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## The effects of personal networks and social context characteristics on loneliness and perceived isolation

This study explores the determinants of loneliness and perceived social isolation, focusing on the roles of personal networks and social context characteristics. Perceived social isolation is an individual's subjective feeling of disconnection, regardless of actual social interactions. Loneliness arises from a perceived gap between desired and actual social relationships, encompassing both the quantity and quality of connections. We examine the associations between these feelings and specific characteristics of personal networks, including their structure and composition of social roles, support exchange, temporal dynamics, and modes of communication.

First, we focus on personal network characteristics as potential determinants of perceived isolation and loneliness: network size; emotional closeness; geographic distance; network cohesion; diversity of roles and interaction foci; sociodemographic diversity; and network turnout. Second, we investigate the role of online interactions, exploring whether virtual communication mitigates or exacerbates these feelings. While online platforms expand the reach of social networks, their effects on perceived connection and satisfaction with relationships remain mixed. We hypothesize that reliance on online communication weakens social bonds typically fostered through face-to-face interactions, potentially leading to a greater sense of isolation and loneliness. Finally, we consider whether the effects of personal network characteristics on perceived isolation and loneliness vary by gender, race/ethnicity, and migration status.

Using three waves of egocentric network data from the UC Berkeley Social Network Study (UCNets), which provides detailed longitudinal measurements of personal networks and individual-level observations, this study makes both theoretical and empirical contributions. First, it refines and advances theories about social and relational determinants of loneliness. Second, it provides new insights into how modern modes of social interaction, particularly online communication, influence negative feelings associated with social interactions. Ultimately, this study enhances understanding of the complex interplay between social context, individual characteristics, and modes of interaction in shaping experiences of loneliness and social isolation.

### Keywords/Topics

Loneliness; Network modeling; Panel network data; Perceived isolation; Personal Networks;

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