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# **7. UCLA TEST FOR MEASURING LONELINESS**

# INTRODUCTION

In general, according to Professor Christina Victor (2005), we can differentiate between two types of measures or tools for measuring loneliness: **direct or self-assessed measures, and aggregate or scale measures**. The former involves direct, single questions that ask the person to assess their perceived level of loneliness in terms of frequency (Sancho et al. 2020). The value of this type of measure could be its simplicity, though we must acknowledge that this simplicity can constitute a reduction of such a complex phenomenon.

Then there are scales. The best known instruments for measuring loneliness were designed and put together in the late 1970s and early 1980s; these include the UCLA scale (1978) and the De Jong Gierveld scale (1985).

- The UCLA loneliness scale (University of California, Los Angeles) consists of twenty items divided into three dimensions: subjective perception of loneliness, family support and social support. It also includes two other factors: intimacy with others and sociability (Mayol et al. 2015). It is the most commonly used scale worldwide and various versions of it have been developed in order to adapt it to different groups of the population.
- **The De Jong Gierveld scale**(Netherlands) is composed of eleven items to measure two dimensions of loneliness. Six of these items measure emotional loneliness, caused by the absence of loved ones, trust or intimate relationships. The other five measure social loneliness, caused by the desire to have support when needed.

Both scales were designed and put together in individualistic societies that are different to the collectivist society here in Catalonia or Spain. For this reason, some aspects relating to their validity can be questioned. Studies to validate these two scales have been carried out in our society with varying results. The UCLA scale has been deemed valid and adaptations to it have been made so that it can be used for different groups in the population (Mayol et al. 2015), while in the case of the De Jong Giervelds scale and others, more items have needed to be incorporated in order to measure different levels of loneliness (Buz and Adanez 2012).

Nonetheless, loneliness is a highly complex phenomenon and the tools we have to measure it are not perfect. In order to ensure a thorough examination of loneliness, and because it is a subjective, complex feeling, survey results should be accompanied by data gathered through other qualitative techniques, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups. This way, a better understanding of the phenomenon can be reached and a more detailed assessment can be provided (Coll Planas 2019).

# MEASURING LONELINESS

The Municipal Strategy Against Loneliness incorporates both types of loneliness measurement. The first, a direct question about how often people feel lonely, uses the word 'loneliness' explicitly, which enables us to interpret what loneliness means to us.

You can think for a few minutes about what loneliness means to you and answer the following question:

HARDLY EVER      SOME OF THE TIME      OFTEN

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**How often do you feel lonely?**

          

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As loneliness is a complex, diverse feeling, it is often indirect questions on aspects linked to loneliness that enable us to accurately identify people who are experiencing loneliness but do not express this directly due to the associated stigma (Barcelona City Council, 2020). The scale used in Barcelona City Council's Municipal Strategy Against Loneliness is the short-form version of the UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) scale, which consists of indirect questions that measure self-perceived isolation, social connection and emotional connection.

The short-form version (which has also been validated) includes the following questions, which we encourage you to answer. There are three possible answers: hardly ever, some of the time or often. Please tick the answer that most applies to you:

HARDLY EVER      SOME OF THE TIME      OFTEN

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**How often do you feel left out?**

          

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**How often do you feel isolated from others?**

          

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**How often do you feel that you lack companionship?**

          

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The scale is used to construct a dichotomous indicator – loneliness or non-loneliness – which corresponds to the result of the sum of the 3 indicators.

- 'Hardly ever' responses are worth a point.
- 'Some of the time' responses are worth 2 points.
- 'Often' responses are worth 3 points.

The lowest possible score is 3 (if the answer is hardly ever to all questions) and the highest is 9 (if the answer to all questions is often). Values of 6 or above indicate a case of loneliness.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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