

I will always remember the dread when the first shell hit nearby. How our house shook, and the windows smashed. I will never forget the beast-like cry of the wounded soldier, who was dragged down our street by his comrades.

I kept imagining being torn to pieces by an explosion. The thought that this could happen to my parents or my sister felt even worse. After a month, when we were evacuated, I was not the same girl. I developed a stutter and experienced episodes of extreme anxiety.

Now I'm 34. I still have to cope with moments of anxiety. During the countdown to New Year, when I hear fireworks, I freeze. They sound like explosions. I don't like thunder either."

War came to little Emilija in March of 2001. She had no idea why her town of Tetovo in North Macedonia came under siege, nor what [the armed insurgency](#) was all about. Now she knows.

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Loneliness-washing, no thank you



Angelo Boccato



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Got it!

49.63% of British adults reported feeling lonely in 2022 occasionally, sometimes, often, or always and 3.83 million people reported experiencing chronic loneliness, according to the [Campaign to End Loneliness](#).

Loneliness was declared by the World Health Organisation [a global threat](#) in November 2023. In the UK, loneliness in society has increased since the pandemic.

Former prime minister Theresa May's government instituted the Ministry of Loneliness in 2018, implementing the recommendations of Jo Cox's Commission on Loneliness (a cross-party commission established in 2016 by the Labour MP, who was murdered that year) and while the Ministry [has produced research](#) on loneliness and launched strategies to mitigate it, it is not comprehensive. There is a lack of understanding about how the policies of austerity and the cost of living crisis' have impacted communities and individuals' social cohesion, and mental health in general.

This is evident in [the guidelines](#) for the government's recent campaign to tackle loneliness in universities. They are so vague that they fail to consider the costs of university for students, and inequality, as 55% of students are doing paid work to support their studies (compared to 45% in 2022).

Over the last 14 years, Tory governments have continued to implement austerity measures, impacting the most vulnerable in society and seeing the closure of community hubs, from playing fields to community centres and libraries.

The impact of loneliness in the UK cannot be separated from over a decade of cuts to social welfare and their impact on society, and this can also be applied to mental health.

"Mental health-washing" is not the answer here. As the country looks to a general election this autumn, it will be up to charities and grassroots groups to start conversations and advocate for future campaigns that consider the damaged texture of British society, beyond sanitised narratives, buzzwords and wishful thinking.

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Talk gets real for AfD targets



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