

Tekst 9

Psychology

Alone in the crowd

ON THE surface, Framingham, Massachusetts looks like any other American town. Unknown to most who pass through this serene place, however, it is a gold mine for medical research. Since 1948 three generations of residents in Framingham have participated in regular medical examinations originally intended to study the spread of heart disease. In the years since, researchers have also used Framingham to track obesity, smoking and even happiness over long periods of time. Now a new study that uses Framingham to analyse loneliness has found that it spreads very much like a communicable disease.

Feeling lonely is more than just unpleasant for those who yearn to be surrounded by warm relationships – it is 29. Numerous studies show that loneliness reduces fruit-fly lifespans, increases the chances of mice developing diabetes, and causes a host of adverse effects in people, including cardiovascular disease, obesity and weakening of the immune system. Simply being surrounded by others is 30. In people, the mere perception of being isolated is more than enough to create the bad health effects. However, in spite of its significant impact, precious little is known about how loneliness moves through communities.

Keen to shed some light on the mystery, John Cacioppo of the University of Chicago and his colleagues turned to the Framingham data. They found that all participants in the study were routinely asked to list people who would probably know their

whereabouts in the next two to four years. Most importantly, they were asked to describe their relationship with each person as friend, spouse, sibling, neighbour or colleague. The original purpose of such questions was to help the researchers behind the heart-disease project stay in touch with participants even when they moved out of Framingham. But the loneliness team immediately recognised them as a way to 31 social interactions.

Between 1983 and 2001, even more useful information was collected by Dr Cacioppo and his colleagues, allowing them to analyse the formation and transmission of isolation.

They report in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* that loneliness formed in clusters of people, and that once one person in a social network started expressing feelings of loneliness, others within this person's network would start to feel 32. Those who had immediate contact with lonely people were around 50% more likely than average to feel lonely themselves.

Yet these findings are only the first step. The team of researchers is starting to look at other towns and cities, to see if there are any public policies or city-planning techniques that 33 the spread of loneliness. No solutions have been discovered so far, but through the process of studying other communities the researchers have discovered that when it comes to having clusters of lonely people, Framingham, unfortunately, is very much like any other town in America.

adapted from an article from
The Economist, 2009

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Kies bij iedere open plek in de tekst het juiste antwoord uit de gegeven mogelijkheden.

1p **29**

- A a chronic disease
- B a health risk
- C the cause of depression
- D typical of modern times

1p **30**

- A an easy solution
- B a threat to privacy
- C no cure

1p **31**

- A change
- B identify
- C influence
- D promote

1p **32**

- A even more depressed
- B instant relief
- C the same way

1p **33**

- A confirm
- B neglect
- C prevent