

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS OVER HEALTH AND LONGEVITY. THE “BLUE ZONES” CASE.

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Abstract

The present paper aims to analyze – both from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective – the impact of social relationships over health and longevity in contemporary society.

Today human interaction is more and more facile thanks to the new technology development. However, despite this facility, many Western countries face the “loneliness epidemic”. Individual-centered cultures promote the atomizing of society to the detriment of strong and quality social relations. Insufficient social relationships and so much the more loneliness and social isolation - according to the psycho-social studies of Holt-Lunstad a.o. - negatively affect health state and significantly increase the risk of premature death. The impact of this risk is so serious that it surpasses the risks posed by most health indicators (food, exercise, etc.). In other words, the absence of social relationships and loneliness are enemies of health and longevity.

The present paper aims to comparatively analyze the types of social relationships which one can find in the so-called “blue zones” (where it has been noticed that people have the highest longevity on Earth) in comparison with the Western ones.

We intend to identify the differences between „ the territories of longevity “ and Western world concerning the lifestyle, the frequency and quality of social relationships. What type of social relationships encourages a positive attitude towards life, gives life meaning, reduced risk-taking, sustain health and longevity.?

In the conditions of recording - in Romania after 1989 - of a lack of frequency and quality of social relations with the consequences, the present paper wants to draw an alarm signal both for the governors and for the governed.

Keywords: *social relationships, quality, loneliness, lifestyle, longevity.*

1. Social relationships, health, longevity

1.1. Social relationships versus loneliness

Although the human being is a social being by definition, today the Western lifestyle tends to significantly reduce the quantity and quality of social relationships. Many persons no longer live with their families, so much the least in large families, and neither do they live close to the others. Many delay getting married or planning having a baby. A significant number of persons prefer to choose a bachelor's life. We have also noticed the existence of a deficit as to the relationships between generations, as well as an ever increasing geographical mobility, an increase in the number of families in which both parents develop a career and in the number of single-parent families. An ever increasing number of persons living in the Western World live alone and loneliness becomes a way of life for more and more human beings. These observations point out that, despite technological development and globalization – which one could expect to create more social connections – actually make people more and more isolated from a social point of view. According to a new survey made by AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) has revealed that an important number of adults, namely persons of over 40 years old, declared that they are affected by the lack of social

relationships. These persons also mentioned that they started to confront with mental issues (memory and concentration deficit, etc.).

Research developed by Holt-LUNSTAD J. have revealed that “the insufficiency of social relationships or the relative lack thereof pose a major risk for health, as well as smoking, blood pressure, lipids in the blood, overweight and lack of physical activity. Loneliness generates human sufferance, especially to elderly persons and may lead to the appearance of serious health problems, such as: depression, cognitive decline and even cardiovascular problems.”¹ (our translation)

On the other hand, social relationships may generate (informational, emotional or tangible) resources, which generate behavioral or neural-endocrine answers that help people adapt to acute or chronic states of stress (e.g. illness, life events, transitional periods in life). The support offered by social relationships reduces or alleviates negative stressful factors over health. In other words, Julianne Holt-Lunstad concludes, relationships between persons play a fundamental role in increasing survival chances.” as well as in enhancing health, life quality and longevity. (our translation)

Sarah Lock, Prime Vice President for policies within AARP and Executive Director for GCBH (The Global Council on Brain Health), considers that, according to the studies made by GCBH, socially active

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¹ Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith T.B., Layton J.B., *Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20668659>

persons pose a lower risk to mental decline, which demonstrates once again how important social links are for brain health².”

When you feel that you are loved, supported and encouraged thanks to a relationship that you have, your mind is exposed to less stressful reactions and issues more relaxing answers, and the physiology of the body reacts accordingly, as Lisa Rankin notices in her book *Mintea bate medicina: dovezi stiintifice ca te poti vindeca singur [The Mind Rules over Medicine: Scientific Proofs that You May Heal Yourself]*.

To support the same idea, we make reference to a study published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, which points out that persons who are more than 70 years old and have more friends and more social relationships live more in comparison with the others. “Ensuring that older relatives and friends are involved in society in some way seems to be a key factor in longevity,” said Lynne C. Giles, the lead author on the study and a doctoral student at Flinders University in Adelaide. “Perhaps facilitating contact, either by phone or in person, is a simple thing we can all do to help older people. This is a question for both individuals and policy makers to think about³.”

In this context, it is worth mentioning the study published by Harris and Yang after 20 years of research, according to whom social relationships may be as important for health as food and sport. In short, the conclusions of their research work are the following ones:

- the social circle that a person has is an importantly independent factor for health;
- to teenagers and adults the the number of relationships is more important;
- to the middle-aged the quality of social relationships matters more;
- social relationship protects against abdomen overweight;
- social isolation tends to increase the level of systemic inflammation;
- as to the more elderly persons, the small number of social relationships proved to be worse in comparison with high blood pressure or diabetes⁴.

1.2. The Quality of Relationships. Willingness and health state

The studies quoted above analyze the impact of social relationships from a quantitative point of view (sufficient/insufficient or absence) on health state and longevity.

Other studies not only refer to the impact of the insufficiency/sufficiency of social relationships, but also on the effect of the quality thereof upon an individual's life or upon society. According to these

studies, a certain category of social relationships tend to produce positive effects at social or individual level. To be more precise, it is about non-violent social relationships, which are based upon willingness and generosity - “quality relationships”. These relationships lead to “the development of a high relationship quotient between most individuals, and to the development of lively, healthy and intelligent relationships.”⁵ (our translation)

A good quality relationship or the high relationship quotient (RQ) imply the inner presence of cordiality, willingness, which make it possible to have respect for the other, no matter who he/she is.

Relationship quotient (RQ), according to Maryse Legrand, a French clinical psychologist, may be evaluated in two ways: in the relationship one has with himself/herself and in the relationship one has with the others. RQ is linked to the more or less developed capacity of a person to propose for himself/herself, relationships which actively contribute to the enhance and development of them both. According to J. Salome, we could say of an individual who creates and develops energetic, creative and stimulative relationships, that he/she has a high RQ. On the other hand, the RQ of a person is low when he/she generates or stimulates naive, energy-consuming and alienating relationships for himself/herself and the others.

RQ is the art of creating mutually advantageous relationships. A quality relationship is characterized by the need of an individual to be accepted, to express oneself as a unique human being, to be recognized as such and to be appreciated. This type of relationship ensures the human being's development, openness and fulfillment. “In such a relationship, our physical, affectionate needs and the needs to relate to the others may be recognized and heard (but they cannot be fulfilled by all means). The need to relate to the others refers to the need to express oneself, to be heard, to be respected (to have the others' attention), to be appreciated (to feel oneself useful and valued), to feel that one is an intimate of someone else (to share secrets with another person), to feel that one belongs to someone (to feel accepted by a group), to influence others (to contribute to the accomplishment/creation of something new). The quality relationship develops within positive meetings which tends to consolidate personal security, the feeling that one lives a life full of dignity. RQ favors one's aspiration to be himself/herself when meeting the other one and when trying to offer the others the best that one has⁶.”

Besides quality relationships, which are willingful and we previously referred to, Aurore Aimelet identifies other ones, which are at least as important as the mentioned ones. Synthetizing the

² <https://www.aarp.org/health/brain-health/global-council-on-brain-health/resource-library>

³ http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/28/health/longevity-bonds-of-friendship-not-family-may-add-years.html?_r=1

⁴ Yang YC¹, Boen C², Gerken K², Li T³, Schorpp K², Harris KM⁴ Social relationships and physiological determinants of longevity across the human life expectancy. , *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2016 Jan 19; 113(3):578-83. , <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26729882>

⁵ Jacques Salomé, Minuscules aperçus sur la difficulté d'enseigner , Editions Albin Michel. 2004, pp:56-61;

⁶ Jacques Salome, Relation d'aide et formation a l'entretien, Septentrion ,2003, p. 27;

psycho-sociological works of certain famous researchers (Robert Ornstein, David Sobel, M. J. Ryan, Ștefan Einhorn, Robert Emmons, Allan Luks, Serge Cicotti etc.), Aurore Aimelet comes to the conclusion that practicing willingness as a lifestyle leads the individual to the following benefits:

“Willingness reinforces the feeling of personal fulfillment and accomplishment (...); it is a source of joy: it increases serotonin production, the hormone of happiness, which creates a sensation of warmth, energy and calm(...); it improves memory, learning capacity, creativity and problem-solving ability (...); in enhances the immunitary system: it stimulates the dilatation of blood vessels, which is vital for the cardiovascular system, it increases lymphocytes production, a fact which enhances resistance to disease; it comforts pain: it activates the part of the brain that produces endorphins, generating analgesic and antistress effects, a higher tolerance to pain (...); (...) it increases motivation to take part in different activities, including in volunteering acts⁷.”

Apart from all these benefits, practicing willingness - Pierro Ferucci appreciates – removes the feeling of frustration, it is therapeutic and it has antidepressive effects. Pierro Ferucci notices, on the other hand, that “acting with willingness is not simple because it requires the integration of certain essential virtues: trust, empathy, loyalty, patience, modesty, respect, gratitude. Empathy helps us understand what is in the mind of a furious person and to give up acting aggressively. Modesty helps us listen to our interlocutors, to enjoy their presence, diminishing the tendency to speak about our own successes. Patience helps us give value to a relationship and to the interlocutor. Generosity helps us choose staying with a person rather than possessing something. Respect develops politeness. Without respect, politeness is superficial. Loyalty, a proof of someone's fidelity and justice, which gives the feeling of security, ensures the stable attitude of those staying about us. Gratitude makes us content with what we have and not to take things for granted. It comforts pain and frustration, while creating a feeling of fulfillment⁸”.

In conclusion, in order to be able to act with willingness, we have to make use of all its “ingredients”, namely: empathy, loyalty, patience, modesty, respect, gratitude. If not, willingness and quality relationships remain simple isolated manifestations or a theoretical concept.

We underline that the benefits brought by willingness are felt by society and its individuals altogether. We could say, without exaggerating, that in society the manifestation of willingness vs. violence is the key of survival. However, those who benefit most of willingness are those who practise it, which is difficult to understand by persons who do not appreciate it or who underestimate it.

Finally I would like to underline the idea that all the research that I referred to converge to the same conclusion: persons who have strong social relationships tend to be healthier than those who are isolated; persons who have adequate (good quality) social relationships are supposed to have 50% more chances of survival in comparison with those who have insufficient or relationships of a poor quality.

Social isolation leads to more stressful reactions, which increase systemic inflammation and the level of stress hormones and which reduce the mental function, generating a decrease of the health state, illnesses and a shorter lifespan. Relationships offer to our lives a meaning and a goal.

When one is aware of his/her meaning and goal in life, one tends to be more careful with himself/herself and to assume less risks.

2. Lifestyle in “blue zones” versus lifestyle in the Western World

Starting with 1990, Dan Buettner - a member of National Geographic – who was collaborating with Gallup – identified and researched the areas where persons with the highest longevity could be found: Sardinia (Italy), Nicoya Peninsula (Costa Rica), Loma Linda (California), Okinawa (Japan) and Ikaria (Grecia). He noticed that in these “blue zones”, the natural and social environment and the inhabitants' lifestyle had quasi- similar characteristics. In his work entitled “The Blue Zones: 9 lessons to live longer”, he identified the main factors that seem to increase the lifespan and life quality of those living in the “blue zones”. In short, these factors are: being active, having a sense in your life, reducing stress, eating less, eating less meat, drinking with moderation, having a faith, giving your family a priority position in your life, staying close to your parents, grandparents and building a social network that supports healthy behaviors.

2.1. The rationale of living and leading an active life like in a flow.

Hector Garcia's and Francesc Miralles' studies confirm and complete the conclusions of Dan Buettner's research. The former ones confine their research to the Japanese island Okinawa. They notice that on that island the inhabitants have a philosophy of life and a particular, well-defined lifestyle, which is different or rather totally opposed to the Western one. Here, the human being does not fervently search the meaning of life, which has always existed and it is self-understood. The meaning of life seems to preexist in comparison with an individual's life. For example, to Okinawa inhabitants, the rationale / the joy to be living, the passion with which you do your duty/profession are “reasons for which you wake up in the morning”, “the happiness to be busy all the time”; all of these are, in

⁷ Aurore Aimelet, „Șase motive să faci bine”, în *Psychologie Magazine*, nr.33/noiembrie, 2010, pp. 82-83;

⁸ Isabelle Taubes, Gannac, Anne Lure, „Revanșa celor binevoitori”, în *Psychologie Magazine*, nr.33/noiembrie, 2010, p. 77;

brief, their life philosophy or what they call “*ikigai*”. They identify their meaning in life, their *ikigai*, in work relationships, friendships, mutual support actions performed within the community (“*moai*”).

The Japanese – according to the above quoted authors – consider that once you have discovered your *ikigai*, you have to pursue and develop it ceaselessly so that your life could gain significance. The wisdom of Ogimi-Okinawa reveals that there are some fundamental laws which support the discovery and practice of the *ikigai*: being always active, never getting retired, being always in motion, being always surrounded by good friends, regarding all calmly, getting connected to nature, never eating one's fill, smiling, being grateful, seizing the day and following your passion⁹.

The discovery and practice of the *ikigai* are closely linked to the experimentation of the “flow state”, namely the “state in which persons are so much involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter to them; the experience in itself is so pleasant that persons would like to repeat it by all means only for the pleasure of doing it.”¹⁰ It seems that the experience of the “flow state” may be found not only with the elderly persons from Ogimi, but also with most Japanese people. “Their capacity of being absorbed in the activity that they perform, forgetting about time passage, as well as their perseverance in solving a problem are indisputable. It is a characteristic we identify in any environment, from the retired persons who spare no detail in taking care of the rice paddy in Nagano Mountains to the students who work at the weekend in a *conbini* (a non-stop shop)”¹¹.

In conclusion, to the Japanese what really matters are not accomplishments, success, personal welfare (individualism), as it happens with the Western World mentality, but rather the opposite thereof (collectivism).

Multitasking, which blocks the flow state – and which is so much stimulated by the Western World – is underestimated by “100 year old people.” The elder Japanese understood that one is healthier and happier when one does one activity in comparison with those persons who try doing several activities at the same time.

2.2. Respecting biorhythm. Harmonizing social rhythms with natural (biological) ones

According to Diane Kochilas, a characteristic of those living on the Greek island Ikaria is lack of haste, lack of hasting against time. There are no cruel deadlines, no ceaseless reasons to race, the fear of being late/not being on time, which are specific to the Western World. The people of Ikaria do not keep their

eyes on the watch. They live slowly, walk without being in a hurry, take their time to notice what is going on around them, as if they could decide what to do with their own time”. In Ikaria nobody hurries to reach a certain place; according to local mentality, “being late or changing mind as to going to a place where one intended to go though one promised to do so, is deeply rooted in the local inhabitants lifestyle, according to Diane Kochilas – see her book „*Lecții despre mâncare, viață și longevitate de pe insula grecească unde oamenii uită să moară*” [*Lessons about food, life and longevity on the Greek Island where people forget to die*].

Similarly, the Okinawa population's mentality totally opposes emergency culture, which generates so many negative emotions. One of the ten laws of “*ikigai*”, selected from the elderly's Okinawa (Ogimi) wisdom impels us approach things calmly. Haste has nothing to do with life quality. The one who walks slowly will go far. “When we ignore emergency situations, our time and life gain a new significance¹².”

Another law of the *ikigai*, which completes the above enumerated ideas, refers to giving full value to the present or “trying to seize the day”. All that we surely have is the present day and, consequently, we must live it as well as possible so that it will be worth remembering it. The Japanese concept “*Ichi-go ichi-e*”, namely “this moment exists only now and it will never exist once more” explains why it is important to respect this principle. “This principle is used especially at reunions to remind us that each meeting, no matter if meet friends or the family or unknown persons, is unique and non-recurring. That is why we must concentrate on the present and enjoy the unique moment without feeling overwhelmed by worries regarding the past or the future. The concept of *Ichi-go ichi-e* is very much used in the tea ceremony, Zen meditation and Japanese martial arts¹³.”

The Italians, especially those coming from Sardinia – which is another “blue zone” - do not hurry, and live with the feeling that they have time for everything. They consider that life is lived in the present. We must not waste the present trying to find something in the future. This attitude reduces the stress level considerably. Once a person adopts this mentality, his/her priorities change. The Italians this slowness with an increase in life quality, which is their main priority. They focus on personal accomplishment, trying to have time for the things that make them happy, working for living and not vice versa¹⁴.”

We appreciate that the expression *dolce far niente* refers to this life philosophy and that this expression has nothing to do with laziness, but with living the moment, contemplating it and letting things happen and

⁹ Hector Garcia, Francesc Miralles, *Ikigai. Secrete japoneze pentru o viata lunga si fericita*, Humanitas, Bucuresti, 2017, pp:168,169

¹⁰ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flux: Psihologia fericirii*, Publica, Bucuresti, 2015, p13;

¹¹ Hector Garcia, Francesc Miralles, *Ibid.*, p 83;

¹² *Ibid.*, pp:168,169;

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp:158,159;

¹⁴ <http://brightside.me/inspiration-health, http://www.gandul.info/magazin/zece-lucruri-despre-viata-pe-care-le-putem-invata-de-la-italieni-14980394>

flow without pressure and without planning. It is a way of giving value to our spare time, it is a way of beautifully feeling idle after one finished an intense activity.

2.3. Social organization and the sense of belonging to a community.

Dan Buettner noticed that in at least three out of the five Blue Zones lifestyle and social organization are obviously different from lifestyle and social organization of the Western World. In the Blue Zones people are part of a real social network and appreciate family, friends and support each other; most often they are actively part of a religious community.

Thus, one of the secrets of the Ogimi population is the strong feeling of *belonging to the community*. Establishing strong links within the local communities is a tradition in Ogimi (Okinawa). Studies made by Dan Buettner, H. Garcia, Fr. Miralles and others reveal that social organization is accomplished in Ogimi on the basis of cooperation, solidarity and enhancement of life quality. Ogimi is organized in 17 dwelling associations, each of them having a president and several persons who are responsible with different domains: social activities, longevity, culture, festivals, etc. It is interesting to notice that the Town Hall has a *Department for Enhancing the Inhabitants' life quality*. The Town Hall has portfolios with lists of all the inhabitants living in the village, who are organized, according to their age, in clubs. In other words, everyone is part of a club (*moai*), that is a group of friends who support each other. "Groups do not have a precise goal, they are simply like a family.(...) Everyone offers to collaborate, the Town Hall only deals with task organization. In this way, everyone feels that he/she belongs to a community and may be useful to the village. In fact, to so-called *yui-maru* or mutual cooperation spirit is deeply rooted in the hearts of the Ogimi inhabitants. They practice *yui-maru* since childhood and learn team work and how to help each other."¹⁵

They help each other with rice seeding and cane cropping, as well as with other agricultural activities. They help each other build houses, do voluntary work for different public activities. In other words, they make up a *moai*, that is an "informal group of persons, who have common interest and who help each other. For many, this mutual help becomes one of their *ikigai*. Members of a *moai* must monthly pay a tax that affords them take part in reunions, dinners, go, shogi (Japanese chess) games or simply share a common passion.

Moai builds life-long connections and contributes to maintaining the emotional and financial stability of each member. "If one of the group members has financial difficulties, he may be granted the spared sum in advance.(...) The feeling of belonging to a

community and mutual help create a feeling of security to the person and contribute to enhancing life expectancy¹⁶."

According to one of the 10 laws of the *ikigai* man absolutely needs the company of good friends. Japanese consider that friends are "the best elixir" for being care free or for asking for advice or for telling and listening to stories that make one person's life easier and more pleasant, or for amusing or sharing something and for living. Actually, interviews made by Hector Garcia and Francesc Miralles in Ogimi reveal that all the 100 interviewed persons (persons in their 90s and 100s) valued friendship and considered that it considerably increases life quality and longevity. The majority of the elderly interviewed ones declared that their most important hobby is meeting friends, for talking, drinking tea. Thus, going to karaoke and getball games with your family, friends and neighbours is the most beneficial activity. The persons interviewed by H. Garcia and Fr. Miralles, who were in their 100s, appreciated that one of the secrets for living long is to talk to the people you love, dance with them and sing with them daily. Such a vision reflects the joy of living and an intense social involvement, which are key elements for good health and longevity.

A society based on cooperation and affection to the community, the elderly ones and the forerunners enjoys a lot of respect. We could speak about a real worship of the forerunners, a fact which makes the Japanese culture so different from the Western one. The modern, Western society is individualistic and inhibits the community spirit, it does not value the elderly ones' expertise; in reality, the Western society places the elderly ones in a marginal position. In social and family hierarchies the elderly seem to occupy a modest position; thus, the proverb *he who does not have elderly one should buy some* has lost its meaning. This situation is not favorable either to the elderly ones or to society.

"On the other hand, the Japanese lives with the conviction that the voice of his consciousness is the voice of his parents, forerunners and masters, to whom he feels grateful, considering that if he does something wrong he is a disappointment to them. He preserves the same feelings to the forerunners and masters even when they pass away¹⁷."

The word "jibun", which corresponds for the self, accurately describes the person as a part of the common life environment. To the Japanese, according to Hamaguchi, the sense of identifying oneself with the others preexists and the Ego is only confirmed through interpersonal relationships. The Ego is not constant but a fluid which changes depending on time and context and in conformity with social interpersonal relationships. Social relationships are appreciated as such and not regarded as a means of meeting personal objectives. People are constantly aware of the others

¹⁵ Hector Garcia, Francesc Miralles, *Ibd.*, pp:98-109;

¹⁶ *Ibd.*,p21;

¹⁷ Markus, H.,R., Kitayama,S.,Culture and the self; Implications for cognition, emotion and motivation, in *Psychological Review*, 98, nr.2/1991;

and try to act for the others' goals and wishes in an attempt to reach their personal goals."

In Okinawa families, in the house of the primogenitor, there is a butsudān, a little altar at which forerunners are worshiped and prayers are said for them. Respect for the forerunners – according to Garcia & Miralles – is an attitude that is common to all Japanese.

Similarly, in Sardinia the elderly enjoy a lot of respect on the part of society. Here, according to Dan Buettner, "the older you are, the more equitably you will be treated and the more will be appreciated your wisdom. If you go to Sardinian pubs, you will find the Monthly Centenary instead of the Sports Illustrated calendars that are full of swimming costumes"¹⁸.

As to Japan, one has to mention that inter-human relationship patterns are different from context to context, for example in corporations. Differently from most Western countries, here, "the employees within corporations may have a life-time commitment. Here it is the working group and not the individual who has the responsibility and who makes the assessments and decision-making is rather collective than oligarchical. (...)

Furthermore, the state-corporations relationship is a special one. The so-called "one-day bankruptcy" cases are well-known because it is the state which takes over resources and redistributes them for a more efficient usage thereof. In these conditions, unemployment is under control (...). This organization type grants workers security, comforting confidence, stability and social cohesion"¹⁹.

3. Conclusion

Analyzing lifestyle and social relationships in the so-called longevity realms, the present study is a meditation as regards the effects which the Western lifestyle has over health, longevity and the people's quality of life. Psycho-sociological research and the case studies quoted here bring into evidence that in the present Western World there is a deficit and an acute need of building strong and quality social relationships for all age categories, especially for those aged over 65. Health and life expectancy seriously depend on the intensity and quality of social relationships. On the other hand, the quoted research works underline the fact that the Western World seems to face the loneliness

phenomenon more and more despite the advanced communication technologies that exist. The consequences of this phenomenon acquire ever more varied and complex forms affecting the wellness state of the individual and society.

The present paper did not deny the role played by the other factors on our health and life expectancy: food, exercise, etc.; however, the main goal of this paper is to analyze the positive effects of social relationships upon people's life. We have decided to write this study because we have seen that people do not pay attention to this factor. It seems that at least here, in Romania, many people do not understand the role played by social relationships in their lives (both from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective); they seem not to understand how much they are affected by loneliness and the insufficient or feeble social relationships that they have. They are neither aware and nor do anything to change this state of facts. They are rather concerned with survival problems or their career and personal success. When interviewed, they recognize that they are discontent with the social relationships that they have and that "loneliness is like an enemy to human being. (...) More than a half of the Romanians (54%) declare that they have experienced loneliness (...). They also recognize (36%) that most of their social relationships are superficial and appreciate (46%) that nobody really knows them. However, more than 80% of the Romanians declare that they have close friends and 43% declare that they often or very often take part in socializing activities"²⁰.

In reality, the feeling of loneliness and the loneliness phenomenon seem to be more acute than statistical data indicate. "When one in five persons and 77% of the interviewed persons consider that most of the people try to trade on the others and that you cannot trust them, it is clear that loneliness is a national phenomenon"²¹.

The continuous worsening situation of formal and informal social relationships which seems to have started after 1989 and generated anomie in the Romanian society made us write the present paper as a warning signal for those who run our society and for all its members, as well. It is unquestionable that our society needs a correct and urgent policy that helps "rebuild" social relationships, reinvent communities, impose respect as a normal attitude for each of us, including the elderly ones, for traditions and history.

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¹⁹ Norman Goodman, *Introducere în sociologie*, Ed. Lider, București, 2004, pp:62-63;

²⁰ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Politically Incorrect*, editura Școala Ardeleană, Cluj-Napoca, 2017, pp:356-358;

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