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Study on loneliness among young people

Portuguese people have fewer friends today than 10 years ago, and it is younger, poorer people who socialise the least.

This conclusion comes from a study released by ISCTE, which argues for the need for public spaces for social interaction.

"Comparing 2025 with 2015, the difference is evident: there is a clear reduction in the number of close friends, an increase in feelings of loneliness, and a decrease in social integration, although people do not seem to be aware of this change," stated the coordinator of the study, Luísa Lima, quoted in the study's publication.

Social relationships promote health

Good social relationships continue to be associated with higher levels of health and well-being. It is recommended "to remove economic obstacles" to more frequent interaction with friends, through public policies, namely from Local Administration, such as the promotion of "quality public spaces for social interaction," the use of which does not involve spending money.

"Especially younger people, they

currently feel lonelier, have reduced their number of friends and close friends, and in recent years have had fewer social interactions than before the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020," stated the authors of the study, "Friendship in Portugal - What is it like? What has changed?", conducted last year.

The reduction in the number of friends and the frequency of meetings is also greater among lower-income groups than among higher-income groups.

Isolation trend

"The population between 18 and 64 years old confirms that Portugal has become part of the major international trend of isolation among younger and poorer people. People who feel lonely are more often young, precarious, and with lower incomes," the researchers said.

According to Luísa Lima, relationships have changed significantly since the pandemic, registering "notable differences" compared to the study conducted in 2015. "Since then, the poorest have reduced the number of

friends, spend less time with other people, and feel lonelier. They are the group that has lost the most in the last ten years in terms of relationships, social capital, health, and well-being."

However, according to the same source, the vast majority of people "do not perceive" this change in relationships. About 60% of respondents believed relationships have not changed, and only 20% believed they have worsened.

Determinants of happiness

Relationships with friends, the researchers emphasised, are even more determinant of happiness than family relationships. "Having good friends seems to be good for your health," they concluded.

"Social connection is very important for health, and loneliness is a worrying issue. The World Health Organisation [WHO] refers to loneliness as a public health problem," Luísa Lima highlighted.

Loneliness

Loneliness is felt more strongly among people who live alone (33%)



Unsplash, Soma Freemove

than among those who live with others (20%).

The feeling of isolation is also more frequent among LGBT+ people (35%) than among heterosexual people (21%), among those in precarious employment (24%) or the unemployed (39%) than among those with

stable employment (18%), and among the poorest (43%) than among the richest (13%).

"This result shows that loneliness is not only dependent on personal variables, but on structural causes linked to belonging to socially devalued groups," he added.