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URBANIZATION, MIGRATION, AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT AS DETERMINANTS OF ADULT LONELINESS IN UKRAINE

УРБАНІЗАЦІЯ, МІГРАЦІЯ Й ВИМУШЕНЕ ПЕРЕМІЩЕННЯ ЯК ФАКТОРИ САМОТНОСТІ ДОРОСЛОГО НАСЕЛЕННЯ В УКРАЇНІ

Malimon V. I.

*PhD in Public Administration,
Associate Professor,
Department of Public Management,
Administration and National Security,
Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical
University of Oil and Gas;
Postdoctoral Researcher, Department
of Social Psychology
Vasyl Stefanyk Carpathian National
University
Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine*

Малімон В. І.

*кандидат наук з державного
управління, доцент,
доцент кафедри публічного
управління, адміністрування
і національної безпеки
Івано-Франківський національний
технічний університет нафти і газу;
докторант кафедри соціальної
психології
Карпатський національний
університет імені Василя Стефаника
м. Івано-Франківськ, Україна*

Migration waves, internal displacement, and accelerated urbanization are transforming the social fabric of Ukrainian cities and communities. For adults who have experienced relocation alongside changes in employment and housing, loneliness manifests not only as a deficit of contacts but also as a disruption of social embeddedness within everyday micro-environments – courtyards, building entrances/stairwells, workplaces, and learning communities. Comparative European evidence demonstrates persistent migration-related inequalities in the prevalence of loneliness, varying by age, gender, duration of residence, and integration conditions in host countries. Risks are amplified by labour-market access, language proficiency, housing stability, and household structure; conversely, social «bridges» to the local community and participation in civic life reduce the likelihood of prolonged isolation [1]. For refugees and forcibly displaced persons, these vulnerabilities are compounded by legal uncertainty, family separation, and losses of resources and support networks; systematic reviews document greater needs for formal and informal support channels and close associations between loneliness and indicators of poor mental health in these groups [5].

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to delineate the socio-psychological foundations for understanding loneliness among the adult population of Ukraine as an outcome of urbanization, migration, and forced displacement.

Firstly we outline the socio-psychological mechanisms of loneliness under the influence of urbanization/migration/displacement:

1) Erosion of social capital. Relocation and high mobility reduce both bonding and bridging capital: strong ties of support are severed and loose weak ties – typically conduits to information and opportunities for participation – attenuate. «Thin contacts» along daily routes (courtyard, bus stop, marketplace) disappear, weakening belonging and the predictability of interactions [6; 7].

2) Spatiotemporal fragmentation of everyday life. Long commutes, changes of neighbourhood, and shifting work schedules disrupt routines of spontaneous encounters and «rituals of presence», cumulatively heightening perceived isolation even when contacts formally exist.

3) Low urban legibility and a deficit of «third places». The absence of clear and safe meeting points (community hubs, libraries, parks, courtyard spaces with seating and lighting), poor walkability, and limited access to green/public spaces reduce the likelihood of positive spontaneous interactions and intensify adult residents' isolation [6; 7].

4) Integration barriers and legal temporariness. For migrants – and especially refugees/IDPs – the combination of language barriers, unstable employment, temporary housing, and uncertain legal status elevates vulnerability to loneliness and impedes entry into local support networks [3; 5].

5) Stigmatization and discriminatory practices. Negative social attitudes toward «newcomers» and status hierarchies in labour and housing markets heighten expectations of rejection, lower willingness for self-disclosure, and deepen self-isolation, particularly during early adaptation [5].

6) Cognitive–emotional shifts. Network loss and adaptation stress foster an interpretation bias whereby neutral signals are read as threatening (expectation of rejection), trigger hypervigilance to social threat, and strengthen shame/demoralization – processes that reinforce avoidance and close the loop of loneliness.

7) Digital inequality and weak «social presence». Intermittent access to electricity/connectivity, low internet quality, and reliance on asynchronous channels among IDPs and vulnerable households diminish the visibility and timeliness of interaction, producing digital loneliness even within ostensibly networked communities.

8) Institutional barriers and service navigation. Difficulties in accessing municipal/state services (health, employment, education, leisure), coupled with the scarcity of «social navigator» and language/cultural mediators,

delay inclusion in local communities and prolong periods of social isolation [3; 5].

9) Heterogeneous risks by age and life stage. Migration-related inequalities in loneliness are more pronounced in specific age groups (e.g., older adults living alone; young adults without established networks), necessitating stratified prevention and support strategies [1].

Temporal dynamics also matter: in the first months post-displacement, risks of loneliness and distress peak; subsequent trajectories depend on the speed of access to housing and employment, the quality of neighbourhood environments, and the availability of integration programmes (language clubs, «locals–newcomers» mentoring, social navigators). Cross-sectional data on Ukrainian refugees in a host city (Wrocław) show higher psychological distress and loneliness relative to the local population; family ties (co-residence, regular contact with close relatives) exert a marked protective effect, associating with lower isolation and better well-being [3]. According to another study [4], displaced Ukrainians in the Russian Federation exhibit worsened quality of life and elevated levels of depression. Alongside depression, loneliness, increased substance use, and unhealthy eating behaviors were also documented. Syntheses of reviews on the consequences of war and displacement indicate that loneliness and social isolation co-occur within a risk cluster together with depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms [2].

Thus, adult loneliness in the context of urbanization, migration, and forced displacement has a multilevel etiology: individual states, the social architecture of neighborhoods, and the urban ecological environment jointly shape both risk and protection. Recent international evidence substantiates that: (a) migrants and refugees are more likely to experience loneliness; (b) the quality of micro-environments and urban «meeting places» is a key moderator; and (c) integration and support programs that combine physical/built-environment changes with social «bridging» interventions reduce loneliness and improve well-being.

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