

The plethora of actual evidence states that nowadays, people worldwide face huge and increasing social isolation and loneliness with plenty of serious, detrimental health implications. Basically, social interactions are essential for normative brain development, neurotransmission, and cognitive functions. Social stressors, such as isolation or loneliness, are considered the category of stimuli that trigger the strongest, integrated, multisystemic response to stress. It is estimated that the health damage caused by social isolation is comparable to (or even greater than) the damage associated with smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, obesity, physical inactivity, and air pollution. Currently, scientists postulate the necessity to research determinants and synergistic effects of social isolation and loneliness on health, setting them in a broader perspective, considering both psychosocial and physiological aspects. Thus, the presented project has three primary purposes. At first, the project examines the internal relationship of social isolation and loneliness, setting in a broader psychosocial context, including the subjective perception of social support, self-concept clarity, the perceived pleasure of social touch, and tactile deprivation. The second goal is to investigate the relationships between the above psychosocial and touch variables, stress, and depression. The third aim is to verify whether the psychosocial and touch variables are significantly associated with physical health at the level of endogenous pain modulation dysfunction (in the Conditional Pain Modulation paradigm) and concentration of biological markers in saliva.

A group of 250 people will be invited to the project. Each person will complete psychological questionnaires. Next, the perceived pleasure of touch and endogenous pain modulation will be measured. Additionally, saliva samples will be collected from each person, in which markers of oxidative stress and pain will be tested.