

NEWS

PROJECT

S.T.E.P.S Shared Time
Enhances People
Solidarity
Verona, Italy

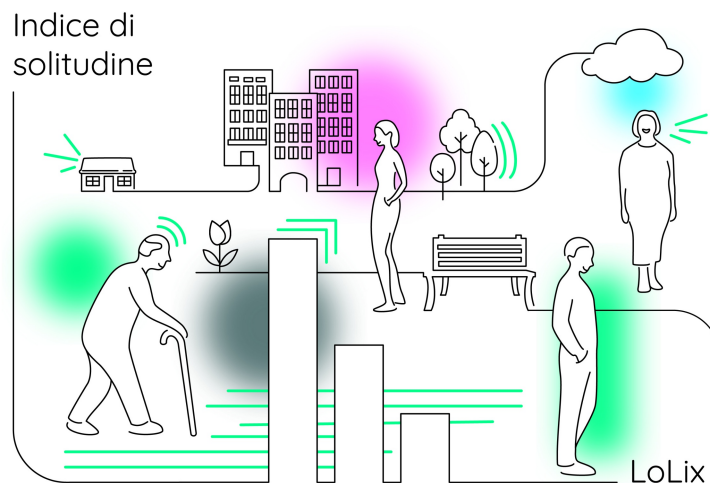
TOPIC

Demographic change

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BY CITY OF VERONA

LoLix, the Levels of Loneliness Index: a statistical measurement of loneliness and the quality of life.

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The S.T.E.P.S. project set itself the challenge of creating a loneliness index called LoLix (Levels of Loneliness Index), with the aim of measuring loneliness and identifying its causes.

To this end, the Municipality of Verona, in partnership with the University of Verona - Department of Economics and Sylla - Istituto Ricerche di Mercato srl, has developed a questionnaire that investigates various dimensions of life conjoined with factors of economic, socio-relational and psycho-physical well-being.

Between the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2023, a survey was carried out with the residents of the 3rd District of Verona to investigate people's quality of life. The idea was to collect a wealth of data and information that would provide an overview of the state of well-being or malaise of the population in their daily lives.

The 3rd district was selected as the territorial target for the S.T.E.P.S. project due to its demographic traits mirroring Verona's urban population. Therefore, by statistical inference, the results of this research can provide an informative picture that can be extended to the entire city.

300 families were surveyed from September 2021 to April 2022. This initial administration of the questionnaire was very challenging, particularly due to the length of the questionnaire, which caused many refusals or incomplete answers from the interviewees. The fact that participation in the questionnaire was not mandatory was also an issue. Therefore, the questionnaire was reviewed, simplified, administration times were reduced, and the focus shifted from the family unit to the individual unit, while still maintaining a set of questions about the characteristics of the family. The 300 questionnaires were used as pre-research to develop the survey models.

Between February and March 2023, another 800 questionnaires (in the reviewed version) were administered to individuals. Based on the data collected from these 800 questionnaires, the LoLix index was created.

As of now, 90 more questionnaires have been gathered since the questionnaire was made available to the general public for online self-completion (from September 2023). The purpose of online questionnaire provision for citizens and welfare service providers is to maintain a steady flow of data that will allow the index and its findings to

be updated in the future.

The questionnaire investigates the following areas: moodwatching, physical activity, use of time, health, personality, resilience, boredom, positive loneliness, technological loneliness, negative loneliness, consumption, economic situation, personal data.

Different dimensions of life (social, family, economic and livelihood, environmental and housing context, etc.) enclose the causes of loneliness. These causes have been structured according to 3 variables: economic, socio-relational, and psycho-physical.

The report that was produced following the 800 questionnaires provided a range of critical values for each of the 3 variables based on a probabilistic criterion: an individual who scores within these ranges of values has a greater probability of living in a situation of loneliness caused by economic, socio-relational, and/or psycho-physical factors. It is assumed that these ranges are applicable in Verona's reality and could potentially be applied to urban areas with the same characteristics and standards as Verona. If not, then the ranges must be adjusted to meet the actual standards of the context. Supposedly, in a different city, like southern Italy, the same questionnaire would produce a diverse range of values for each of the 3 variables.

The basis assessment, in line with relevant literature, is that there is no "acceptable or reasonable" level of vulnerability and there is no "unique objectivity": the issue allows for value judgments and personal sensitivities to be explored. However, it is possible to capture key indicators (alerts), related to conditions of vulnerability (estimable vulnerability) in the face of objective markers and manifest variables, such as socio-demographic characteristics, statements of behavior, or values, answers to appropriately selected questions, on the basis of which people can then be directed towards prevention, mitigation, or treatment programs to curb loneliness. This is what the S.T.E.P.S. project has endeavored to accomplish.

As a result of this lack of "unique objectivity" regarding the vulnerability condition, the next step in creating LoLix was to have the public decision-makers choose the threshold of criticality for each of the 3 variables (economic, socio-relational, and psycho-physical) within the three ranges of values that emerged from the statistical survey conducted.

The following criticality benchmarks (thresholds) were approved in September 2023 by the Local Government of the Municipality of Verona (Resolution nr.850/2023): 0.75 probability for the economic variable; 0.85 probability for the psycho-physical variable; 0.80 probability for the socio-relational variable. People who achieve scores equal to or greater than these thresholds in the questionnaire have a higher probability of living in a vulnerable situation and experiencing loneliness. As previously mentioned, the decision was made based on the assessment of the average characteristics of those who can be considered economically, socially, psychologically, and physically vulnerable in Verona, a city that is widely acknowledged for its good standards of quality life and wellbeing.

The S.T.E.P.S. project has currently entered its final phase regarding Work Package 4 which includes the list of project activities that are specifically dedicated and planned for the LoLix index. The last phase entails administering the same questionnaire to a treatment sample and a control sample (each consisting of about 50 individuals with comparable characteristics: the characteristics of the members of the control group match those of the treatment group). The reference population, which is the population that was administered the 800+90 questionnaires in the first round, has been used to extract the two samples.

Individuals from the treatment group have participated in some of the project activities intended to reduce loneliness caused by economic, socio-relational, and psycho-physical factors. The index's purpose and potential are indeed to become a long-lasting tool for assessing loneliness and distressed situations, as well as gauge the level of quality of life, but it also seeks to assess the effectiveness of programs/services that are implemented to improve people's living conditions. In this regard, LoLix's potential to provide feedback on various services could be beneficial to both traditional and community welfare systems.

The final report will be produced using the counterfactual analysis method to evaluate the condition of people before and after attending activities proposed by the project for a minimum of 6 months, and comparing these results to those of the control group in the same initial conditions who did not participate in the activities.

Knowing the causes means facing the consequences. This is the long-term benefit of the LoLix.

Social and health workers from both public and private sectors can use LoLix to evaluate activities, initiatives, and services that are activated for citizens, to monitor their impact on prevention and treatment, and adapt them to demographic trends.

LoLix can also aid policy makers in making more targeted, effective, and sustainable decisions that are responsive to the actual needs of the territory and population.

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