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Self-Management and Management of Loneliness

ABSTRACT

The article analyzes two aspects of the current issue of loneliness of modern people. On the one hand, it is about the means of self-regulation by the lonely man himself. On the other hand, the problems related to the activities of non-lonely people and different types of institutions are analyzed in relation to solving the problems of lonely people. The first part of the article discusses the ways in which lonely people try to cope with their loneliness. In the second part, I look at some of the ways in which other people and the institutions react to this phenomenon. In the process of analysis, I used interviews with lonely people, statistics, as well as analysis of scientific and other literature.

Keywords: loneliness, self-management, management

INTRODUCTION

Loneliness is one of the forms of experiencing alienation. The subjective feeling of loneliness is the end result of real, objective alienation. A distinction can be made between the feeling of loneliness in professional and in private life. When loneliness is felt in one segment of life, it can be somewhat offset by a lack of loneliness in the other one. The worst option is a combination of the two.

Loneliness can be defined:

- as a crisis-related state of the psyche,
- as an unpleasant or unwanted feeling,
- as a destructive form of self-perception. The lonely person feels abandoned, forgotten, unnecessary, isolated, with a lack of social contacts, help and understanding,
- as a feeling of oppressive emptiness due to the lack of love.

The consequences of loneliness are very serious – both for the individual and for society. They can be economic, social, physical and mental. The increase in loneliness naturally leads to a deterioration in the health of the masses, to an increase in diseases, crime and pressure on the social system. Solving the problem of loneliness of lonely people is not only their personal issue and right, but also a public issue and obligation. Because the consequences of their loneliness directly affect the happiness of non-lonely people. Because their problems are solved with the money, time and any other resources of non-lonely people who have worked hard to start families, to raise children, to maintain communities of close people so as not to be lonely.

SELF-MANAGEMENT OF LONELINESS

An important issue is the self-management of loneliness, which refers to the efforts of the individual himself to overcome the loneliness. The individual can become more active to overcome it or reduce it, or he can perform actions to increase it. Dealing with loneliness is in direct proportion to the understanding of the reasons for it by the individual and society. The way of interpreting the events is important for whether the individual will reach a feeling of loneliness or how he will cope with it, if he has already reached it.

The increase of superstition, religiosity, attachment to the theory of the unchanging essence, destiny, predestination, on the one hand, is the result of increased loneliness. And, on the other hand, it can be a factor in increasing loneliness in modern conditions. Religious and superstitious people are more likely to think that their loneliness is the result of the will of God or fate. This is an obstacle to their desire and ability to self-manage in the direction of overcoming it. They are waiting for another subject to solve their problem. They try less to help themselves than those who believe in themselves and other people.

There is a difference in the attitude towards explanations for loneliness between married people, divorced and widowed people, on the one hand, and voluntarily unmarried people, on the other. Divorced and widowed people are more likely to look for the causes of their problems than the second group of people. The results of Natasha Angelova's research on divorcees and widows are interesting. In these two groups, all participants declared their readiness to look for the causes of the failures in life within themselves. Most of the unmarried participants tend to attribute the explanation for the problems and failures they encounter to reasons that do not depend on their actions and are beyond their control. Blaming external factors has its positives, but, at the same time, it limits the individual in taking responsibility for his own behavior and influences the change that could happen if a person gives himself the opportunity to realize himself as an active, not a suffering subject [Angelova 2019: 214].

If society believes that loneliness should be minimized, it should encourage thinking that these are not birthmarks, genetic predisposition or the Lord's decision, but the

conscious and consistent construction of one's own "destiny". And that human can influence events, improve himself, acquire skills and change relationships. Loneliness is always the result of the functioning of society. The lonely person is a product of the social environment. One of the proofs for this is the increase or decrease of the number of lonely people in the different stages of social development, depending on the changes in the social environment. The lonely person is socialized in such a way that he cannot fully communicate and cannot satisfy his basic needs, while being lonely. As a result of their socialization, lonely people take more appropriate or inappropriate steps to solve their problems. Some of them contribute to overcoming the problem faster and easier. Others steps actually stimulate the problem or create other personal problems – such as alcoholism and/or taking drugs.

"There is certainly a lot of evidence that when people suffer from loneliness, they are more likely to think of it as a mental, personality disorder and seek help from mental health professionals than to assess its complex origins in the social and cultural matter of the societies in which they live" [Franklin 2012: 12]. In fact, this is a common behavior of most people, a characteristic feature of their thinking. They tend to blame others for their problems but not to look for the causes in themselves. They do not analyze the complex of reasons for their loneliness, they do not approach sociologically.

People who are more rational thinkers, with more developed sociological thinking (without the need to be sociologists) cope more successfully with loneliness. And this means that they can analyze the interaction of the various factors that determine their personal situation. People who generally do not like loneliness, who are in situational, temporary loneliness, are more prone to self-management in a situation of loneliness. Divorced and widowed people are more likely to look for alternatives compared to single people, because their loneliness is caused more by other circumstances than by their desire to be alone. They are connected more with temporary loneliness. In the case of voluntarily unmarried people, the moment of unwillingness to commit is stronger. So self-management in the direction of overcoming loneliness is more difficult for them. They are more characterized by chronic loneliness.

Lonely people, more than non-lonely people, believe that competence in social relationships is not so important or that it is unchangeable, genetically set, etc., that destiny predetermines them to be such and this encourages them not to make the necessary efforts to change. Family people are more motivated to change, at least because they feel responsible for other people. The first step is to acknowledge the problem to yourself and then to others. If it is not done, the advice is useless. There must be a desire to deal with the problem, and this can happen when the problem is realized and acknowledged.

Unmarried people more often than other lonely people do not admit their problem. They are more likely to resort to risky and unsatisfactory ways to deal with loneliness. Instead of radically solving the problem – mostly by finding a partner and having children, by creating lasting communities of loved ones – they resort to excursions, sex tourism, prostitution, unforced emigration and other palliatives.

The other type of lonely people (divorced, widowed) are more inclined to admit their problem, to change something in themselves, in their habits, in their environment in order to avoid unwanted loneliness. The lonely person must accept the fact that he feels lonely. He must analyze his thoughts and actions in relation to this feeling – what and how causes his loneliness and what its consequences might be. In order to overcome loneliness, it is necessary to make conscious efforts, to admit that something needs to be changed. He needs to understand the effects that loneliness has on him, both physically and mentally.

Loneliness, like other emotions, is a state of mind. Researches show that anxiety and depression are connected to the tendency to focus on ourselves and the negative emotions we experience, and not engage in conversations and interactions with others – which are actually a key to our good mental state. On the other hand, when we feel calm and more positive, the desire to communicate and interact increases. How can we get rid of the negative emotions that make us focus on ourselves and the bad way we feel? The paradoxical answer may be to pay attention to the person who no longer pays attention to us, to the person who has stopped caring for us – our own essence.

We can feel lonely because we don't take care of ourselves – whether it's because of a lack of time, energy, interest or simply because we don't consider ourselves important enough. Try to take more care of yourself. You will see how just a few actions can make you feel more loved and connected. Self-help depends on your needs and personality. It is an act of self-love that makes you feel good physically and emotionally: a bath, a walk, a meditation, tidying the house, reading, etc. You know better than anyone what you need to feel better. [*Chuvstvate se samotni...* 2019]

You need to change your usual lifestyle! Instead of being alone, as you are used to, try to communicate more. Look for activities that are interesting to you. “Sign up for a sports club or mountain club, play chess, go fishing, go for walks with your pet and meet the owners of other pets. Contacts with people who have similar interests will give you the opportunity to practice and improve your social skills in a pleasant company, as well as to overcome problems more easily” [Radovanovich 2021].

Think about starting training or activities that you like – it will be a great opportunity to meet different people, make new friends and social interactions. Focus on developing quality relationships with people who share your interests, attitudes and values. Focus on positive thoughts and attitudes in your social relationships and always expect the best, because a common mistake of single people is the fear of rejection, which prevents them from creating a full-fledged relationship. [Radovanovich 2021]

Everyone needs their own community – for someone it is his friends; for others it is some spiritual community or family they have created. If you have not found them yet, keep looking because they exist.

One way to overcome loneliness is to get involved in volunteering. In this way you will shake off your problems, you will learn to take care of and dedicate yourself to others.

At some point, you may realize that all people, whether they belong to your tribe or share your views, have the same deep need for social connection and love. It is for this reason that a profound way to increase social connection with others is through compassion and altruism.

Compassion (when balanced with self-care) is one of the greatest sources of happiness. It not only leads to physical and emotional well-being but even improves our chances of living longer and more fully. Research by psychologists Ed Diener and Martin Seligman suggests that altruism leads to better mental and physical health and boosts recovery from various diseases. The researchers concluded that the support and help we provide to other people helps reduce the stress response in the brain. Most importantly, however, compassion helps us connect with others and find a deeper sense of meaning and purpose. Compassion can be an antidote to loneliness, but in order to be able to show it to others we must first learn to show it to ourselves. [Radovanovich 2021]

An interesting example of seeking ways to overcome loneliness is joining a terrorist group. In some cases, they include people who, for some reason, cannot find another positive community that is legitimate and supportive and with which they might identify themselves strong enough. Their inclusion in these groups is not so much and only for ideological reasons, i.e. because of their attachment to the cause, but also because of their need to be an element of a cohesive community, their need not to be lonely and rejected. Identity is an essential part of the personality that provides the individual with a sense of wholeness. Joining such a terrorist group is a step towards forming an identity, albeit a negative one. Since a positive identity is impossible, the terrorist prefers to be a “bad” person than “no one”. Moreover, in these groups a high degree of unanimity and synergy is achieved, which creates a high degree of closeness to the members of the group. According to Troy Glover,

leisure serves as an indispensable tool for the formation, maintenance and sustainability of social ties and an important social lubricant for the production of social capital [...] Researchers usually report how free time brings together people who share a common identity. Free time allows strong relationships to develop. Leisure time encourages the materialization of social ties among individuals who are also seen as different [...] Literature reveals leisure time as bridges between strangers, among “others”. Free time also connects people with other organizations/services that can help them. [Glover 2018: 28–29]

Since the individual cannot find rapprochement through work or family, leisure time gives you opportunities to do so through various forms of leisure. Spending free time can also have an isolating effect, supporting loneliness. It depends on the desire of the individual – whether he wants to communicate and use the opportunities of

free time for rapprochement, or not. Some people prefer passive coping strategies that include solitary activities such as watching screens, listening to music, and spending time on a computer or mobile device that can further isolate them, preventing them from engaging meaningfully with other people. Dealing with social isolation stimulates the development of occupations and technologies related to recreation. The best option is to combine face-to-face interactions with e-mails to enable “friends” to build successful friendships. “These findings are similar to Cacioppo’s and Patrick’s (2008) view that social media can deal with loneliness by serving as a »road station« used to facilitate face-to-face meetings” [Glover 2018: 31].

One way to look for a soul mate is through “artificial” dating. They can help as well as prevent overcoming loneliness. Our face-to-face activities are decreasing due to the changes in the nature of our work (the “electronic house”, especially now during the COVID-19 pandemic, work with few people in the field of services, etc.), i.e. reduce our ability to naturally find partners and friends – this leads to an increase in the need for artificial ways to find them. They provide new opportunities, but they also pose many risks. So the lonely person should use them carefully [Bolgurova 2018]. These dating tools in most cases are used not to solve the serious existential problem of loneliness, to find a real partner, but for fun and play in tune with the consumer psychology of modern man.

Dating systems can be analyzed both from the point of view of the self-management of loneliness and from the point of view of its management by external subjects. They are an expression of self-government, insofar as the individual decides whether, to what extent, and how to use these systems. But, on the other hand, the state, private companies, etc. may or may not provide such a service, may stimulate or discourage them. In other words, it is about managing these processes, the desire of people to use these systems. Different actors may or may not encourage people to use them in a less risky and successful way. And it is important who the entities that offer the service are; whether they are more concerned about people and overcoming their loneliness or more about their gains or other benefits.

This is generally true of new technologies. People can use them to manage their loneliness. At the same time, these technologies can be used by different types of subjects to guide people’s loneliness – to assist in its deepening or minimizing. New technologies can counteract loneliness, but they can also help deepen it. The main difference between the time before the new technologies and the time with the new technologies is the following – before them the person was forced to communicate directly with real people because he had no other alternative. There is now an alternative and he is increasingly tempted to use it. When there are difficulties in communicating with real people, it increasingly leads to less engaging communication through technology, through an intermediary. The feeling remains that you are communicating, and there is not always a depth of communication. You have actually escaped the more difficult communication – face to face with people with whom you are deeply connected. Whether new technologies will help or counteract loneliness

depends largely on the causes of that loneliness, not on the technology itself. Through them, those who are already alienated from real life can become more alienated from it. The growing problems in relationships with real human communities, the alienation of man from them often push him to new technologies as a substitute for real communication, which actually deepens the alienation. Communication with other people is superficial, impermanent, shallow. It does not have the same quality characteristics as face-to-face communication. It is more precarious, it is more dangerous, and, most of all, it is more superficial and less engaging. On Facebook, a person may not be himself to a much greater extent, may show only that part of himself that he wants, usually the beautiful one.

Those who are not alienated usually use technology to get closer to people with whom they have difficulty in communicating. Some people log in to Facebook to connect with people they would otherwise find difficult to contact. Satisfy their need to be informed. But they do not become slaves to the nets. They prefer contacts with real people and do not spend too much time on social networks. Because they have more important things to do, they are not alienated from real people, from the outside world.

Some people are lonely, have no direct contact with people, cannot or do not want to devote their time to other real-world communication, and are satisfied when they communicate online. People without interests, or with gossip tendencies, who do not have more important activities, have a lot of free time which they are not able to fill with more serious activities, become slaves of social networks. "The information society, using technological innovations, gives the social subject opportunities for self-realization, but also creates conditions for new forms of alienation, which determine the manifestation of destruction" [Isachenko 2018].

Alienation between people, lack of objects for self-identification, groups of friends, etc. leads to enslavement by the virtual world. People, who have something else to identify with, have interests, friends and families do not become slaves to social networks. They are a vent for people with problems. And the problems are born elsewhere – in the socio-economic situation, in the activities of the subjects of socialization. It is not the technology itself, but other factors that form nationalistic, xenophobic, hateful feelings in some people, for example, and technology only helps them spread more easily.

Technology and technique can be a powerful factor in increasing alienation. There are authors who are tempted to blame them for alienation, for moral degradation. But in fact they are only a means of manifesting the alienation already caused by other, much more serious causes among people. It is mainly social relations that are the cause of enslavement, not technology itself and social networks. By shifting the blame to social networks and technology, we move it away from social relationships. We exonerate ourselves that instead of trying to improve our communication with other people, we stagger in an easier way to connect with the world. It is easier to criticize on Facebook than face to face.

If there are no people willing to use weapons, scientists will not create them. If there are no people willing to replace human labor with robots, they will not be created or, even if they are created, they will not be used. If there are no lonely people to use the services of robots for communication, religious, sexual and other needs, there will be no demand for these robots, even if they are created. Ultimately, the big question is whether it is not more humane to solve the problems of these people even with the help of networks and technology, since there are no people to solve them? Isn't it better for a lonely Japanese man to be helped by a robot instead of anyone? Antiscientism is also meaningless insofar as the development of technology cannot be stopped. Only to a certain extent can it be directed, regulated through moral norms, financing and other similar measures. But no one can stop the scientific and technological development, the good or evil genius of man.

What does humanism mean? Is it the solution of human problems through society and people, not technology, or is it the solution of human problems with what is possible? Since his problems cannot be solved in any other way, why not solve them with the help of technology, for example? But it is true that in his relationship with technology, new questions and new dangers arise, new methods are needed to prevent and communicate with it. But the solution is not to deny science and technology. This solution is also impossible to implement. It would be like an adopted law, which does not consider the resources for implementation in life and it remains inapplicable.

If all these means of self-regulation of loneliness do not help, it is advisable to seek the help of a psychotherapist or counselor to give guidelines for more successful coping. Another form of overcoming loneliness, but with a dual effect, is workaholism. Single people tend to become workaholics without measure. Workaholism and making money are a form of self-management of loneliness, unfortunately, in the wrong direction. They actually take the time to look for close people – an intimate partner, a community that values you, not because you are breaking away from work, but because of yourself. Another wrong direction of loneliness self-management is alcoholism and drug use. They usually deepen the problem, not solve it. The same dubious effect is achieved when trying to replace social relationships with material goods.

Building a connection with material possessions is a method of adaptation used by individuals to overcome loneliness. Based on attachment theory, failed interpersonal intimacy motivates people to seek material possessions [...] Consequently, single individuals are increasingly building relationships with their material possessions to address shortcomings in interpersonal relationships. Epley, Akalis, Waytz, and Cacioppo (2008) found that people who do not have social connections feel the need to compensate by creating a sense of human connection with nonhuman agents. Consumers who use material possessions as substitutes for interpersonal relationships deliberately blur the boundaries between human and object. [Feng 2016]

MANAGEMENT OF LONELINESS

The management of loneliness is carried out by non-lonely people, as well as by state and non-state entities. The attitude of non-lonely people towards lonely people influences the desire of lonely people to cope with their loneliness. The more disrespectful, contemptuous, stigmatizing the attitude towards lonely people, the more they tend to shut themselves in, not to acknowledge their problem and, thus, reduce their ability to solve it. There must be understanding, concern, an attempt to really help them in the attitude, no stigmatization, contempt and other inhibiting reactions.

Today, loneliness is more secretly stigmatized, rather than more publicly problematized, especially for some categories of people. Communication, the presence of close people is considered normal, because man is a social being and must communicate, to reproduce. That is why many lonely people do not acknowledge their loneliness and it is difficult to be identified as such. That is why it is difficult to help them. As for voluntarily unmarried people, the relationship is even more complicated. On the one hand, nowadays most people do not respect this marital status. They treat it with covert or overt contempt and ridicule. On the other hand, some unmarried women believe that this is a modern and problem-free status, a consequence of the emancipation of women. They even try to be proud of it (perhaps in most cases in an attempt to hide their inability to replace it with a family). On the other hand, some married women with less successful marriages envy their unmarried status, envy them... But in any case, little is said about the problems of unmarried people (both men and women).

“It is specific to American culture that this problem is perceived more as a personal matter, which leads to a much lower tendency of public institutions to formulate and implement various strategies, policies and measures. However, the high health cost of loneliness is now activating the health industry and it is proving to be a major source of pressure to respond” [Novite strahove... 2019].

In European countries, loneliness management is more prevalent, but not for all categories of people. Modern countries with developed social policy have quite developed policies towards some types of single people. These policies also include private entities that comply with state requirements. But it turns out that some rapidly growing groups of people suffering from chronic loneliness are not the focus of the countries in question. They are left to their own devices. Not surprisingly, there are already governments that have managed to create strategies to address the problem. Great Britain is among the first countries to do so. For the first time, there is a ministry there that deals with loneliness. This ministry has adopted a strategy for working with single people. According to it, loneliness in its harmful effects, is compared to smoking. The goal is to reconnect these people with the community. The aim is to open a public discussion on the issue, to inform about the dangers of loneliness and to minimize the stigmatization of lonely people.

The British Ministry's strategy for lonely people declares the following categories of people to be such: people between the ages of 16 and 24, widows, people

with disabilities, the sick, the unemployed, the caregivers. Emancipated unmarried women and unmarried men are not included. Their situation is not problematized in any way. And it is scary that they consider about 9% of their population to be lonely, without including lonely unmarried people.

In other words, the social policy of some European countries usually involves caring for lonely people. An example of such a policy is the social assistance system. It cares for lonely and sick elderly people, younger people with disabilities, abandoned children, poor people, people who have suffered from violence and others. For example, the service “social assistant” cares for elderly lonely people. The social assistant takes care of two or three people and the emphasis is not on supporting him in daily communal activities, but on the communication between the assistant and the client of the service, which satisfies the need for communication and reduces loneliness. The personal assistant and the domestic helper play a similar role. To some extent, they fill the need to communicate with other people, but the emphasis is not on communication.

Another example is the modern service, which is rapidly becoming more widespread, the so-called day care centers – for the elderly, or children with disabilities, i.e. for people who have problems with communication and loneliness. In these day care centers, they communicate with similar people, with identical social problems, because they do not have people at home with whom to communicate during the day. The centers for social rehabilitation and integration have a similar character.

Older, but still relevant and evolving form of care for the elderly and sick, are homes for the elderly. There are different types of such institutions. The expansion of this service is also connected with the increase in the number of single elderly people who have no one to take care of them at home. And they rely on help from the state, municipalities or private entities. An important direction to support lonely elderly people is to raise their awareness, their technical ability to use new technologies, social networks. A major factor influencing the quality of life of older people is the increased isolation that comes from reduced mobility, as well as possible cognitive, visual or hearing impairments. An increasing number of researchers and healthcare providers see the benefits for older people in accessing support networks via the Internet. This can provide them with a variety of resources – forums that provide health information, networks of friends, for sharing favorite jokes, photos and humorous stories.

In connection with these considerations, I propose a hypothesis which I cannot prove at present. In poorer countries, which “export” people permanently to the richer ones, the incentive for adults to use new technologies is greater because it is one of the few ways to connect with their children. In richer countries, adults “export” fewer children and there is less interest in using new technologies. Robotics in social policy is also developing. Robots will now help elderly lonely people to remind them to take medication, to call relatives in case of a problem, to feed them, etc.

At the same time, “Christian” civilization is experiencing a unique moment in its development. There has hardly ever been a situation in which such a huge percentage of older people do not have grandchildren and great-grandchildren or they are very far away from them. The reasons are numerous. Some of them concern their mistakes in raising their own children. Another part concerns social reasons – consumer psychology, problems with socio-economic status, women ambitions to make a career at the expense of having children, declining masculinity among men, etc. All of this leads to mass and deepening loneliness among these older people.

The next group of people that needs to be taken care of are former prisoners. Crime has been on the rise in recent decades. There are more and more prisoners and when they are released from prison, they usually have no social ties/contact with their previous communities. Therefore, they can be assisted by counseling centers. They provide them with information, remind them of their skills, etc., for faster adaptation to the new environment. They meet people who care about them.

The number of refugees and the homeless is also growing. And the problems with their loneliness are growing too. Taking care of them to some extent counteracts their loneliness. There are shelters, dining rooms, etc., which provide them with conditions for communication.

People affected by violence are cared for. Crisis centers, for example, care for people suffering from violence from their loved ones. This violence is a sign of a greater than permissible alienation between them and a high level of loneliness. The issue of violence against men is also interesting – it is more often psychological, not physical, but it should not be neglected. One of the problems for many men is that they do not admit when they have such a problem. They consider sharing the problem as something below their masculine dignity. In this regard, the issue of violence on social networks, the so-called cyberbullying, is topical. More and more subjects are involved in the activity of reporting, analysis and counteraction. It turns out that the active subjects in this type of harassment are lonely people.

As for the children without the necessary parental care, there are homes for children deprived of parental care, or centers for working with street children. They prevent children from living on the street and leaving school. They work with those who live on the street and with their parents, if they have any. One of the tasks of these institutions is to alleviate the psychological state of children, to minimize the feeling of loneliness, of carelessness. Children from orphanages are also cared for. For example, there are the so-called sheltered, supervised and transitional housing which helps these children to find new communities, to adapt to the environment, not to fall into loneliness.

With regard to people with disabilities, physical accessibility is a condition for social contacts and minimizing their loneliness. In this aspect, of course, there is still much to be done. However, the highlighting of the problem as well as the criticism of the bodies that are authorized to solve it are of importance.

There are mechanisms for caring for different types of families – with people with disabilities, large families, etc. Social policy textbooks usually have separate sections on family social policy, which analyze the care of already established families.

Another group which deserves protection are pregnant and rejected women, women who have given birth, or those of them who are ready to abandon their children. Their number is growing as a result of growing alienation within the family, indiscriminate sex, great irresponsibility on the part of many men in such a situation. In the “Mother and Baby Unit”, as well as in the centers for public support (prevention of abandonment, violence), they can find people who feel sympathetic towards their situation, reducing their sense of loneliness. They show them that a child can be a salvation from loneliness. In Bulgaria, the number of underage girls who become pregnant is growing – not only in the Roma ethnic group, but also among ethnic Bulgarian women.

A specific feature of the medical, social and psychological problems in modern obstetrics is the clear tendency to increase the number of pregnancies and births among unmarried and single women. In Ukraine, the number of births to unmarried and single women has doubled in the last decade, with one in four children born out of wedlock (23%). These changes in the structure of fertility are characteristic of all highly developed countries. The increase in the number of births against the background of declining birth rates shows significant changes in the principles of family formation in modern society. Emotional stress in women associated with pregnancy in an unregistered marriage has a significant impact on the frequency and severity of gestosis. Lack of partner support during pregnancy leads to a higher rate of complications such as premature placental abruption, threat of abortion and premature birth, early and late gestosis and placental dysfunction. [Koroluk 2019: 469]

The media, to some extent, highlight the problems of some single people – those with disabilities and some others. The national Bulgarian media – BNT and BNR, as well as BTA – have commitments recorded in the regulations. The number of special broadcasts is growing, as well as the information concerning these people, who suffer to a greater or lesser degree from serious problems, including loneliness.

The social policy towards divorced people is insufficiently developed. And the legitimization and facilitation of divorces is connected with their massification. An increasing percentage of the population consists of divorced people. In this respect, the situation is unique. And divorce is a serious condition for going into a state of chronic loneliness. Many divorced people are so frustrated with their partners that they tend to make the mistake of extrapolating their “flaws” to all members of the same sex. And they do not dare to think of a new relationship. The number of films that touch upon this issue is increasing – of frustrated divorced people who do not dare to repeat their attempt to live as a family. Fortunately, most of such films end with the so-called happy ending. The media, however, do not deal sufficiently with

this problem. There are no common therapeutic groups for communication between such people, etc. In fact, all these forms of care – through the social assistance system as well as through the social security system – on the one hand, can help single people to minimize their loneliness. But, on the other, they can prevent the individual from taking matters into his own hands, from mobilizing to solve his problems. They are a substitute for real relationships, real closeness. According to Eric Kleinenberg, economic growth and the development of the social insurance system lead to the fact that today a person can independently ensure their existence and not rely on the material support of their primary social group (family, above all) [Cholak, Gareeva 2017].

Elites in different countries are hesitant in their policies. On the one hand, in the more developed countries, there are mechanisms for taking caring of different groups of people, including single people. And it is very difficult for particular populations to accept degradation in this regard. On the other hand, due to the tendencies in the development of the capitalist economy, the problem of the increase of the “surplus population” is growing. So these same elites are interested in minimizing this population. Reducing it by waging wars in the modern atomic age is not always possible. Furthermore, modern wars would not help the elites of developed countries in this regard, because they have weapons with which they can defeat foreign countries (and peoples) and preserve their own peoples. Obviously, new methods will be sought to get rid of the excess population. For example, with the help of coronavirus. Without being an adherent to conspiracy theories, I do not rule out the possibility that this virus was deliberately released by someone. But regardless of the reason for its spread, the result may be considered “positive” in terms of the need to minimize the excess population – the elderly and the sick. This partially minimizes the problem of too many lonely and “unnecessary” elderly people.

The policy of stimulating the family and the birth rate is indicative of this hesitation of the elite. There are many economic, financial, social, administrative, psychological mechanisms for caring for different types of families. But the institution of marriage, which provides the greatest sense of security of the individual, compared to other forms of family life and which gives the highest birth rate, is not sufficiently supported. Cohabitation, single parenthood, or homosexual relations are family forms that provide a lower birth rate, lower social security of the individual. A major shortcoming of modern social policy in developed countries is the lack of care for voluntarily unmarried people, whose percentage is growing alarmingly.

The lack of concern about the marital status of unmarried and infertile people is probably related to the disinterest of the ruling elites in developed countries in their population. But in this way they also neglect the happiness of these people, leaving them to make their mistakes and live in solitude. And this has its negative consequences not only for single people, but for society as a whole.

There are policies for family people, but not for non-family people. On the contrary, their behavior is not treated as an act of irresponsibility towards themselves

and society as a whole. There is no criticism of their marital status. It is perceived as an expression of the right to freely decide whether or not to get married, but not as a failure to fulfill the commitment to reproduce the social organism. This is a characteristic feature of the so-called “Western civilization” with a democratic political regime, which emphasizes rights rather than obligations. Especially in countries like Bulgaria, where the majority of the population still idealizes a democratic political regime and closes its eyes to its shortcomings. There is no serious policy to encourage single people to start a family. On the contrary, the interest of employers who seriously exploit them is followed. Instead of distributing the working time fund among more people, workaholism is encouraged and non-compliance with working time restrictions grows. It is set as a condition for career development and is presented as a condition for personal happiness. And overtime and commitment to thinking about problems at work prevent workaholics from solving their personal problems.

As mentioned above, single people are much more frequently exploited by their employers and they usually do not want to change this situation. They feed their selfishness and inhumanity with their willingness to work endlessly and with their excessive ambition to pursue a career. These people, for whom the only meaning of life is work, prevent employers from being forced to allocate working time more humanely due to the growing number of unemployed people. They allow it because they need it to feel useful, almost irreplaceable, because they have no relatives towards whom they feel irreplaceable, useful and responsible and with whom they could share their time.

If the political elite wants to help this group of unmarried people minimize their loneliness by realizing the harmful effects of their loneliness on many aspects of public life, as well as on their personal happiness, it is necessary to come into conflict with those to whom the state belongs – the representatives of the capitalist class. In other words, the harmful influence of the loneliness of these people must become harmful to the capitalist class as well, so that it itself considers it necessary to limit itself in its greed to over-exploit these people and to take care of their family and personal happiness.

Living alone is usually considered a prerequisite for loneliness when combined with illness, old age, unemployment, minority status and other factors. It is rarely associated with loneliness when it comes to healthy, relatively young, rich people from the majority. The emphasis is more on the loneliness of the elderly, but not on the loneliness of people of other age groups [Lasgaard, Friis, Shevlin 2016].

Due to the growing needs of these people, there are follow-up activities provided by the state, as well as social processes and phenomena through which they meet their temporary and superficially determined needs, which, however, bring problems for themselves and other people. However, these people must be kept in a tolerable mental and physical condition so that they do not become dangerous. That is why tourism (in all its forms, including sex tourism), prostitution and other ways to satisfy their needs or to temporarily provide pleasant emotions, are currently developing. Well-paid single people also have a problem with one more thing – to decide where to spend their money.

The state encourages the development of the porn industry in all its forms, protecting the interests of the entities profiting from it. But this industry is not a very successful attempt to replace a real and beloved sexual partner. And it creates problems for both parties in the relationship. It supports the production of porn toys, sex tourism, male prostitution, porn movies, etc. There seems to be a tendency to further legitimize prostitution. For example, in the Netherlands, prostitution is developed, organized and legally regulated, very often in large buildings, and not necessarily in houses with red lanterns, as in Cologne, where large multi-storey buildings have already been adapted for these services, supposedly with the argument that control should be more effective. In fact, these large buildings symbolically say “we will not hide this activity, we will make it more frank and legitimate”. It will be presented as the most normal thing in the world – with skyscrapers. Prostitution is allowed in Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland and Greece. In Spain it is not explicitly legitimized, but it is indirect – prostitutes are entitled to insurance and pensions, pay taxes. The development of prostitution through the Internet is associated with an increase in the use of these services. There is no legal basis in Bulgaria to prosecute prostitutes but only pimps and those who make premises available for prostitution. Unfortunately, these activities are carried out randomly and ineffectively. Probably the next step will be the development of lesbian prostitution. Gay prostitution is already developed.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, loneliness is a phenomenon with very serious negative consequences for the normal development of the individual and society. Our sense of happiness, our future depends to a large extent on its self-management and governance. Unfortunately, many lonely people are either unaware of their problems arising from their loneliness or they are aware of them but are unable to help themselves and change the situation. People experiencing loneliness may feel embarrassed to admit that they are lonely which may lead to tragic consequences (e.g. depression, suicide). Fortunately, there are numerous institutions that provide support to lonely people and the situation differs from country to country but the trend is pretty much the same – the number of people suffering from loneliness continues to grow.

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BIOGRAPHY

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