

Look at all the lonely people

(The Beatles, Eleanor Righby)

Many people feel lonely at some point in their life. Loneliness is the unpleasant feeling that occurs when people are not satisfied with either the amount or the quality of their social relationships. People may feel lonely when alone, but also when they are surrounded by other people. Loneliness is often assumed to be a problem of the elderly, thereby overlooking the importance of this phenomenon for younger individuals. It is important to study loneliness in adolescents, not only because of the emotional pain it involves, but also because loneliness is a risk for many adverse outcomes. For example, lonely people show more psychological problems, such as depression and anxiety, physical problems, such as sleep problems and cardiovascular incidents, and become physically ill more quickly and pass away at an earlier age.

The present dissertation had three aims. First, we examined whether there are different types of loneliness. For example, people may feel that they lack a close, intimate attachment to another person (i.e., intimate loneliness) or may feel that they lack a network of social relationships (i.e., relational loneliness). Second, we examined the quality of an instrument that has been frequently used to measure different types of loneliness in adolescents. Third, we focused on health status (i.e., having a chronic physical condition) and gender as characteristics that may make individuals vulnerable to experiences of loneliness.



Cover: Evelien Stougje