

Social Research Call

Title:

Understanding and Addressing Chronic Youth Loneliness



Acronym: UNLONE

Project leader: Silvia Cannas

Host organisation: Institut Barcelona Estudis Internacionals

Main purpose of the project: UNLONE aims to understand and address chronic loneliness among Spanish youth aged 16–29. It seeks to distinguish chronic from merely episodic loneliness, estimate its national prevalence, identify the factors that drive the transition to chronicity, and develop interventions to reduce barriers to help-seeking.

Design/methodology/approach: The project uses a mixed-methods design with three components. First, a psychometric study validates Spanish measures of youth loneliness. Second, a nationally representative two-wave longitudinal study estimates prevalence and identifies predictors of chronicity. Third, a co-designed online experiment tests anti-stigma interventions and their effect on help-seeking behavior.

Potential results: UNLONE will deliver a validated psychometric toolkit for Spanish youth loneliness and Spain's first prevalence estimates distinguishing chronic from episodic loneliness. It will also assess whether loneliness stigma predicts the episodic-to-chronic transition and yield a portfolio of experimentally tested anti-stigma messages with documented effects on reducing stigma and increasing help-seeking.

Social relevance of the research: Chronic loneliness in youth has lasting consequences for health, education, and employment, yet research and services have focused mostly on older adults. UNLONE targets the developmental window when loneliness can still be prevented from entrenching, giving institutions what they currently lack: validated tools to identify at-risk youth, prevalence evidence to guide policy, and low-cost anti-stigma materials ready for use.

Originality/value of the project: UNLONE will deliver the first loneliness measures validated for Spanish youth and Spain's first data distinguishing chronic from episodic loneliness. It will also be the first study to explore whether stigma drives the episodic-to-chronic transition and to experimentally test co-designed interventions to reduce loneliness stigma.