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Loneliness in Europe: Determinants, Risks and Interventions. By Sylke V. Schnepf, Béatrice d'Hombres, & Caterina Mauri (Eds.), Springer 2025

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Abstract. This volume, authored by the scientific staff of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, offers a comprehensive, multidisciplinary analysis of loneliness in Europe, moving beyond treating it merely as an individual symptom to recognizing it as a critical public health threat. The book is the culmination of a pilot project initiated by the European Parliament and the European Commission to synthesize dispersed research and provide a holistic overview of the existing evidence. The core of the research relies on the novel European Union Loneliness Survey (EU Loneliness Survey), which for the first time, utilized three distinct, cross-nationally comparable measures of loneliness. The findings identify the determinants and risks associated with loneliness, highlighting that social network quality (e.g., high-quality romantic relationships, close relationships with family and friends) plays a more significant role than demographic or socio-economic characteristics. The book also explores the critical link between loneliness and support for democratic institutions, civic behaviors, and social cohesion. Finally, it offers a pathway for policymakers to develop effective, evidence-based interventions aimed at improving mental well-being and fostering social cohesion across Europe..

Keywords. Loneliness in Europe; Loneliness Survey; Public Health Threat; Mental Well-being; Determinants and Risks (of Loneliness); Social Cohesion; Democratic Processes; Interventions and Policy.

JEL. D72; H75; I18; J10; Z13.

Book Review

Loneliness in Europe: *Determinants, Risks and Interventions*, edited by Sylke V. Schnepf, Béatrice d'Hombres, and Caterina Mauri, represents a significant and timely contribution to social science and public health policy. As a product of a collaborative pilot project between the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the European Parliament, the volume successfully synthesizes widely dispersed empirical research to position loneliness not as a fleeting individual sorrow, but as an "underestimated public health threat" with profound implications for mental well-being, social cohesion, and democratic processes across the continent. The book moves beyond mere symptom recognition to establish a robust, evidence-based foundation for policy intervention.

The editors emphasize the multifaceted nature of loneliness, which was acutely highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, though its roots predate it. The key innovation of this work is the implementation and analysis of the European Union Loneliness Survey (EU Loneliness Survey), which is introduced as a major step forward in measurement and cross-national

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comparison by using three distinct metrics of loneliness. The ultimate dedication of the book—to policymakers and stakeholders committed to giving voice to the problem and evaluating intervention effectiveness—underscores its policy-oriented mission.

Part I: Conceptualization and Measurement (Chapters 1-2)

The initial chapters focus on establishing a unified conceptual framework and introducing the novel methodology. Chapter 1 defines loneliness and firmly establishes its status as an urgent public policy issue. The need for the European Commission–European Parliament (EC-EP) project is justified by the difficulty of obtaining a comprehensive overview of the existing evidence, as empirical research is dispersed across diverse disciplines. By synthesizing this knowledge, the book aims for a comprehensive understanding that informs public policy. Furthermore, the introduction signals a critical link, exploring the unique opportunity afforded by the EU Loneliness Survey's module on civic and social attitudes to assess the connection between loneliness and support for democratic institutions.

Chapter 2, "Measuring Loneliness: The European Union Loneliness Survey," details the survey design and implementation. This chapter is vital as it introduces the methodological cornerstone of the entire volume. The EU Loneliness Survey is lauded for being the first cross-national survey to employ three distinct measures of loneliness, allowing for meaningful comparison and a richer understanding of the phenomenon. The data collection aimed to be representative of the EU population in terms of age, gender, educational attainment, and NUTS region of residence. By providing transparency on sampling, weighting, and the scales used (such as the UCLA and DJG measures), the book lays a robust foundation for the empirical findings that follow.

Part II: Determinants, Risks, and Vulnerable Groups (Chapter 3 and beyond)

The empirical core of the book, exemplified by Chapter 3, "Who Feels Lonely in the European Union?", utilizes the EU Loneliness Survey data to identify which population groups are most at risk and the factors contributing to loneliness.

The analysis provides novel and counter-intuitive insights:

- **Social Network Quality vs. Demographics:** The findings highlight that an individual's social network and social interactions appear to play a greater role than traditional demographic and socio-economic characteristics in determining frequent feelings of loneliness.
- **Key Protective Factors:** Having a high-quality romantic relationship, as well as close relationships and frequent interactions with family members and friends, is consistently associated with a substantially lower risk of loneliness.
- **Risk Factors:** Conversely, being single, separated, or widowed is linked to a higher likelihood of feeling lonely than for people who are married or have a partner. Life events, such as separation from a partner, are shown to be statistically significant predictors of loneliness across various specifications.

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- Non-Significant Factors: Intriguingly, the chapter finds no significant association between being disabled or permanently sick and loneliness, a result the authors suggest may be due to a high correlation with working status categories.

These findings are crucial for policy, as they suggest that interventions should focus less on broad socio-economic groups and more on fostering high-quality relationships and social interactions.

Part III: Policy Implications and Future Pathways (Final Chapters)

The final section shifts the focus to actionable policy strategies. The book, in its conclusion, reaffirms the value of the novel insights provided by the EU Loneliness Survey, confirming existing evidence while opening up new avenues for research. The authors argue that to effectively reduce the incidence of loneliness, policy must adopt a two-pronged approach: identifying and reducing individual exposure to high-risk factors, and, most importantly, intervening to support individuals and communities.

The broader context of the foreword and the dedication suggests an emphasis on macro-level societal changes. Evelyn Regner, in the foreword, links the lack of social environment beyond work to a form of loneliness, emphasizing the role of economic factors such as the cost of living and public space availability in contributing to social isolation. The final chapters, therefore, implicitly or explicitly endorse a need for comprehensive public policy that:

- Increases data and information about the prevalence and factors of loneliness.
- Addresses the root causes and symptoms of loneliness, moving beyond treating it as an isolated disease.
- Supports interventions evaluated for effectiveness, thereby improving physical and mental well-being and strengthening social cohesion.

The work included in the volume is presented as an encouragement for researchers to make full use of the data gathered by the EU Loneliness Survey, ensuring that future policy is driven by empirical evidence.

Overall Assessment and Conclusion

Loneliness in Europe: Determinants, Risks and Interventions is a landmark publication produced by a highly credible source (the European Commission's JRC). Its strength lies in its methodological innovation (the EU Loneliness Survey) and its rigorous, evidence-based findings that reframe the debate around loneliness. The book successfully bridges the gap between scientific investigation and public policy formulation, providing a robust, data-driven "future pathway" for the European Union and beyond. It is an essential reference for policymakers, public health professionals, academics in population economics, and researchers focused on social resilience and democratic vitality in contemporary Europe.



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