The Loneliness of Many?:
Investigating the Roots of Urban Russian Loneliness through WVS Data

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Why does loneliness matter?

**Loneliness:** predicts more likelihood of

- Having carried a weapon in the past year
- Justifiability of using government resources,
  - of stealing,
  - of bribery,
  - of avoiding taxes,
  - of suicide,
- of violence against spouse, children, other persons

Also correlates with lack of generalized trust, and very strongly with unhappiness (.316)

Treated as a medical, or psychological problem. So how can we explain it sociologically?
Research Questions

• The lonely city, New York and Moscow as “lonely” places
• Theories of relevance: Durkheim, Tönnies, Simmel, Louis Wirth, Individualization
• City relationships as superficial at the same time as chosen, «useful», and liberating

Is loneliness really more prevalent in cities?

What are its determinants?

Are these different determinants than those in non-city samples?
Theory

- Strangers (facelessness)
- Division of labor (diminished likeness)
- Geographical dispersion, commuting
- Segregation
- Incidental contact (instrumental facefulness. Being „used.“
- Density, Overstimulation (blasé attitude)
- Urban values (useful for the ambitious, instrumental, thin networks)
The Blasé Attitude
Urban Values/Intentions

Urban Values

Individualism vs. Collectivism
Instrumental-rational vs. Intrinsic, intuitive values
careerist vs. family oriented
Friendship vs. Family oriented

Blasé Attitude

Less social behavior

Objective
Social Isolation

Family status,
Friendship types
Social activities

Aging

Lonely :(
Take 2: Urban Values/Intentions

Objective Social Isolation
Family status, Friendship types Social activities Aging

Filtered by Urban Values
Individualism vs. Collectivism Instrumental-rational vs. Intrinsic, intuitive values careerist vs. family oriented Friendship vs. Family oriented

Blasé Attitude

Socially isolated, but not lonely

Sociality matters less
Hypotheses

• H1: Values should play a role in determining Urban loneliness

• H2: Non-urban loneliness should depend more upon objective social isolation

• H3: Individualism should buffer social isolation, so that social isolation does not result in loneliness in cities

• H4: The blase attitude should reduce loneliness in cities

• H5: Greater perception of instrumental ties ('being used') should correlate with greater loneliness in cities

• H6: the small city sample (Tambov) should echo metropolis (Moscow) results on each hypothesis, but to a smaller degree
4 Separate OLS Regressions. WVS 2011.

1. Moscow, N=1000 (pop ~15 million)
2. Tambov, N=1000 (pop. 280,000)
3. non-urban Russia (settlement size less than 100,000), N=1237
4. Tatarstan, N=1000

Dependent Variable: «I often feel lonely». 4 point scale. (completely agree, agree, ... )
Independent Variables

- **Individualism**: Additive scale (0 to 15) of inverted value of parents, value of friends, making parents proud, living up to friends expectations, and trying to do good for society.

- **Blase attitude**: does not think about the «meaning of life» often. General desensitization to all external stimuli.

- **Instrumental facefulness**: perception of being used → generalized trust

- **Age**: (older because of fewer social ties, deaths, isolation), non-married/living together status, fewer children

- **Inverted civic engagement**: additive scale, involvement in civic organizations: religious, sport/leisure, art/music/education, trade union, political, ecological, professional, humanitarian, consumer protection, self-help, other

- **Immigrant, non-Russian speaking, unemployed**

- **Sex**

- **Income**

- **Education**

**Urban Values**

- **Social Isolation**

**Controls**

- **Urban Values**

- **Social Isolation**

- **Urban Values**

- **Social Isolation**

- **Urban Values**

- **Social Isolation**
Loneliness by sampling region, 95% Confidence Intervals

37.3% of Moscovites agree

25% of those from Tatarstan agree
Loneliness by age, 95% Confidence Intervals
Loneliness by family situation, 95% Confidence Intervals

Family situation

- Married
- Living together, not married
- Divorced
- Living separately from spouse
- Widowed
- Not Married
Loneliness by sex,
95% Confidence Intervals
What Predicts Loneliness?

Reducing Loneliness -

H6: the small city sample (Tambov) should echo metropolis (Moscow) results on each hypothesis, but to a smaller degree.

Instrumental use ('being used') should correlate with greater loneliness in

Enhancing Loneliness +

Moscow sample:

- All significant factors (children, education) involve interactions with individualism, except one (age).
- For collectivists, fewer children and more education = more lonely.
- For individualists, the opposite.
- Age makes everyone more lonely.

Why the education effect?

H2: Non-urban loneliness should depend more upon objective social isolation.
- No interactions with individualism.
- One minor value effect (blase attitude).
- 2 social isolation effects (children, separated/divorced).
- Being separated/having fewer children, having a thin skin (non-blase), means more loneliness.

H3: Individualism should buffer social isolation, so that social isolation does not result in loneliness in cities.

H4: The blase attitude should reduce loneliness in cities.

H5: Greater perception of instrumental ties ('being used') should correlate with greater loneliness in cities.

Small city:

- H1: Yes. All affects are value related.

- H3: For collectivists, more civic engagement means more loneliness. This is reversed for individualists (buffer effect). But individualism catalyzes effects of being single and separated on loneliness.

- H4: Blase attitude has no effect.

- H5: Instrumentalization of relationships matters in Tambov, unlike Moscow.

Adj. r²

- Moscow: 11.3%
- Non-urban: 12.2%
- Tambov: 9.6%
- Adj. r²: 13.7%
Conclusions

- H1: Values should play a role in determining Urban loneliness
- H2: Non-urban loneliness should depend more upon objective social isolation
- H3: Individualism should buffer social isolation, so that social isolation does not result in loneliness in cities
- H4: The blase attitude should reduce loneliness in cities
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- Unemployment, Non-Russian, income, gender have no effect in any sample.
Next Steps

Why would education enhance loneliness for collectivists? (Educational migration? Delay of family formation?)

Split Tatarstan sample into urban-rural to allow for interpretation (half respondents in city of 100,000 or more)
Thank you