THE PROBLEM OF LONELINESS IN MODERN SOCIETY: A SOCIOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Among increasingly important social phenomena of a modern world is the problem of loneliness becoming more common among people of all ages due to various cognitive, behavioral,and social factors. People have been worried about the problem of loneliness throughout the history of mankind. This study is devoted to investigation of the phenomenon of loneliness from the perspectives of sociology and philosophy. The goal of research is to explore how relevant the problem of loneliness is in modern society. The descriptive study of loneliness based on the review of scientific literature used the methods of analysis and synthesis of the collected research data, thematic analysis, comparative analysis and data systematization. The research results demonstrated that loneliness is a universal phenomenon, caused by various factors, and leading to health risks, cognitive and behavioral disorders. The recommendations for overcoming loneliness were presented.

Key words: Loneliness, Problem of Loneliness, Sociological Analysis, Philosophical Analysis, Modern Society, Causes of Loneliness, Outcomes of Loneliness.

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Қазіргі қоғамдағы жалғыздық мәселесі: әлеуметтік-философиялық талдау

Аннотация. Қазіргі қоғамда маңызды әлеуметтік құбылыстарының ішінде орын алып отырған, әртүрлі әлеуметтік, когнитивті және мінез-құлық факторларының әсерінен пайда болатын жалғыздық мәселесі барлық жастағы адамдар арасында жиі кездеседі. Адамзат тарихында адамдарды жалғыздық мәселесі әрдайым толғандырып келді. Бұл зерттеу әлеуметтану ғылымымен философия ғылымы тұрғысынан жалғыздық феноменін кешенді зерттеуге арналған. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – қазіргі қоғамдағы жалғыздық мәселесінің қаншалықты өзекті екендігін анықтау. Ғылыми әдебиеттерге шолу негізінде жалғыздық мәселесін сипаттайтын ғылымда жинақталған зерттеу деректерін талдау және синтездеу, тақырыптық талдау, салыстырмалы талдау және деректерді жүйелеу ғылыми әдістері қолданылды. Зерттеу нәтижелері жалғыздықтың әртүрлі факторлардың әсерінен туындайтынын және де денсаулыққа қауіп төндіретін, когнитивті бұзылыстар мен мінез-құлық бұзылыстарына әкелетін әмбебап құбылыс екендігін көрсетті. Жалғыздықты жеңу бойынша жинақталған кейбір шешімдер талданып, ұсынылды.

Түйін сөздер: жалғыздық, жалғыздық мәселесі, социологиялық талдау, философиялық талдау, қазіргі қоғам, жалғыздықтың себептері, жалғыздық салдары.

Проблема одиночества в современном обществе: социально-философский анализ

Аннотация. Среди значимых социальных явлений современного мира все более распространенной становится проблема одиночества у людей всех возрастов вследствии различных социальных, когнитивных и поведенческих факторов. Проблема одиночества волновала умы на протяжении всей истории человечества. Данная статья посвящена

анализу феномена одиночества в социологии и философии. Целью данной работы является исследование того, насколько актуальна проблема одиночества в современном обществе. В описательном исследовании одиночества на основе обзора научной литературы использовались методы анализа и синтеза собранных материалов исследования, тематического и сравнительного анализов, систематизации данных. Результаты исследования показали, что одиночество является универсальным явлением, вызванным различными факторами и приводящим к рискам для здоровья, когнитивным и поведенческим расстройствам. В заключении проанализированы и даны рекомендации по преодолению одиночества.

Ключевые слова: одиночество, проблема одиночества, социологический анализ, философский анализ, современное общество, причины одиночества, последствия одиночества.

Introduction

One of the rapidly growing problems in our world today is loneliness. Emerging social trends influencing the way people interact in society leads to loneliness, which is considered "the next critical public health issue" [1], and a social threat.

Throughout the history of mankind, people have been worried about the problem of loneliness. The experience of loneliness is an exciting, sometimes painful experience that no one can avoid. And at the same time, feeling of loneliness is a complex and multifaceted experience that has many shades, causing us to have differently colored emotions, thoughts, feelings [2].

Loneliness is becoming usual among people of various ages due to different links including cognitive, behavioral, and social factors. There are various reasons why people may feel lonely, some of them are social media, bullying and depression. Signs of a chronic loneliness include "inability to connect with others on a deeper, more intimate level, many acquaintances but no "best" or "close" friend, feelings that no one "gets" you, overwhelming feelings of isolation even if you're at a party surrounded by dozens of people, negative feelings of self-doubt and self-worth; feeling exhausted when trying to engage in social activities" [3].

Loneliness, seen as "a negative embarrassing condition", is an issue that is little debated in the current "self-obsessed climate" [4]. In this respect, this study is aimed at exploring the problem of loneliness from the perspectives of sociology and philosophy, identifying how relevant the problem of loneliness is in modern society, the causes leading to loneliness and its outcomes.

Research method

In line with the research goal of identifying how relevant the problem of loneliness is in modern society the following research questions were stated in this study:

RQ 1: What is loneliness from the perspectives of Philosophy and Sociology?

RQ 2: What are the factors leading to loneliness in modern society

RG 3: What activities are undertaken in overcoming loneliness as a social threat?

To achieve the goal set in this study several research methods were utilized. T*he collection of data from the research databases was conducted for analysis of the problem of loneliness in the modern society. The databases included ResearchGate, Elsevier, and Academia.edu.* The study is descriptive in nature and is grounded on the results of previously published works. The research articles for the study were selected based on their abstract, bibliography, and "the best methodological base" [5, p. 104]. The review of research articles was

manipulated through the analysis and synthesis of the collected research data, thematic analysis, comparative analysis and data systematization.

Results and Discussion

Loneliness from the perspectives of Philosophy and Sociology

Loneliness is considered in Philosophy from the point of view of several approaches:

1. *Ancient Greek philosophers* equated loneliness with death, because man could not survive being separated from the collective.

2. *Medievalism*. Loneliness was a way of unity with God and knowledge of the divine. Man refused to unite with people in order to achieve unity with God. It was emphasized that a person is lonely because he is aware of his loneliness – a burden imposed on a person by God [6, p. 21].

3. *Existentialism* defined loneliness as one of the basic existentials of human existence in line with fear, death and love [7, p. 14]. The main characteristics of loneliness are the fundamental nature of loneliness for defining human nature, and the irresistibility of loneliness. The only thing an individual can do is understand that he is forever and infinitely alone.

4. *Modern philosophical approach*. The ideas described above have changed and transformed over time. An analysis of the literature confirms that currently, loneliness is considered from a philosophical standpoint a form of existential escapism as a way to get away from the surrounding reality [8, p. 157]. But unlike the medieval understanding of escapism, the ultimate goal is no longer a meeting with God. According to modernphilosophers, a person avoids meeting with the real world, the people inhabiting it in order to meet with himself, his own personality, needs and desires not imposed from outside

In Sociology until now loneliness was equal to death, as it was believed that a person is not able to surviveon their own, without the help of their fellow tribesmen, relatives neither physically nor economically [2]. Loneliness is "a subjective feeling of distres arising when social connections are perceived to be inadequate or unfulfilling" [9]. An important point is that within the described approach, loneliness is eithera conscious or a voluntary socialisolation.

Loneliness as a common social phenomenon, and according to sociologists, it originates from the overgrown mass culture of individualism. Conscious loneliness, a voluntary social isolation, is becoming more and more common phenomena today, for which there are no cultural and national differences. One of the examples is the hikikomori, originated in Japan but widespread throughout the world. A person cannot cope with the high social requirements that dictate the need to be successful, educated, financially secure and attractive. Personality is under pressure and to cope with which he goes to the world of computer games [9].

It is stated, that most people do not see loneliness as a burden, isolation or an obstacle in communicating with others and achieving their goals, but consider it a stage of growing up and transition to an independent life [10, p. 82].

Understanding of loneliness as alienation is also characteristic of the current stage in the development of Sociology. Internetization of communication processes plays a huge part in the spread of the phenomenon of loneliness leading to an increasingly intense restriction of social contacts, and their destruction, the loss of social communication skills and building "new" connections [8, p. 693].

Factors Leading to Loneliness in Modern Society

Loneliness is considered" a psychological state resulting from perceived or real deficiencies within an individual's social relationships" [11].

"Emotional loneliness" is "the absence of an attachment figure (together with feelings of isolation) and social loneliness is the lack of a social network, the absence of a circle of people that allows an individual to develop a sense of belonging, of company, of being part of a community" [12].

Studies on loneliness indicate that "lonely people remain lonely in the presence of other people, loneliness is not a particular person characteristic, but a state which can be induced in anyone, loneliness is associated with impaired emotion regulation" [13]; "loneliness is associated with low levels of the same key psychological resources such as relationship intimacy, money sufficiency, and purposeful engagement, loneliness and self-esteem are strongly negatively correlated" [14], "loneliness and meaning in life are biologically linked" [15].

Existentialism explains loneliness through authenticity. It is up to each individual to give meaning to life and live it authentically, the failure of which leads to despair. Despair is "a loss of hope resulting from a breakdown in the defining qualities of one's self or identity. If a person has nothing to rely on for their identity, they are unable to be what defined their being – they are lonely" [16]. Camus and Sartre addressed the existential loneliness stating that "whether or not an individual believes in God, he has the capacity to resist despair by confronting his own choices and seeking his own purpose"[17].

Loneliness is becoming "a social cancer" worldwide. The Australia Talks national survey reported that only half of participants stated that they "rarely" or "never" feel lonely [18]. Causes of loneliness in America are considered to be "(1) a lack of social support and infrequent meaningful social interactions, (2) negative feelings about one's personal relationships, (3) poor physical and mental health, (4) a lack of "balance" in one's daily activities – doing too much or too little of any given thing (e.g., sleep, work)" [3].

It is believed, that "loneliness is determinant of how people interact with the digital world. Lonely people express a preference for using the Internet for social interaction and are more likely to use the Internet in a way that displaces time spent in offline social activities" [19].

Numerous studies were conducted to explore personal characteristics which incline people to loneliness. Research results demonstrated that anyone can start feeling lonely in particular conditions [20].

Experiencing loneliness can differ in various life stages as person's social needs alter [21]. "During the shift from adolescence to early adulthood, close friendships and romantic relationships are highly valued. Thus, loneliness is highly prevalent from adolescence to early adulthood" [22], making this stage of life interesting in studying loneliness and associating it with social isolation and depression.

Research indicates that "social media use may be tied to negative mental health outcomes, including suicidality, loneliness and decreased empathy" [23]. Bullying, especially on social media nowadays, directly leads to loneliness. After being bullied individuals may develop social anxiety, which is confirmed by Jackson & Cohen in "the study of white American, middle-income sample of late elementary students" [24]. "In-person overt victimization and

cyber victimization were associated with concurrent loneliness and social acceptability" [25].

Feeling lonely is also highly affected by work. "People working less than they would prefer feel lonelier, as do those who work more than they would prefer. Those who don't get along with coworkers or are new to their workplaces also experience loneliness. And unsurprisingly, people who frequently work from home stated that they feel lonelier" [3].

Another view to the factors leading to loneliness is that loneliness and negative or harmful thoughts can be caused by tyrannical regimes that isolate and divide populations [26]. "Loneliness can also be a personal experience, separate from the influence of historical events" [27]. Thus, loneliness can be considered a by-product of being a part of the modern world.

Outcomes of Loneliness in Human Lives

The analysis of the studies on loneliness confirms that "there is no consensus among the prominent thinkers on whether loneliness is a positive or negative experience" [28].

People experiencing loneliness are "at risk for reduced health and well-being, including poor life satisfaction" [29], "depression" [30], "low self-esteem and reduced hope" [31], "negative affect" [32], and "impaired function in activities of daily living" [33]. Besides, loneliness causes cognitive decline and dementia [32].

Depression is a major outcome of loneliness. People who feel lonely "don't feel the sense of well-being because of an absence of social relationships, and this can significantly impact their health" [34]. Thus, "loneliness is a strong risk factor for depression. Although the prevalence of loneliness varies with age, its association with depression remains stable across the lifespan" [35, p. 340].

In Great Britain "the social isolation and loneliness are comparable risk factors for early death as smoking 15 cigarettes a day" [36], "for social relationships being a fundamental component of human life provide a source of support, meaning and guidance which can influence long-term trajectories of health outcomes" [25].

Overcoming Loneliness as a Social Threat

In treating loneliness, it is important to explore the experience of other countries of overcoming loneliness. For instance, "suggestions for Japan's prevalence of social isolation and loneliness included monetary support for community-based programming (building and fostering social support networks for the elderly), improving urban residential experiences by addressing issues of litter, crime, air pollution, and green space at the neighbourhood level" [37]. However, "social isolation is distinct from loneliness. Loneliness is like an emotion – it's subjective and self-described. A person could be in a crowded room and feel lonely; however, they're not isolated from society because they're surrounded by people" [9].

As for the UK's cross-governmental strategy, it implies creating "public awareness and understanding of loneliness and a consequent policy response to the loneliness crisis" [38]. The major recommendations of the Commission on loneliness include "the creation of a Minister of Loneliness, as well as the development of a national loneliness indicator, an annual report on loneliness, and funding for initiatives to help ease loneliness. The recommendations informed the government's loneliness strategy released in 2018. This strategy includes

general policies to reduce risk of loneliness within the population, and other policies that specifically target vulnerable populations. An example of a policy targeting those at higher risk for experiencing loneliness is the increased support of Carers UK. Established in 1988, Carers UK is a government-funded charity that helps the 6.5 million UK residents who care for family and friends suffering from chronic conditions by providing the caretakers with emotional support and practical information" [39].

Interventions "to reduce loneliness among older adults have been analyzed and described in previous literature reviews and included:

1) activities – social or physical programmes;

2) support – discussion, counseling, therapy or education;

3) internet training;

4) home visiting;

5) service provision" [40, p. 5].

The main tools needed to cure or prevent loneliness comprise "a sufficiency of money, a purposeful activity, and an emotionally intimate relationship" [41]. "Interventions should not only aim at increasing social connections but also focus on subjective feelings of loneliness" [35]. However, in other studies the treatment of loneliness by training societal competences, and organizing interpersonal contact and shared support is found to be ineffective. "This can only be achieved by increasing human kind's awareness of this distressing condition that everyone has to endure in some way, shape or form during their lives, about which there is nothing to be embarrassed" [42].

Conclusion

As a result of our study of the problem of loneliness in modern society, it can be stated, that loneliness is a longstanding societal concern resonating across disciplines. Loneliness is a sociocultural phenomenon in modern society, devoid of ethnic and cultural boundaries. Loneliness is a universal phenomenon. The widespread occurrence of the problem of loneliness is due to the fact thatit spreads through Internet.

Person's feeling of loneliness is caused by a number of issues: an absence of social care and rare significant communication, undesirable feelings of interactions, deprived mental and physical health, unbalanced daily activities, using the Internet over social interaction, bullying, work, and tyrannical governmental regimes.

The nature of loneliness varies throughout the human life due to social needs' shift. Loneliness predominantly occurs in young people (from adolescence to early adulthood). Though, it also prevails in aging individuals.

The state of loneliness is dangerous as it leads to early death, cognitive disorders, unhealthy conditions, deprived life satisfaction, depleted sense of worth, low hope, stress, reduced activities of daily living. Loneliness and depression are directly correlated, and are influenced by each other. Loneliness leading to depression may cause the decline of many health factors.

The support activities in overcoming loneliness should manipulate interventions such as various public programmes, discussion clubs, treatment, educational programmes, ICT training, visiting at home, and providing various services not only aiming at fostering social interactions but also focusing on personal feelings of loneliness.

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