

Akvilė Virbaliienė<sup>1</sup>

ORCID: 0000-0001-9209-5665

Aurelija Šiurienė<sup>2</sup>

ORCID: 0000-0002-7964-652X

Remigijus Bubnys<sup>3</sup>

ORCID: 0000-0002-7614-7688

---

## A Multidisciplinary Perspective of the Existential Loneliness of Older People

## Multidyscyplinarna perspektywa egzystencjalnej samotności osób starszych

### Introduction

Many scholars still disagree on a clear limit to the age of old age, as this age group is not judged by the biological age indicator, but rather by human social

---

<sup>1</sup> Akvilė Virbaliienė: Ph.D. Assoc. Prof. Klaipėda state university of applied sciences, Lithuania, e-mail: a.virbaliene@kvk.lt

<sup>2</sup> Aurelija Šiurienė: Klaipėda state university of applied sciences, Lithuania, e-mail: a.siuriene@kvk.lt

<sup>3</sup> Remigijus Bubnys: Ph.D. Prof. Vilnius university Šiauliai academy, Lithuania, e-mail: remigijus.bubnys@sa.vu.lt

expression. Psychological researchers study aging both based on age and based on cognitive changes in processes. However, this age group remains more based on stereotypes and myths, shaped by a negative image based on fear, loss, and loneliness. Research by psychologists in the late 1990s has shown that older people have significant needs that cannot be met by psychotherapy, social work or other areas of help, as older people face meaning, dignity, religion, love and necessity, morality, death, and other existential issues (Erichsen, Buessing, 2013). Consequently, such needs show a gap between the specific expectations of older people and the situation as it stands. Or, alternatively, if a person does not naturally overcome the challenges on their own, specific needs arise that need to be identified and specific strategies proposed to meet them. Most often, professionals working with the elderly have noticed a problem of loneliness caused by self-alienation and self-rejection (Moustakas, 2008). These experiences clearly illustrate the phenomenon of existential loneliness in the lives of the elderly. If the problem of existential loneliness is not solved, it causes psychosocial problems that turn into existential anxiety and cause a sense of meaninglessness, which Yalom (1980) identifies as one of the four existential “gifts” next to death, freedom, and isolation. There are many studies of the loneliness of older people, which describe strategies to reduce loneliness, organize social and physical activities, facilitate social communication Vedreckytė, J., Žiuliukienė, V. (2019), Gaižauskaitė, I., Vyšniauskienė, S. (2019), Mikulionienė, S., Rapolienė, G., Valavičienė, N. (2018), De Leo, D. & Trabucchi, M. (2018), Santaera, P., Servidio, R. & Costabile, A. (2017), Österlind et al. (2017), Lindberg et al. (2015). Studies focusing on the loneliness of older people in a European context are rare. However, the existential needs and existential loneliness of the elderly are discussed instead by Edberg & Bolmsjö (2019) and Sjöberg et al. (2019).

The object of this work is the existential loneliness of the elderly. The aim of the study is to reveal the multidisciplinary perspective of the existential loneliness of elderly wives.

## **Features and types of the Loneliness concept**

The term loneliness was first used in the careful study of psychologists (Perlman and Peplau, 1981; Peplau and Perlman, 1982). Gierveld (1987) described loneliness as a situation experienced by an individual when

the absence of a particular communication (its quality) is unpleasant or unacceptable. These are situations where the number of connections is less than acceptable or permissible, and situations where the desired proximity is not realized. However, the feeling of loneliness is at the same time the result of a subjective assessment of human communication – compared to what is socially desired and acceptable – which also opens the way for sociologists to research. Loneliness in society is stigmatized, so not everyone who experiences it has the strength to admit to themselves or others that they feel lonely; later, this feeling can be clearly expressed as, for example, a sense of unnecessaryness. The opposite of loneliness is social inclusion and the feeling that you are a full member of a social group or society (= needed). Thus, loneliness can be defined as a subjective, undesirable feeling of lack or loss of companionship. This happens when the quantity and quality of the social relationships we have do not meet what we desire (Perlman and Peplau, 1981). Subjective loneliness is a personal experience where a person is lonely emotionally. Being physically alone is much more dangerous than the subjectively perceived feeling that you are alone and there is nothing around you to talk to or ask for help in a difficult minute. This feeling is especially reinforced by the perception that you are unacceptable in society – older people are still stereotypically seen and perceived as weak, sick, angry, abandoned, unable to take care of themselves. This negative image forms the view that such a person is a burden to society, therefore an aging person often feels discomfort, inferiority, shame, wants to maintain distance. This leads to social exclusion – isolation from those around whom the individual lives and from society in general (Belevičienė, 2019). Subjective feelings of loneliness in old age are significantly associated with poorer emotional well-being, despite social and demographic factors. McInnis and White (2001) also argue that loneliness in old age is the cause of many mental health problems, and that loneliness has the greatest impact on deteriorating emotional well-being and depression. Thus, it is possible to distinguish between “objective” and “subjective” loneliness, which do not always coincide, because we can feel lonely even when we are among people. It is also important to bear in mind that these two types of aspects can often be seen in a specific situation. This may be the case for older people who, not wanting to be a burden to their relatives, choose to be alone, even if they experience the consequences of such a choice (Vignola, Neve, 2013). Emotional loneliness is felt when we long for the company of a particular person: often

a spouse, sibling, or best friend. Social loneliness is experienced when we lack a wider social network or group of friends. Loneliness can be a temporary feeling that goes in, it passes. It can be situational, such as rising at some point on a Sunday, during public holidays, or at Christmas. It can also be chronic: it means a person feels lonely (almost) all the time. Loneliness is associated with social isolation, but it is not the same. Isolation is not an objective state in which the number of human contacts can be measured. One way to describe this difference is that you can feel lonely in a crowded room, but you won't be socially isolated in it. However, loneliness is not an objective state. This is the difference between the desired and achieved social contacts. By the way, it depends more on the quality than the quantity of social relations. Loneliness can also be felt in a crowd of acquaintances, including marriage. "Bad" loneliness is probably closely linked to "bad" old age, i.e. diseases, physical and social decline, addiction, and the fact that older people are seen as a burden on society (Rožanova, 2006; Lundgren and Ljuslinder, 2011). On the other hand, voluntary loneliness was created as "good" and associated with peace, pleasure, and individual empowerment and choice (Rožanova, 2006). Loneliness and its determinants can also be understood as a value. This is especially true in a situation where the condition experienced is the result of a decision made independently by a particular person. According to some authors, good loneliness occurs when a person controls it and can change the situation at any time. However, if it is a long-term situation that is difficult to control and that does not pass or that continues against the human will, loneliness is felt as a ballast, a burden, an obstacle, or an unwanted suffering.

Thus, based on the scientific literature, different types and variations of loneliness can be listed. It depends on the criteria applied by a particular author. The literature in the field of gerontology distinguishes between two definitions, which are used as two separate states: loneliness as an objective state and loneliness as a subjective one.

### **Conceptual bases of existential loneliness**

Analyzing existential loneliness from a multidisciplinary perspective, it is necessary to discuss the theoretical concepts and perspectives of different disciplines based on the well-known works of international scholars.

From a social work perspective, Victor et al. (2005) described the loneliness of older people as a social problem that needs to be addressed. Although only in modern society, life one by one took hold as a mass phenomenon that grew into a social problem. Loneliness is said to be problematic because it increases the risk of mental and physical illness in the elderly. A lot of tension causes loved ones, complicates the health care sector and social services. From a community perspective, the loneliness of the elderly casts doubts on the strength of society's value system and its sense of solidarity (Durkheim, 1960). Loneliness has its own social context: "taken out of the social context, it becomes an empty category", its origin is both external and internal. The belief that loneliness has only a historical and social basis is wrong and harmful. This approach deprives people of responsibility for their personal experiences and affairs. They become victims of historical circumstances. The causes of loneliness lie mainly in the inner world, the structure of the character, the sphere of emotions, and the peculiarities of the system of action. They are related to dark, inadequate self-understanding (i.e., inherent self-dislike, low self-esteem, lack of self-acceptance, distorted self-image; such a person does not like other people), emotional immaturity of the individual, and poor, archaic system of individual functioning. There is a perception that social skills – institutional and spontaneous – are paramount when it comes to loneliness. A poor, schematic, and inadequate system of social action, especially spontaneous and unplanned, is probably the leading cause of loneliness. However, other authors, Hawkley and Cacioppo (2007), argue that older age correlates with loneliness. From a social work perspective, Victor et al. (2005) described the loneliness of older people as a social problem that needs to be addressed. Although only in modern society, life one by one took hold as a mass phenomenon that grew into a social problem. Loneliness is said to be problematic because it increases the risk of mental and physical illness in the elderly. A lot of tension causes loved ones, complicates the health care sector and social services. From a community perspective, the loneliness of the elderly casts doubts on the strength of society's value system and its sense of solidarity (Durkheim, 1960). Loneliness has its own social context: "taken out of the social context, it becomes an empty category", its origin is both external and internal. The belief that loneliness has only a historical and social basis is wrong and harmful. This approach deprives people of responsibility for their personal experiences and affairs. They become victims of historical

circumstances. The causes of loneliness lie mainly in the inner world, the structure of the character, the sphere of emotions, and the peculiarities of the system of action. They are related to dark, inadequate self-understanding (i.e. inherent self-dislike, low self-esteem, lack of self-acceptance, distorted self-image – such a person does not like other people), emotional immaturity of the individual, and poor, archaic system of individual functioning. There is a perception that social skills – institutional and spontaneous – are paramount when it comes to loneliness. A poor, schematic, and inadequate system of social action, especially spontaneous and unplanned, is probably the leading cause of loneliness. However, other authors, Hawkley and Cacioppo (2007), argue that older age correlates with loneliness. From a sociological perspective, loneliness is an ambiguous construct, and is often studied in scientific discourse as social isolation in relation to the negative effects of physical and mental health or as a social risk factor increasing in old age. Ågren (2017) sees loneliness as a phenomenon that may have different meanings depending on the societal, historical, and cultural context. Sociologist Robert Weiss (1973) describes loneliness as emotional and social isolation. Emotional isolation manifests itself in the absence of a close emotional connection, and social isolation in the absence of access to a social network (Tornstam, Rydell et al., 2010). Thus, all sociologists agree that loneliness is the result of alienation between people. Szczepański (1988) distinguishes between two states of human existence – loneliness and loneliness. Loneliness is a lack of contact with other people and with oneself, and loneliness is a state where one communicates only with oneself and focuses only on one's inner world. Loneliness is a negative state accompanied not only by anxiety, but also by fear of death as the last form of loneliness. Loneliness arises mainly from the impaired development of the individual's inner world. In sociology, the essence of loneliness is that an elderly person loses contact not only with other people and target groups, but also with himself. Sociologists are looking for ways to justify loneliness in the transformation and functioning of modern societies. It has been observed that the changes in civilization today reinforce the negative direction of transformations in the individual social control typical groups: the family, the work environment, and a group of similar people. So, loneliness threatens our survival, so the body has created a warning system for a lonely person to return to society. The warning system causes stress, anxiety, and pain, i. e. a certain discomfort that the experienced person begins to seek in the company of.

Conversely, good relationships and a coveted community activate our reward system that creates wealth (Cacioppo, cited in Strang, 2014).

Psychological reflection on loneliness is inseparable from philosophical and sociological reflections, less frequently from theological reflections. In psychological reflection, loneliness and loneliness are perceived not only as a universal feature of human nature and existence, but also as an individual's inner, personal experience arising from a lack of close contact with other people. This experience is not only negative in nature (loneliness, isolation, alienation) but also positive in that it contributes to human development, transcendence, creativity, and maturation. Every personal experience of loneliness is different. It is most associated with pain, suffering, tears, fear and anxiety, despair or anxiety, feelings of emptiness, frustration, depression, anger, guilt, longing. People notice the charm of loneliness much less often. In addition to internal causes – related to personality – loneliness, according to psychologists, also arises under certain social conditions, such as modern civilization with its inherent tendencies. Thus, speaking of loneliness from an existential perspective, Sjöberg (2018) explored the existential loneliness of older people and concluded that existential loneliness is an unpleasant feeling often described as related to death, cancer, and so on. Sjöberg, Beck et al., (2018) call this existential isolation and conclude that despite the interrelationships, there is an insurmountable gap when people are completely lonely. In addition, Frankl describes the human experience as an inner emptiness and a sense of meaninglessness. This usually occurs noticeably in old age. Thus, the existential loneliness of vulnerable older people (75 years and older) can be perceived as a feeling of being trapped in a weak and weakening body. When you are addicted to other people's limitations, your ability to maintain autonomy and control your life decreases, and your feelings of hopelessness and vulnerability increase. Increasing losses raise fears of becoming completely dependent on others, so realizing that death is imminent and could become a way out. When it is impossible to do significant things, when regretting past decisions, it involves existential loneliness. Moreover, the experience of existential loneliness is related to the experience of experiencing the indifference of others, as it results in a feeling of being unfaithful to anyone, a feeling of neglect, and a feeling of being an object. In addition, existential loneliness arises in situations where you are alone and unable to engage in shared activities and share thoughts with anyone, and lack of or closeness to physical intimacy, leading

to feelings of sadness, grief, emptiness, and neglect. Moreover, existential loneliness is associated with the feeling that you do not see purpose and meaning, which has been described as existence in a vacuum caused by the feeling that you are lost, in the waiting room, and waiting for death (Sjöberg, Beck et al., 2018). Österlind, Ternstedt et al. (2017) examined the experiences of older people when death is imminent. This experience was interpreted as a sense of loneliness in an unknown place that complemented a sense of existential loneliness. Older people said they had little opportunity to discuss their thoughts on life and death. As a result, a national study was initiated in Sweden to reveal the experiences of the existential loneliness of older people. Multidisciplinary analysis of existential loneliness provides a definition that focuses on the experiences of vulnerable older people. Existential loneliness is defined as the immediate realization that you are fundamentally separated from other people and the universe, firstly experiencing yourself as mortal or, especially during a crisis, experiencing dissatisfaction (communication) on a deep human (i.e. authentic) level, so you usually feel negative feelings, that is, emotions or moods such as sadness, despair, grief, meaninglessness, or suffering (Edberg & Bolmsjö 2019). Thus, existential loneliness mainly means distancing oneself from life, that is, when you feel trapped in a weak, indifferent treatment, do not have to share meaningful aspects of life, do not feel the meaning of life (Sjöberg, 2018). However, existential loneliness can be attenuated when you are recognized by others, that is, when you are the object of their care, experience intimacy, and there is a meaningful exchange of thoughts and feelings. Existential loneliness can also be alleviated by removing negative thoughts and feelings, that is, when adapting to an existing situation and accepting it, looking at life through the rearview mirror, maintaining communication on a spiritual level, being able to step back and distract (Sjöberg et al., 2019).

From a philosophical point of view, loneliness can be viewed in historical periods. Ancient and medieval philosophy describes loneliness as a single immersion in oneself and a subsequent discovery of the higher transcendent foundations of one's own self. During the Renaissance, philosophers began to consider the problem of loneliness dialectically, distinguishing the positive as loneliness and the negative as isolation. However, according to Levin (1994), one cannot share one's existence with another's one. It can only allow him to coexist. This is also confirmed by Schlioger (2009) that there is no collective



experience or object of collective experience. Hence, we can understand that from birth a person feels and perceives everything alone. He understands himself best, so often at critical moments in life or when he feels the need to find meaning and calm, people voluntarily separate themselves from society. Thus, two aspects of loneliness emerge: existential loneliness, which is an inevitable part of human existence, and loneliness caused by alienation from oneself and self-rejection, which is not at all loneliness, but rather vague and disturbing anxiety. Existential loneliness is an inner and fundamental reality of human life, combining pain and the triumph of creation that arises after long hours of loneliness. A person who experiences existential loneliness perceives himself as a separate and lonely person, while a person who is lonely and therefore anxious distances himself from himself as a feeling and conscious person. The philosophical concept of loneliness runs parallel to the theological perspective of loneliness that began to develop during the Middle Ages. Christianity provides a unique experience for the lonely man of God, Jesus Christ. It invites every person who seeks divine truth to follow his example from birth to death, accumulating in his life the experience of religious loneliness. The recognition of the need for religious loneliness can also be traced in the theological books, especially in the works of Blessed Aurelius Augustine. The main idea of which is that loneliness is a consequence of man's separation from God (Aleynikova, 2018). The loneliness that God identifies with man is existential and applies to all individuals. Here emerges the main anthropological problem that man was created to be painfully alone. However, the concept of loneliness according to the Book of Genesis, together with the existential loneliness of man after the "fall", allows the experience of loneliness to be partially named and valuable, giving it a specific role in human life. It is to accept and love yourself, acknowledging your undeniable spiritual value.

### **Signs of existent lonely in older people**

Anyone can feel lonely at different times in their lives, but some people are at greater risk. As older people, they are more likely to experience social isolation and loneliness as a result of living alone, lacking close family ties, reduced contact with their culture of origin or being unable (often without transport) to participate actively in the local community.

The loneliness of vulnerable older people (65 years and older) has been interpreted as living in a hurry world, but apart from it because of the older person's social environment and the inability to recover what has been lost. It was experienced as hopelessness, sadness, emptiness and anxiety, being invisible to others and lack of inspiration. The loneliness experienced by older people (85 years and older) was described as a lot of neglect and loss of life. The existential loneliness of vulnerable older people (75 years and older) can be perceived as a feeling of being trapped in a weak and weakening body. When you are addicted to other people's limitations, your ability to maintain autonomy and control your life decreases, and your feelings of hopelessness and vulnerability increase. Increasing losses raise fears of becoming completely dependent on others, so realizing that death is imminent and could become a way out. When it is impossible to do significant things, when regretting past decisions, it involves existential loneliness. Moreover, the experience of existential loneliness is related to the indifference of others, as it leads to a feeling that you are not believing in anyone, a sense of neglect, and a feeling that you are only an object. In addition, existential loneliness arises in situations where you are alone and unable to engage in shared activities and share thoughts, and lack of or closeness to physical intimacy, leading to feelings of sadness, grief, emptiness, and neglect. Moreover, existential loneliness is associated with the feeling that you do not see purpose and meaning, you are in an existential vacuum caused by the feeling that you are lost, as if in a waiting room and waiting for death (Sjöberg, Beck et al., 2018). Moreover, Österlind, Ternstedt et al. (2017) investigated how older people living in nursing homes are experiencing impending death. This experience was interpreted as a sense of loneliness in an unknown place that complemented a sense of existential loneliness. Older people said they had little opportunity to discuss their thoughts on life and death. The signs of existential loneliness in vulnerable older people were described in more detail by health care professionals in a qualitative study by Sundström, Edberg et al. (2018). Signs of existential loneliness can be the pursuit of contact, asking for attention, or surrendering to anger. These symptoms have been described as characteristic of older people experiencing different forms of communication problems. Another expression of existential loneliness was a request or longing for contact, such as asking for help often and repeatedly, which is an attempt to achieve human contact, closeness, and intimacy. This need for social contacts has been described

by health professionals as insatiable. What's more, older people's existential signs of loneliness manifest as regret, guilt, a feeling that you believe no one, that you are insignificant to others, and alienation. Existential loneliness is also associated with increased shyness, anxiety, anger, decreased sense of social ability, less optimism, and less social support, making it reminiscent of a syndrome that also includes a concept and expectations that reinforce loneliness. In addition, loneliness is characterized by greater negative effects and more frequent interactions of a negative nature, so individuals not only interact negatively with others, but also take it over from others and pass it on to others (Cacioppo, Fowler, Chistakis, 2009). Lonely people are characterized by lower self-esteem, they tend to see themselves and others negatively, more often than single people expect to be rejected by others. Moreover, psychological research has shown that single people are more often associated with other single people, but they are single individuals among single people, and their loneliness eventually increases (Cacioppo, Fowler, & Christakis, 2009). According to researchers, loneliness is a social supplement to physical pain, and in the presence of physical pain, social pain is functional because it motivates individuals to reduce it and seek communication to feel safe and satisfied with life (Masi et al., 2011). However, trying to break free from loneliness – which is complicated – is not enough for people in one space to start communicating. Friendships can become unattainable because the thoughts and behaviours of lonely people make them less attractive to each other as communication partners.

Professionals should be able to notice and detect any signs that indicate the need to express emotions, even if the person refuses to speak and asks to be left alone. When it comes to existential loneliness, it is important to emphasize that sometimes one does not realize one's sense of loneliness, and therefore feels ailment and dissatisfaction that can be caused by a variety of factors, including distancing oneself from one's emotions and needs. Thus, the worker must be able to address meaningful issues, manage any obstacles and difficulties he or she may face in dealing with the existential loneliness of the elderly.

## Conclusions

Assessing existential loneliness from a multidisciplinary perspective, the following aspects emerged:

The analysis of existential loneliness as a phenomenon from the perspective of social work revealed that existential loneliness is related to a social problem, the origins of which lie in reduced social abilities and individual differences between individuals. The loneliness of the elderly is closely linked to the value system of society and the spread of solidarity in society.

From a sociological point of view, existential loneliness is treated as a multi-faceted construct related to the historical and cultural context of society and is therefore in a constant negative transformation within social groups.

From the point of view of psychology, existential loneliness is related to the possibilities of a person's development, deeper self-knowledge, discovery of creativity, on the other hand, existential loneliness has a negative connotation of sadness, helplessness, grief, meaninglessness, or suffering.

In the philosophical-theological perspective of the perception of existential loneliness, two aspects emerge related to loneliness as an inevitable existential part of a person and isolation from oneself. From a Christian point of view, this is equated with the need for religious loneliness, whose task is to discover meaning in loneliness while acknowledging its undeniable spiritual value.

Signs of the existential loneliness of the elderly are visible and invisible in society. The most recognizable are negative feelings and experiences like sadness, anxiety, grief, regret, guilt, feelings of unnecessary, and so on. Signs of existential loneliness can also be a desire for contact, a need for closeness, for receptivity, which further increases a person's isolation.

**Abstract:** Research by psychologists in the late 1990s has shown that older people have significant needs that cannot be met by psychotherapy, social work or other areas of help, as older people face meaning, dignity, religion, love necessity, morality, death and other existential issues (Erichsen, Buessing, 2013). Most often, professionals working with the elderly have noticed a problem of loneliness caused by self-alienation and self-rejection (Moustakas, 2008). These experiences clearly illustrate the phenomenon of existential loneliness in the lives of the elderly. If the problem of existential loneliness is not solved, it causes psychosocial problems that turn into existential anxiety and cause a sense of meaninglessness, which Yalom (1980) identifies as one of the four existential "gifts" next to death, freedom, and isolation. Studies focusing on the loneliness of older people in the European context are rare. However, the existential needs and existential loneliness of the elderly are discussed instead by Edberg & Bolmsjö (2019) and Sjöberg

et al. (2019) . The aim of this study is to reveal a multidisciplinary perspective on the existential loneliness of elderly wives.

A scientific analysis of the literature was performed. The method of this study was chosen to reveal the phenomenon of existential unity from a multidisciplinary perspective, revealing the holistic, existential nature of loneliness. Existential loneliness is associated with a social problem, the origins of which lie in diminished social skills and individual differences between the individuals. The loneliness of the elderly is closely linked to the value system of society and the spread of solidarity in society. From a sociological point of view, existential loneliness is treated as a multi-faceted construct related to the historical and cultural context of society and is therefore in a constant negative transformation within social groups.

From the point of view of psychology, existential loneliness is related to the possibilities of a person's development, deeper self-knowledge, discovery of creativity, on the other hand, existential loneliness has a negative connotation of sadness, helplessness, grief, meaninglessness, or suffering.

In the philosophical-theological perspective of the perception of existential loneliness, two aspects emerge related to loneliness as an inevitable existential part of a person and isolation from oneself. From a Christian point of view, this is equated with the need for religious loneliness, whose task is to discover meaning in loneliness while acknowledging its undeniable spiritual value.

**Keywords:** existential loneliness, loneliness, the elderly

**Streszczenie:** Badania psychologów z końca lat 90. XX wieku wykazały, że osoby starsze mają znaczące potrzeby, które nie mogą być zaspokojone przez psychoterapię, pracę socjalną czy inne obszary pomocy. Seniorzy mierzą się z takimi kwestiami egzystencjalnymi, jak: znaczenie, godność, religia, miłość i konieczność, moralność, śmierć i inne (Erichsen, Büssing, 2013). Pracujący z nimi profesjonaliści dostrzegają najczęściej problem samotności spowodowanej samoalienacją i odrzuceniem siebie (Moustakas, 2008). Doświadczenia te wyraźnie ilustrują zjawisko samotności egzystencjalnej w życiu osób starszych. Jeśli ten problem nie zostanie rozwiązany, powoduje trudności psychospołeczne, które przeradzają się w niepokój egzystencjalny i wywołują poczucie bezsensu. Yalom (1980) identyfikuje to poczucie jako jeden z czterech „darów” egzystencjalnych obok śmierci, wolności i izolacji. Badania koncentrujące się na samotności osób starszych w kontekście europejskim są rzadkie. Potrzeby egzystencjalne i samotność egzystencjalna osób starszych są jednak omawiane przez Edberg i Bolmsjö (2019) oraz Sjöberg i in. Celem niniejszego opracowania jest ukazanie multidyscyplinarnego spojrzenia na egzystencjalną samotność starszych żon.

W niniejszym artykule dokonano naukowej analizy literatury przedmiotu. Metoda badania została wybrana w celu ujawnienia zjawiska egzystencjalnej samotności

z perspektywy multidyscyplinarnej i pokazania jej holistycznego, egzystencjalnego charakteru. Samotność egzystencjalna wiąże się z problemem społecznym, którego źródła tkwią w obniżonych kompetencjach społecznych i różnicach indywidualnych między jednostkami. Samotność osób starszych jest ściśle powiązana z systemem wartości społeczeństwa i rozprzestrzenianiem się solidarności w społeczeństwie. Z socjologicznego punktu widzenia samotność egzystencjalna jest traktowana jako konstrukt wieloaspektowy, skorelowany z kontekstem historycznym i kulturowym społeczeństwa, a zatem podlegający ciągłym negatywnym przemianom w obrębie grup społecznych.

Z perspektywy psychologicznej samotność egzystencjalna jest związana z możliwościami rozwoju osoby, głębszym samopoznaniem, odkrywaniem kreatywności. Z drugiej strony ma ona negatywną konotację smutku, bezradności, żalu, bezsensu czy cierpienia.

W filozoficzno-teologicznym postrzeganiu samotności egzystencjalnej wyłaniają się dwa aspekty związane z ujmowaniem samotności jako nieuniknionej egzystencjalnej części człowieka oraz izolacji od samego siebie. Na płaszczyźnie chrześcijańskiej ten wymiar samotności utożsamia się z potrzebą samotności religijnej, której zadaniem jest odkrycie sensu samotności przy jednoczesnym uznaniu jej niezaprzeczalnej wartości duchowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** samotność egzystencjalna, samotność, osoby starsze

## References

- Ågren, A. (2017). What are we talking about? Constructions of loneliness among older people in the Swedish news-press. *Aging Stud*, 41, pp. 18–27.
- Aleynikova, O.S. (2018). Loneliness in the history of philosophical culture. *Philosophy*, 7(73), pp. 119–122.
- Cacioppo, J.T., Fowler, J.H., Christakis, N.A. (2009). Alone in the crowd: The structure and spread of loneliness in a large social network. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97(6), pp. 977–991.
- Cavallero, P., Ferrari, M.G., Bertocci, B. (2006). Loneliness and social relations: two aspects of the life of elderly women. [In Italian: Solitudine e relazioni sociali: due aspetti della vita delle donne anziane]. *Psychofenia*, IX, 14, pp. 99–118.
- de Leo, D., Berardinelli, M., Scarpino, O., Trabucchi, M. (2018). Loneliness in Adolescents: A Flash Survey through Smartphones. *Open Journal of Medical Psychology*, 8, pp. 45–52.
- Durkheim, E. (1960). *The Division of Labor in Society* (4th ed.). Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe.

- Erichsen, N.B., Buessing, A. (2013). Spiritual Needs of Elderly Living in Residential/ Nursing Homes. *Evidence-based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 5, pp. 2–12.
- Gaižauskaitė, I., Vyšniauskienė, S. (2019). *Vyresnio amžiaus žmonių potencialas savanoriškai veiklai ir pagalba vienišioms vyresnio amžiaus žmonėms*. Tyrimo Ataskaita: Lietuvos Socialinių Tyrimų Centras.
- Hawkey, L.C., Cacioppo, J.T. (2007). Aging and loneliness: Downhill quickly? *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16(4), pp. 187–191.
- Larsson, H., Rängård, M., Bolmsjö, I. (2017). Older persons' existential loneliness, as interpreted by their significant others – an interview study. *BMC Geriatrics*, 17, pp. 19–29.
- Levinas, E. (1994). *Etika ir begalybė*. Vilnius: Baltos lankos.
- Lindberg, E., Ekebergh, M., Persson, E. Hörberg, U. (2015). The importance of existential dimensions in the context of the presence of older patients at team meetings—in the light of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. *Int J Qual Stud Health Well-being*, 19, pp. 10–21.
- Lundgren, A.S., Ljuslinder, K. (2011). Problematic Demography: Representations of Population Ageing in the Swedish Daily Press. *Journal of Population Ageing*, 4, pp. 7–18.
- Masi, C.M., Hsi-Yuan, C., Hawkey, L.C. (2011). A Meta-Analysis of Interventions to Reduce Loneliness. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 15 (3), pp. 219–266.
- Mikulionienė, S., Rapolienė, G., Valavičienė, N. (2018). *Vyresnio amžiaus žmonės, gyvenimas po vieną ir socialinė atskirtis*. Vilnius: Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras.
- Moustakas, C.E. (2008). *Vienatvė*. Vilnius: Žmogaus psichologijos studija.
- Österlind, J., Ternstedt, B.M., Hansebo, G., Hellström, I. (2017). Feeling lonely in an unfamiliar place: older people's experiences of life close to death in a nursing home. *Int J Older People Nurs*, 12, pp. 1–10.
- Österlind, J., Ternstedt, B.M., Hansebo, G., Hellström, I. (2017). Feeling lonely in an unfamiliar place: older people's experiences of life close to death in a nursing home. *Int J Older People Nurs*, 12, pp. 89–99.
- Peplau, L.A., Perlman, D. (1982). *Perspective on loneliness. Loneliness: A sourcebook of current theory, research and therapy* (1–18). New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Perlman, D., Peplau, L.A. (1981). Toward a Social Psychology of Loneliness. *Personal Relationships*, 3, pp. 31–56.
- Rožanova, J. (2006). Newspaper portrayals of health and illness among Canadian seniors: Who ages healthy and at what cost? *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life*, 1(2), pp. 111–139.

- Santaera, P., Servidio, R., Costabile, A. (2017). Elderly people and depression: the role of loneliness [In Italian: Anziani e depressione: il ruolo della solitudine]. *Psychogeriatrics*, 3, pp. 22–29.
- Schnittker, J. (2007). Look (closely) at all the lonely people: Age and the social psychology of social support. *Journal of Aging and Health*, 19(4), pp. 659–682.
- Sjöberg, M., Beck, I., Rasmussen, B.H., Edberg, A-K. (2018). Being disconnected from life: meanings of existential loneliness as narrated by frail older people. *Ageing Ment Health*, 22, pp. 1357–1364.
- Sjöberg, M., Edberg, A.K., Rasmussen, B.H., Beck, I. (2019). Being acknowledged by others and being able to bracket negative thoughts and feelings: Frail older people's narrations of how existential loneliness is eased. *International Journal of Older People Nursing*, 14, pp. 25–38.
- Sundström, M., Edberg, A.K., Rämgård, M. (2018). Encountering existential loneliness among older people: perspectives of health care professionals. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 13(1), pp. 123–135.
- Šliogeris, A. (2009). *Melancholijos archipelagai*. Vilnius: Apostrofa.
- Tornstam, L., Rydell, M., Vik, I., Öberg, E. (2010). *The loneliness in Sweden 1985–2008* [In Swedish: Ensamheten i Sverige 1985–2008]. Uppsala: Department of Sociology.
- Vedreckytė, J., Žiuliukienė, V. (2019). *Vienišumą lemiančių veiksnių analizė*. Vilnius: Lietuvos Socialinių Tyrimų Centras.
- Victor, C.R., Scambel, S. (2005). The prevalence of, and risk factors for, loneliness in later life: A survey of older people in Great Britain. *Ageing and Society*, 25, pp. 357–375.
- Vignola, G.B., Neve, E. (2013). Loneliness, social needs and responses for elder people [In Italian: Solitudine, bisogni e risposte sociali per le persone anziane]. *Zuncan Studies*, 6, pp. 81–88.

Date of the submission of article to the Editor: 02.08.2021

Date of acceptance of the article: 25.11.2021