



Understanding Adolescent Loneliness: Association with Dimensions of both Individualism and Collectivism



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Health Wellbeing Mental health

Britain is in a loneliness epidemic – and young people are at the heart of it

Stuart Andrew is tasked with tackling the crippling sense of isolation afflicting our youth... and it all starts with a conversation

Fit for ever

The loneliness trap: it is said to be as bad as smoking. So will it shorten my lifespan?

Lonely people are more likely to get heart disease, strokes, anxiety, depression, dementia ... Add it all up, and they're 26% more likely to die early. How do you avoid joining the unhappy millions?

By Phil Daoust

Loneliness impacting majority of young people's mental health

News from BACP

20 June 2025

Loneliness affects 16 to 25-year-old's mental health more than any other age group

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Loneliness

■ This article is more than 3 years old

3.7m over-16s in Britain often or always feel lonely, ONS finds

Proportion who say they are lonely has risen from one in 20 early in pandemic last spring to one in 14

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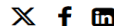
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Loneliness Grips Young Adults as UK Faces Community Crisis, Survey Finds

by Psychreg News Team | Published: 12 May 2025 | Last updated: 14 May 2025



EducationWeek

STUDENT WELL-BEING & MOVEMENT Q&A

Teens Are the Loneliest People in the World, a New Report Finds. Why?



By Jennifer Vilcarino — August 05, 2025 ⌚ 5 min read





INTRODUCTION

We all feel lonely from time to time, here are some examples of such situations:

- When we don't have someone to sit down for lunch with
- When we move to a new city
- When our friends do not have time for us on the weekend
- When you get a good news and you have no one to share it with

Over the past few years this occasional feeling has become a constant!





Prevalence

Loneliness Survey

Campaign to End Loneliness, The State of Loneliness 2023: ONS Data on loneliness



Feeling Lonely Occasionally, Often Or Always

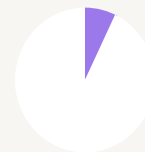
25.99 million people



49.63 %

Chronic Loneliness

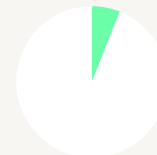
3.83 million people



7.1 %

Pre-pandemic Levels

Risen from 3.24 million
in 2020



6 %



Community Life Survey (2023-2024) also reinforce this trend, with **7% of respondents (16+)** indicating that they often or always feel lonely that is a **slight increase from 6% in 2021-22.**

Reported loneliness is higher for people who:

- are 16-24 years old (**10%** stating they **often or always feel lonely**, compared to **4% to 9%** older age groups.





What is loneliness?

FEELING ALONE VS BEING ALONE



You can be home alone, but you don't experience loneliness. It's a physical state.



Loneliness is an emotional state, when you feel alone or disconnected from others.

Loneliness - as the perceived lack of or discrepancy between desired and actual social relationships (Weiss, 1973).



Why study loneliness?



Chronic loneliness outcomes



Anxiety

(Vanhalst et al., 2013)



Depression

(Qualter et al., 2010; Ladd & Ettekal 2013; Qualter et al., 2013).



Suicidal Thoughts

(Schinka et al., 2013)



Physical Health Problems

(Caspi et al., 2006)



Mortality Rate

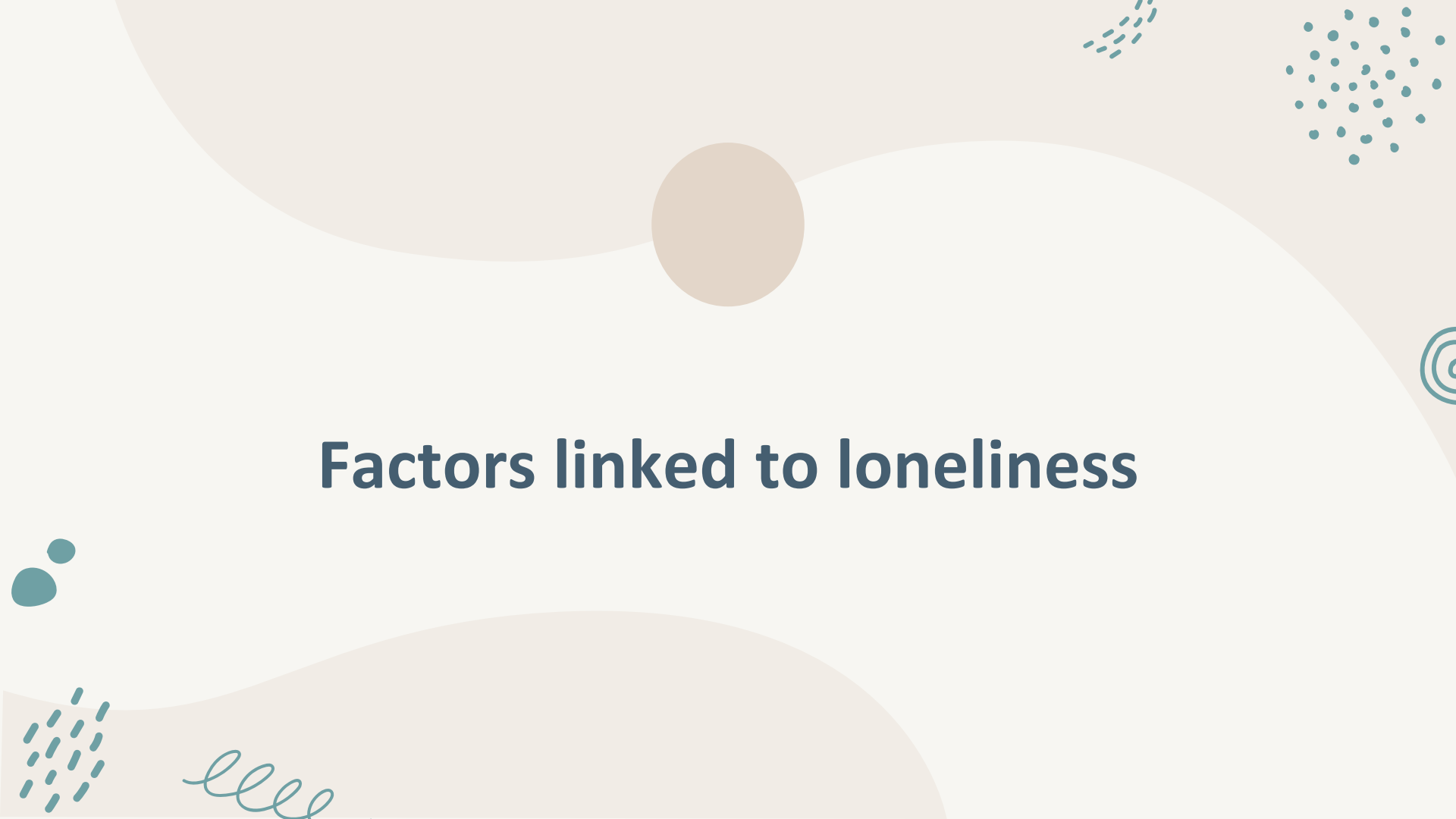
Increased by 26% (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015)



Implications of Chronic Loneliness



- 01 A self-reinforcing and highly detrimental risk factor for maladjustment (e.g., Qualter et al., 2015).
- 02 **Heightened vigilance in the face of social threat**
Leading them to view the social world as a more threatening place (Cacioppo & Hawkley 2009).
- 03 **Experience more negative affects**
When encounter negative social interactions (van Roekel et al., 2013).



Factors linked to loneliness



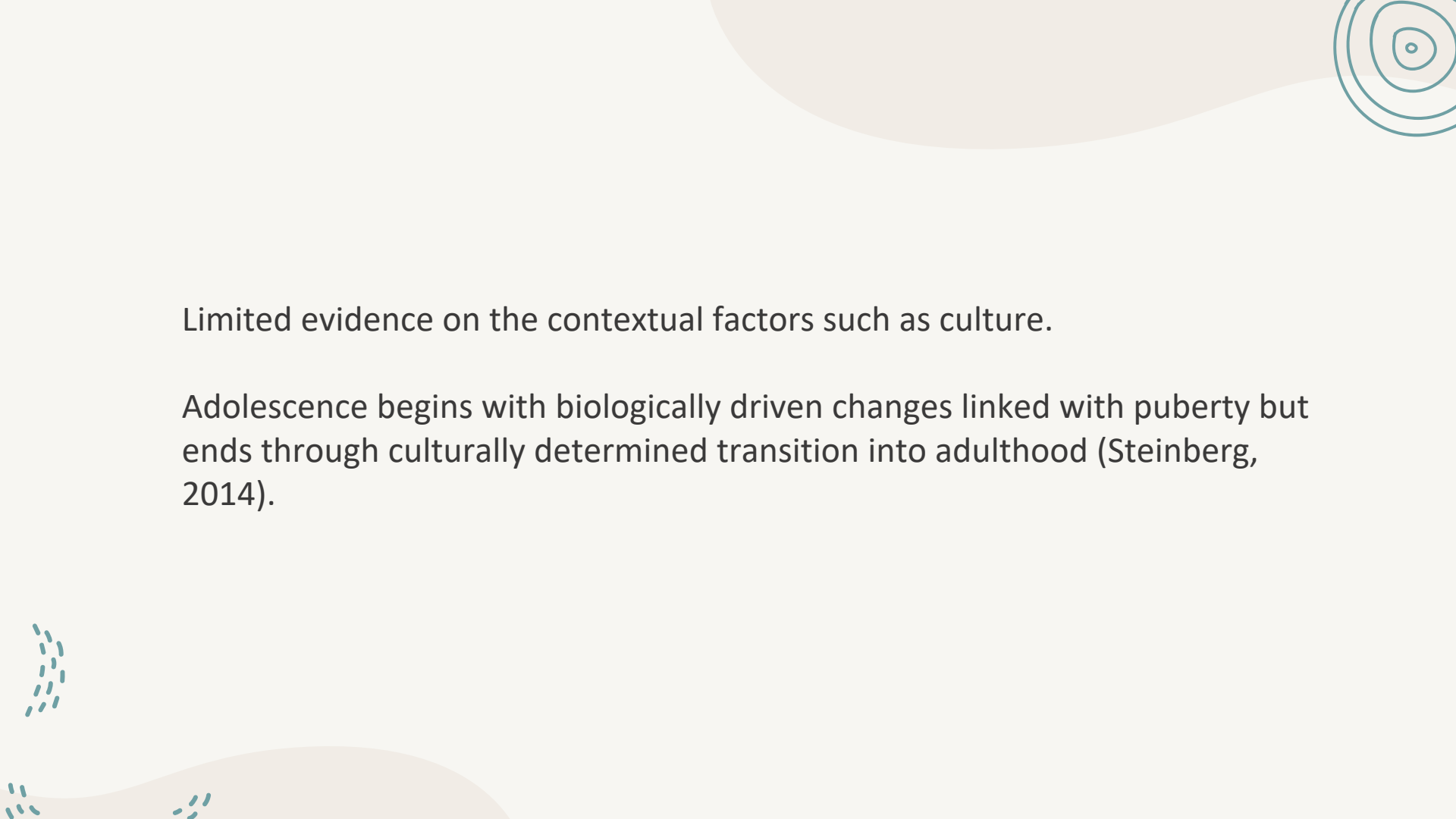
Individual factors:

- Personality traits,
- Lack of social support
- Living alone
- Low income
- Chronic illness
- Maladaptive emotion regulation

Contextual factors related to social environment:

- Access to local facilities
- Availability of green spaces
- Neighbourhood safety





Limited evidence on the contextual factors such as culture.

Adolescence begins with biologically driven changes linked with puberty but ends through culturally determined transition into adulthood (Steinberg, 2014).



Culture and loneliness

Culture is a shared system of meaning that helps individuals adapt to their social and ecological environment, reflected in both tangible products (e.g., tools) and subjective elements such as beliefs, values, and norms.



Hofstede's (1980) Cultural Dimensions Theory

Collectivism

Values group unity, shared responsibilities, collective identity, and interdependence.



Individualism

Champions personal autonomy, self-reliance, independent thought, and freedom.

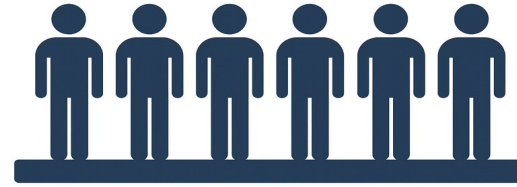
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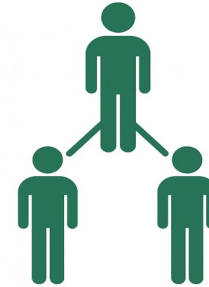
Horizontality-Verticality

Vertical dimension – accept inequality and prioritize achievement, status, hierarchy, social comparison, and competition within the group.

Horizontal dimension - endorse equality, appreciate the freedom to express themselves without comparing to others, and do not promote striving to outdo others.



Horizontal culture



Vertical culture

(Singelis et al., 1995; Triandis, 1995)

Vertical (Authority Ranking)	Vertical Collectivism	Vertical Individualism
	Horizontal Collectivism	Horizontal Individualism
Horizontal (Equality Matching)		
	Collectivism (Communal Sharing)	Individualism (Market Pricing)

Vertical individualism - independent, autonomous, competitive and strive to be the best, competition and comparison is the essential component.

Vertical collectivism - emphasizes the integrity of the in-group and are willing to sacrifice their personal goals for the sake of in-group goals, and support competitions of their in-groups with out-groups.

Horizontal individualism - unique and distinct from groups, highly self-reliant, not especially interested in becoming distinguished or in having high status.

Horizontal collectivism - emphasize being similar to others, focus on common goals, consider interdependence and equality as essence of relationships.

Figure 1. Resource sharing pattern and horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism.



Individualism-collectivism (IC) and the loneliness

Mixed findings: Some studies suggest higher loneliness in collectivist societies (Lykes & Kemmelmeier, 2014), while others suggest a protective role of collectivism (Heu et al., 2019).

Country-level comparisons often overlook within-country variations in IC





Goal of the research



To examine within-country variations in culture orientations and their link to loneliness in late adolescence (18-24 years old) in the UK, focusing on vertical (hierarchical) and horizontal (egalitarian) orientations.





Hypotheses

Higher levels of vertical cultural orientations (vertical individualism, and vertical collectivism) will predict greater loneliness (verticality-loneliness hypothesis) among late adolescents.

Higher levels of horizontal cultural orientations (horizontal individualism, and horizontal collectivism) will predict lower levels of loneliness (horizontal-connectedness hypothesis) among late adolescents.

Cultural orientations (vertical individualism, vertical collectivism, horizontal individualism, and horizontal collectivism) will remain significant predictors of loneliness even after controlling for mental health (depression, anxiety, emotional regulation) and demographic variables (age, gender, ethnicity).





Method

Cross-sectional design

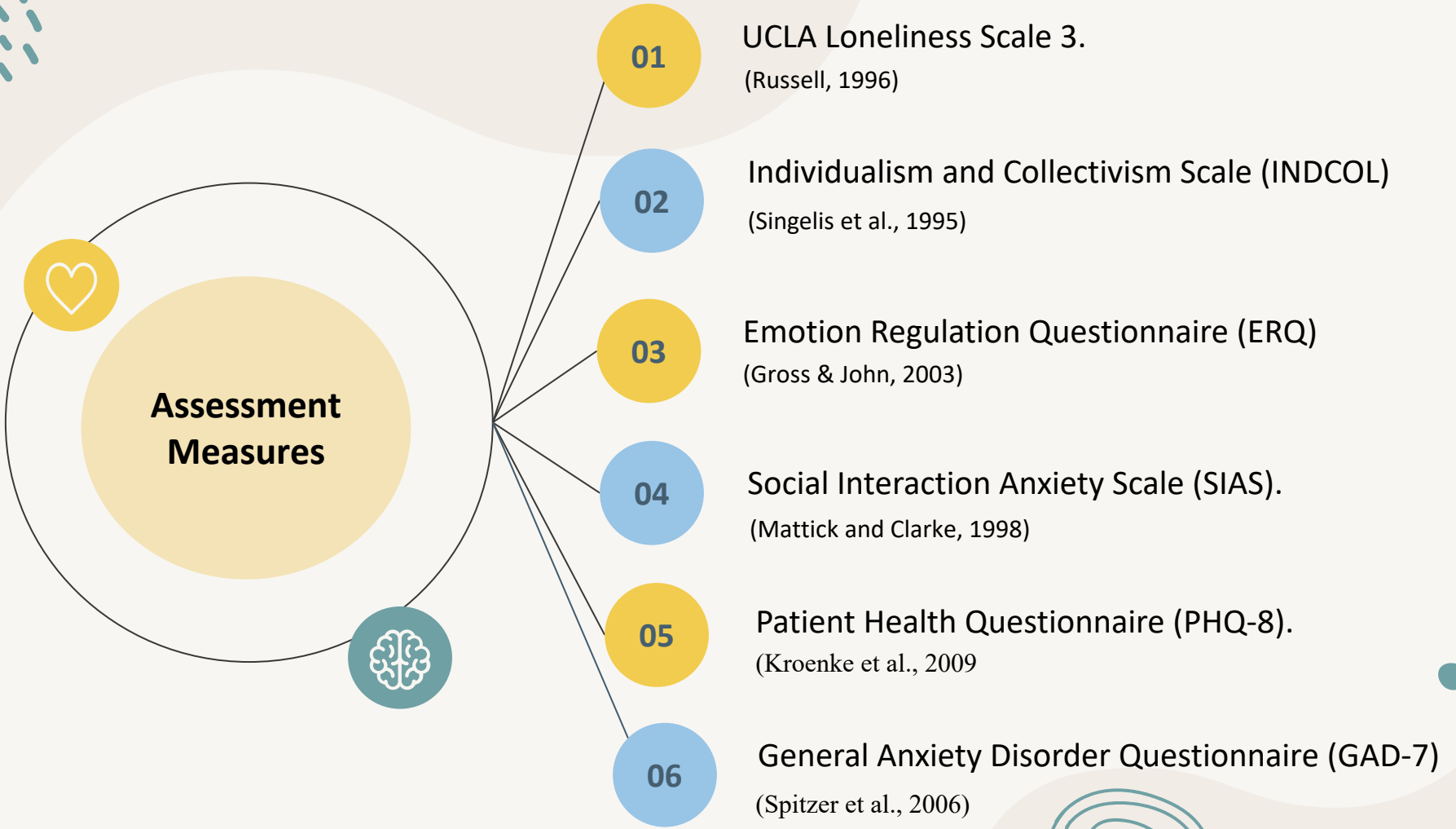
Online Prolific Study

Sample N= 654, Age (M = 22.35, SD = 1.82)

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- Young adults (18-24 years)
- Residents of UK
- Fluent in English
- Individuals not in mental health crisis and/or mobility restrictions, sensory impairments





Assessment Measures

01

UCLA Loneliness Scale 3.
(Russell, 1996)

02

Individualism and Collectivism Scale (INDCOL)
(Singelis et al., 1995)

03

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)
(Gross & John, 2003)

04

Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS).
(Mattick and Clarke, 1998)

05

Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-8).
(Kroenke et al., 2009)

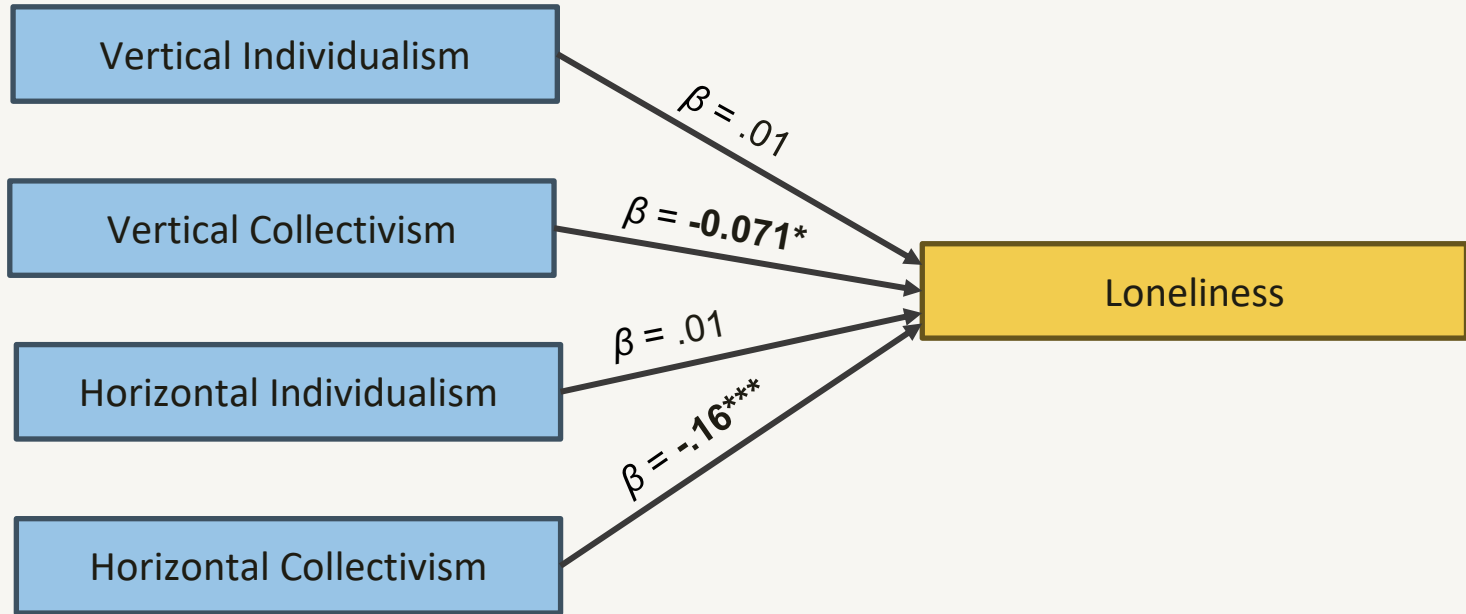
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General Anxiety Disorder Questionnaire (GAD-7)
(Spitzer et al., 2006)



Results and Discussion

Culture Orientations Predicting Loneliness after controlling for mental health and demographic variables



RESULTS SUMMARY

- Loneliness in late adolescents is still explained by the cultural orientations beyond the heavy influence of mental health variables on loneliness.
- Beyond “I vs. we” distinction to a focus on how relationships are structured (equal vs. hierarchical) and how those structures interact with emotion regulation in everyday social life.



THANK YOU!



Do you have any questions ?



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