

# Modern state of the issue of loneliness among elderly people in armenia

## Opinion

The process of adapting to loneliness has great significance for people of all ages and is dealt with differently by different people. The acceptance or non-acceptance of loneliness has its roots in earlier periods of life, in old age its negative aspects simply feature more sharply. In modern society, loneliness is a universal phenomenon, which does not recognize class, race or age barriers. Often, people do not even realize that it has become a regular part of their lives. The manifestation of the range and complexity of feelings of loneliness in elderly people is of a dual nature. On one hand, there is a heavy feeling of growing isolation from others and a fear of the consequences of living in loneliness; on the other hand, there is a desire to isolate oneself from others and protect one's world and its stability from potential invasion by others.

In old age, the reality of aging leads to a number of reasons for loneliness. Old friends die; children spend their adult lives away from their parents. Old age brings with it loneliness and concerns due to worsening health and the fear of death. The feeling of loneliness exhausts the moral strength of the person and in this way damages his or her physical wellbeing as well. Loneliness—the absence of human contact—destroys the personality and its social nature. Maintaining normal, healthy human interaction and not submitting to loneliness means delaying old age. Growing old—as well as loneliness—are impossible to rule out. Old age, in itself, is loneliness.

At a home for the elderly we interviewed 45 people, of whom 16 were male (35.6%) and 29 (64.4%) were female. The largest number of people were in the oldest group - 81 and older (31.1%), followed by those who were 76-80years old (28.9%), then 71-75years (22.2%), 66-70years – 15.6% and 60-65years – 2.2%. The level and reasons of loneliness as perceived by the elderly depended on the age group. People in the group aged 80years and older did not understand the term “loneliness” in the same way as those in the other groups. In the younger groups, loneliness was associated with lowered levels of activity, the inability to work or decreased mobility and not with an absence of social contact, which was mostly seen in the age group of 80 and older. Among the resident of the elderly home which we studied, 20 (44.5%) people were never married, 18 (40%) were widowed and had absolutely no contact with members of their family and other relatives. Only 7 (15.3%) residents were visited by their children from time to time (Figure 1).

During the study, it was noted that widowed men felt lonelier than widowed women, and among the single residents, men once again suffered more from loneliness than women. These data are partially explained by the specific features of how men and women tend to spend their free time in old age. The results of our study suggest that two-thirds of single men engage in activities that are characterized by being on one's own (watching television, reading the newspaper and so on) while the majority of single women dedicate their free time to all kinds of social activities. Elderly women, as a rule, have an

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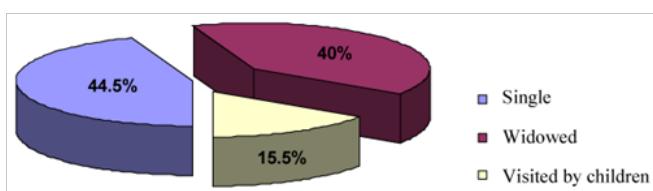
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easier time doing housework than men. A majority of elderly women is capable of tackling the nuances of housework more frequently than men.

The presence of children or grandchildren who visit leads to a decreased sense of loneliness and one which lasts shorter. Some of the responses by residents of the elderly home were of particular interest. It turned out that social contact with friends and neighbors had a greater influence on well-being than contact with relatives. Contact with friends and neighbors lowered their feeling of loneliness and raised their sense of self-worth and being respected by others. Unfortunately, one has to admit that in our society it is no longer a rare feature for people to be busy and unable to find time to meet with their elderly parents and have heart to heart talks, with many opting just to give them material support.

Nevertheless, irrespective of these differences, many elderly people need the support of their surroundings. Almost all the residents in the study noted that their arrival to the elderly home was associated with limits on their ability to lead their normal lives as before as well as negative feelings as a result of the absence of a familiar setting and the people they considered close. Elderly people need social contact, even if they do not work. They need to avoid submitting to apathy and inactivity as well as prevent themselves from focusing on misfortune.

Naturally, it is not easy to interact with all people of old age, because with age many negative characteristics feature more prominently and in some situations there is a need for special (gerontological) interpersonal skills and the ability to care for the elderly. In old age, certain characteristic psychiatric disorders may also be seen. Growing old, people face numerous physiological, psychological and socio-cultural changes. They become more susceptible to illnesses and trauma, they are often subjected to loss – losing a spouse, friends, older children as well as the loss of their previous way of life and their role in society. Many of them also lose their sense of an aim in life after they retire.



**Figure 1** Indicators of family status among residents of elderly home.

## Conclusion

In this way, understanding elderly people, respecting them as full members of society and comprehending the specifics of the process of aging one can provide comprehensive support for the elderly and prepare for one's own aging. In our opinion, this has to be taught to young people from an early age.

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