people across the whole life span."

The study identified three key types of loneliness from participants' answers to their questions: Social loneliness due to a lack of contact with friends or family; emotional loneliness due to a lack of close connections such as [romantic relationships](#), and existential loneliness where people felt entirely separate from other people.

Ms. Leary added: "Existential loneliness is often brought on by

contemplation of death or dying, which likely explains why many people experienced it during the pandemic.

"This is an interesting type of loneliness because there is no obvious way—such as providing opportunities to socialize—to help people who are experiencing it."

The researchers would like to carry out further research into what makes some people more resilient to loneliness than others.

Senior author of the study, Professor Kathryn Asbury from the Department of Education said: "COVID has shown us on a grand scale that it isn't always possible for people to be with others. It seems important to identify strategies for coping with being alone—maybe even benefiting from it sometimes—and to consider how we can help diverse individuals to learn and use such strategies."

"There might be something we can learn from people who enjoy solitude that could help the increasing number of people who suffer a great deal from [loneliness](#)," Ms. Leary added.

More information: Rowena Leary et al, Alone in the COVID-19 lockdown: An exploratory study, *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/asap.12317](https://doi.org/10.1111/asap.12317)

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