



Loneliness in New Zealand

A VICTORIA SCIENCE TEACHING RESOURCE

WHAT'S THE QUESTION?



Loneliness has many negative physical and mental health effects. It is most common amongst vulnerable groups such as the elderly, but the characteristics of loneliness are not well known. While we talk about loneliness, we don't have a way of classifying the different ways that people experience it. This is called a typology.

SO HOW CAN WE BUILD A TYPOLOGY?



Researchers at Victoria University have analysed 18,264 participants of the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study to identify different categories of loneliness and how they exist in the New Zealand population.

WHAT IS THE NEW ZEALAND ATTITUDES AND VALUES STUDY?



The NZAVS is a longitudinal study that started in 2009. It is a self-reporting study where a representative cross-section of New Zealanders fill out a questionnaire every year. Researchers take this data and track how social, psychological, and health factors change over a long period of time.

For more information on this study visit:
www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/NZAVS

WHAT DID THEY DISCOVER?



The researchers measured loneliness using the results of three questions, which were rated from strongly disagree (a score of 1) to strongly agree (a score of 7):

1. I know that people in my life value and accept me
2. I feel like an outsider
3. I know that people around me share my values and beliefs

By analysing the common patterns of people's responses to those questions, they identified four categories of loneliness.

Low-loneliness

These people gave themselves high scores for question 1 and question 3, and a low score for question 2.

Appreciated outsiders

These people gave themselves high scores for all three questions. They perceive themselves as social outsiders, but feel accepted and appreciated, likely through close, meaningful relationships.

Superficially connected

These people gave themselves low scores for all three questions. They perceive themselves as included in social groups generally, but they don't feel accepted or appreciated.

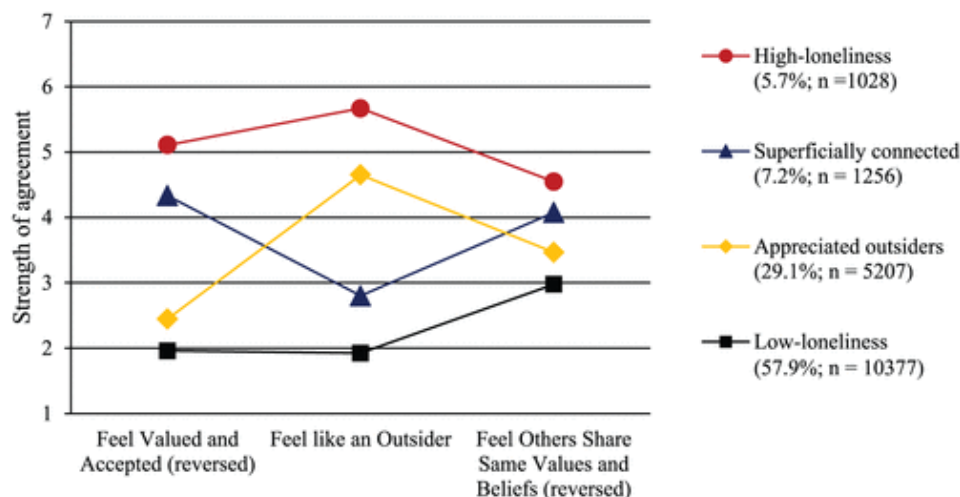
High-loneliness

These people gave themselves low scores for question 1 and question 3, and a high score for question 2. They would perceive themselves as being less accepted and appreciated, as well as being social outsiders.

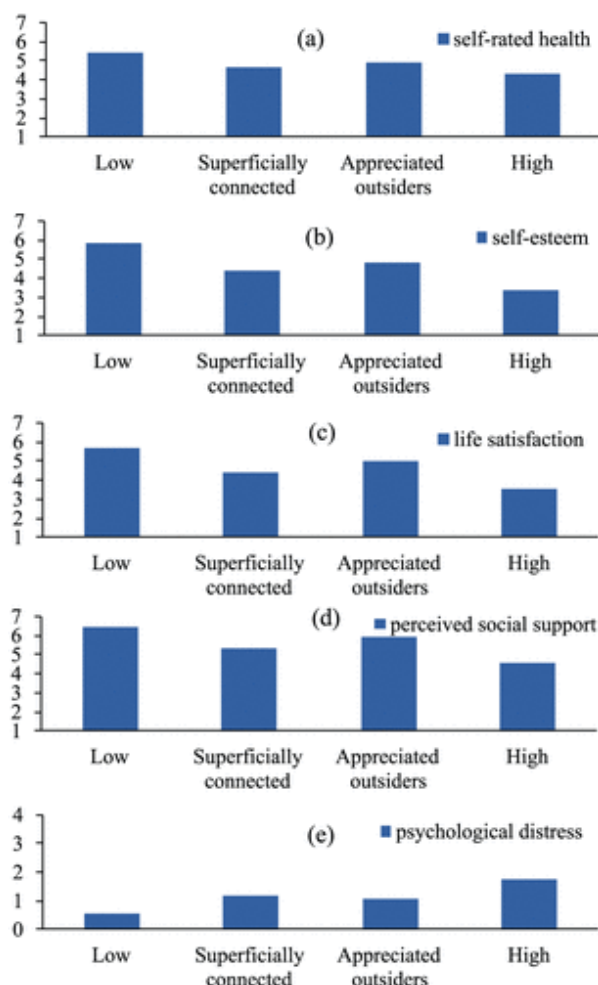
Before you turn the page, how do you think these particular categories are distributed throughout the New Zealand population?

The Distribution of Loneliness

In a sample of just under 18,000 respondents, the researchers found the following distribution of the four categories of loneliness. It's important to note that the answers to question 1 and 3 have been reversed in the graph.



MAKING USE OF THE LONELINESS TYPOLOGY



The researchers performed an analysis to see whether there was a pattern in how five wellbeing indicators showed in the four categories. Looking at the graph to the right, discuss the following questions.

- Is loneliness linked at all with lower mental health?
- Where are the biggest differences between the low and high loneliness groups?
- Where are the biggest differences between the 'Superficially Connected' group and the 'Appreciated Outsiders' group?
- How might this typology of loneliness affect the way that mental health practitioners work with their clients?
- Propose an initiative to promote mental health in your community based on these findings.