

Comparative Analysis of Gender and Age Differences in the Visions of Solitude

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: Consideration of certain aspects of solitude, external and internal causes of its origin, the role of situational factor in the individual context of experience, etc. represents a necessary and methodologically justified stage of research. **Methods:** We used the methods of theoretical analysis of the psychological phenomenon of solitude study trends thereby building a unique prospect of its integral perception. Theoretical provisions were confirmed by the experimental results obtained during the analysis of the problems of solitude in the general humanitarian aspect in certain groups of population with account of gender, age and social differences. **Findings:** In total, among all studied age groups of persons with high degree of social isolation, a considerable prevalence of family problems was distinguished in the structure of the leading reasons of solitude for women, whereas job and personal are typical of men, which completely corresponds to the theoretic provisions of the research and results of other works. The main difference in the vision of the solitude causes in the population under study and results obtained in the group of socially isolated persons was the excessive frequency of diseases and personal problems, and relative decrease of job and family problems. The provided data indicate, first and foremost, the existence of a considerable dynamics in a subjective feeling of solitude in the process of human life. **Applications:** Distinguishing the causes of solitude and their comparative analysis taking into consideration gender, age and social differences are aimed at improving lifestyle attitudes at the individual level and in society as a whole.

Keywords: Age Differences, Gender, Psychology, Solitude

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of solitude is distinguished with complexity and ambiguity. Analysis of classic theories, concepts and approaches allows us to say that the topic of solitude is the subject matter of discussion in a large number of works by philosophers, sociologists and social psychologists. N.A. Berdyayev,¹ E. Fromm,² E. Husserl,³ M. Heidegger,⁴ E. Durkheim,⁵ and others developed the models of solitude explanation, reflections about sources, causes and solitude as an integral formation. However their contemplations have no exact empirical corroboration. Solitude both a psychic state, and an internal specific experience of a person was studied in works by R. Weiss,⁶ V. Frankl,⁷ S. Freud,⁸ etc. Note, that among many others

there are works where the approaches to solitude are developed on the basis of empirical data. They include scientific works by R. Weiss,⁶ J. Jong-Girveld,⁹ L.A. Peplau,¹⁰ D. Perlman,¹⁰ T. Merton,¹¹ E. Fromm² looked at solitude through a prism of social processes and problems, such as anomy, social mobility, suicide, social nature. The cause of this phenomenon was researched in works by A. Maslow,¹² A. Toffler,¹³ D. Riesman.¹⁴ For the first time the idea of social solitude was brought up by American researcher R. Weiss⁶ and empirically confirmed in research done by C. Rubenstein and P. Shaver.¹⁵

Growth of negative attitude to solitude is characteristic for the XX century. This position is reflected in works by social philosopher and psychologist E. Fromm.²

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Other Neo-Freudianism representatives, for example E. Fromm-Reichman¹⁶ also studied pathological solitude.

The next group of sources includes works reflecting the transformation of the social-philosophical and cultural thought. They include scientific views set out in research by foreign thinkers (J. Ortega y Gasset,¹⁷ W. Windelband,¹⁸ G. Lipovetsky,¹⁹ N. Elias,²⁰), Russian philosophers (I.A. Ilyin,²¹ V.V. Rozanov,²² A.F. Losev,²³ etc.), modern Russian social philosophers (A.A. Guseinov,²⁴ V.V. Bibikhin,²⁵ K. Kh. Momdzhyan,²⁶ etc.). Besides, a huge contribution in understanding of the essence of the solitude as a socio-cultural phenomenon was made by the works in history of philosophy and culture (A. Ya. Guryevich,²⁷ A.A. Belik,²⁸ etc.).

Bowman,²⁹ Riesman¹⁴ and Slater³⁰ are representatives of the sociological approach to solitude. In his small article Bowman put forward a hypothesis about the three forces leading to strengthening of solitude in the modern society: 1) weakening of connections in the primary group; 2) increase of family mobility; 3) increase of social mobility.

Social philosophers, in similarity to sociologists, consider the phenomenon of solitude through a prism of social processes and mechanisms: through political changes in the society such as forlornness (G.D. Levin³¹); through anomie as a consequence of the change in the social structure (V.I. Kurashov³²); through social function of a non-typical personality, "a white crow" (L.G. Berezovaya³³).

A serious contribution in the research of the problem of solitude is made with works of western researchers. In particular, the series of scientific and practical works by Canadian researcher Amy Rokach³⁴ (Toronto). The study of the totality of solitude manifestations in various life situations, and also a series of cross-cultural research of solitude together with scientists from other countries define the scientific value of these works. A. Rokach³⁵ researched solitude as a social and emotional alienation, studied the peculiarities of mother's feeling of loneliness during the period of pregnancy and birth of a child. In collaboration with A. Rokach, N. Bauer³⁶ performed a comparative analysis of influence of age and cultural differences on solitude experienced by the Czechs and Canadians. A. Rokach and T. Orzech³⁷ studied solitude of elder people and peculiarities of its overcoming in the North American and Portugal cultures.

Until recently the philosophy of existentialism was looked upon from the point of view of the Marxism ideologists as an unclear or even hostile bourgeois

philosophy. We can agree that existentialism holds a system of illusions and false decisions, but this is also true in regard to other philosophical concepts. Various forms of pessimism and desperation, escape from public life, consideration of personality psychology in separation from the society, search for conditions of self-content of a separate personality, search for understanding of only oneself in the world, which is considered as split, hostile and obscure are the motives combining modern existentialism with philosophical streams that used to emerge during other turning periods. At the same time, the sense of emptiness, tragedy, senselessness of existence, solitude of a person and pettiness of his/her aspirations presents a considerable point for characterizing the social function of existentialism.

Let us turn to our society, which experienced tremendous hardships of the transitional period. Breakdown of the big country ran with heavy artillery on destinies of millions of people of the whole post-Soviet space. The former union fellow republics with some stunning swiftness acquired independence and became self-sustained states. Kazakhstan also acquired its independence and became a free democratic state. But there are plenty of unsolved problems of social nature left inside including the phenomenon of solitude conditioning unsettled state of a person and the crisis of his/her relations with the surrounding world. The relevance of the stated problem of the research is determined by the need in further scientific study of the outlined problems.

2. Concept Headings

The goal of the article is theoretical study and experimental confirmation of its objectively existing social and psychological determinants, on the basis of which certain categories of population (social groups) are proposed to be distinguished with following comparison analysis of solitude in these groups.

The authors have analyzed the problems of solitude in the general humanitarian aspect in certain groups of population with account of gender, age and social differences.

In the framework of the carried out research of the solitude phenomenon, a quite important role was allocated to the study of display of its gender traits. As a result, the considerable differences in perception and explanation of emergence of solitude, and also forms of experiencing it by men and women were revealed.

It is necessary to note that all that concerns the differences in psychological qualities in people of different genders (we refer to the phenomenon in question as a psychological effect) began to be distinguished as a subject of research quite recently, especially in the Russian psychology oriented towards understanding the personality as a totality of social relations. This to a certain extent is connected with the fact that the general human culture, including psychoanalysis, was created mostly by men, moreover the word “man” in many languages often coincides with word “person” and differs from the word “woman”.

In the literature much more attention is paid to the problem of female solitude as compared to the male solitude. In our opinion, this is explained by the influence of stereotypical visions of social roles of men and women historically established in most cultures. In accordance with these visions, a clear differentiation of men and women’s roles, which were distributed exclusively from positions of a priory gender inequality, has formed in society. This phenomenon is called gender stratification. In the opinion of N.M. Lebedeva,³⁸ the gender stratification is observed in all cultures, but the degree of its intensity can be different, and it is less in simple hunting and forager societies (where there is interchangeability of men and women) and stronger in complex stratified societies, where there is social-economic and sexual inequality of genders. So, the argument of “natural” mission of the woman proved by the century-long practice accompanying the sex discrimination is hardly justified. Why then the “natural” segregation of genders manifests itself to a lesser degree in primeval societies more closely connected with nature?

We can point out several factors, which exerted influence on such situation: gender division of labor, education, property, possession of power, attitude of the church and power in general and sexual behavior”.³⁹ These factors, particularly, also shaped the attitude of the society to the problem of men and women’s solitude.

S.G. Korchagina⁴⁰ writes in this concern: “...the majority of people understand solitude as person’s existence outside the family. In everyday life, saying “lonely” of an adult person means that he/she at the moment has no couple, the other half. In regard of old people, solitude is taken as absence of children, grandchildren or living far from them. When we hear this about children or adolescents, the first thing one imagines is absence of family, its clear ill-being, or some pathologies. Of course, at the first sight, solitude is associated with absence of family. Each of

us gets convinced of this in practice in the everyday life. It should be noted that it is female solitude that is associated with absence of family to a greater degree, considering the family role, as was said above, to be the “natural” mission of the woman.

3. Results and Discussion

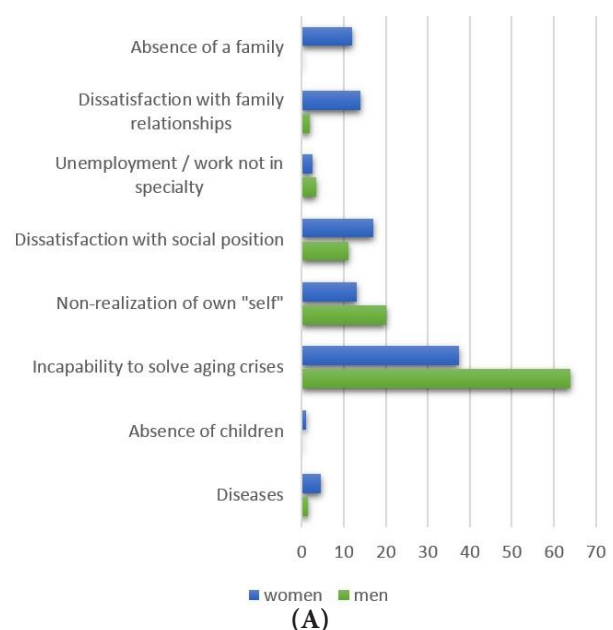
The population group was comprised of 668 persons of different gender and age groups, selected strictly at random from the database of residents of the city of Semey, Kazakhstan. The indicators for inclusion in the research population were limited by the age (17 to 80 years old).

In terms of distribution depending on gender, the research included 303 men and 365 women of the basic group.

The comparison of the frequency of the basic causes of social isolation in different gender-age groups between data received during the analysis of the population visions and causes specified by lonely persons themselves was of particular interest.

The comparative analysis of the ideas about the causes of solitude found in the general population group and the group of persons with a high level of social isolation differentiated by age categories showed the following results.

Apparent discrepancies were revealed in numerous parameters, especially in the younger group (Fig. 1).



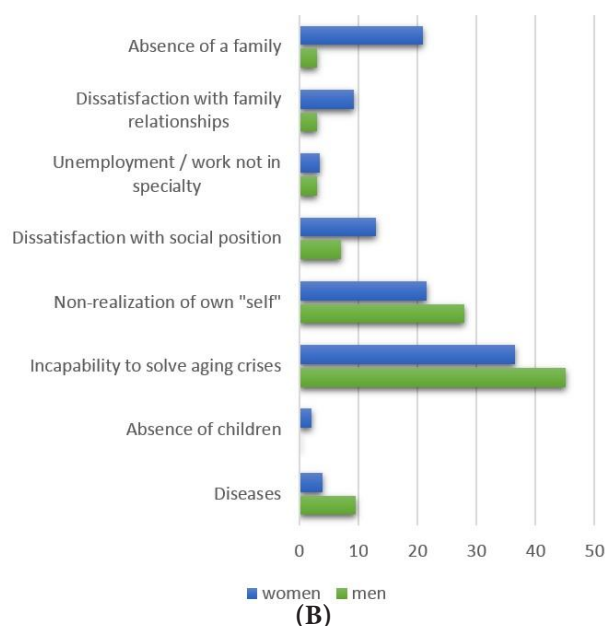


Figure 1. Comparative characteristics of the visions about the basic causes of solitude of adolescent and youth age persons in population (A) and in the group with a high degree of social isolation (B).

Notably, the actual spread of such cause as diseases of males in the adolescent and youth categories was more than 7 times higher than within the population visions, on the contrary, this indicator appeared to be somewhat (insignificantly) lower among women. Much more often, according to the data of polling the lonely females of the junior age category, the absence of children was mentioned as the basic reason.

In a quite large number of cases, even the examined participants of adolescent and youth age consider diseases and pathological states to be the cause of solitude. Among the males, the percentage of those was 9.7%, females – much lower (3.8%). Noteworthy is the fact that the share of this cause in the older age group (young and middle age) decreases among men and increases among women.

Absence of children does not seem to be the cause of solitude according to our findings for the men of the younger age group and in the minimum number of cases it is identified as such among young women. The basic cause of social isolation in this age category, according to our data, is the incapability to solve age-related crises. The relative indicator among the males was 45.2%, females – 35.8%. Increased frequency of such cause of solitude as non-realization of “self” was also reported for males (29.0% against 11.3%).

An interesting point, as we think, was the increase of discontent with social position as the leading cause of solitude of females in the younger age group (13.2% versus 6.5% for the males).

The problem of absence of work or work not in specialty did not have a considerable importance and difference in the gender regard as the cause for solitude.

Family problems, starting already from this age category, were predominant among females. Thus, absence of a family was considered to be the leading cause in 20.8%, and dissatisfaction with relations in the own family – 9.4% with single girls of adolescent and young age, whereas just single cases of such causes were reported for young men.

The incapability to solve age crises was indicated as the solitude reason somewhat more rare for lonely adolescents and youth of this age category, that it would follow from the visions defined in the population (29.4%, $p < 0.05$). Among the young women, this indicator had no differences in the population in the separate group of persons with the high degree of social isolation.

The frequency of personal non-realization appeared to be really higher among the male subjects in relation to the population visions (by 45.2%, $p < 0.05$); there were no socially meaningful differences with women.

The frequency of dissatisfaction with one's own social position was much lower in the structure of the real vs. the assumed causes of solitude in both gender groups. Notwithstanding the minimal number of persons who stated the work not in specialty to be the leading cause of solitude, this indicator was more than twice higher for the women than the population indicator. The frequency of dissatisfaction with the family relations among the men of the younger group (141.9% more than in the population group of the assumed causes) appeared to be more considerable than that assumed by the respondents of all age groups. The factor of family absence was actually more frequent than expected for the young women by 78.8% ($p < 0.05$).

As shown in Figure 2, in the category of young and middle age, the growth of disease indicator as the leading cause of social isolation was not registered, but the structure of the one shifted towards the women (7.9% versus 3.8% among adolescents and youth).

The frequency of absence of children as the leading cause of the solitude sharply grew in both gender groups. If in the previous group it related only females, then in the one under consideration it was reported both for men

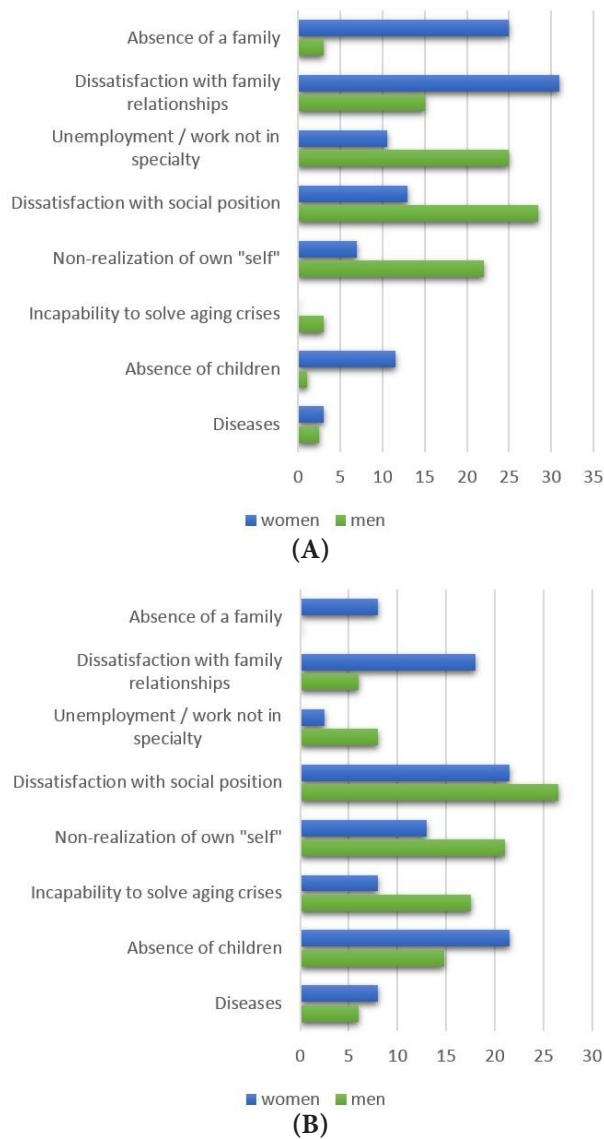


Figure 2. Comparative characteristics of visions about the basic causes of solitude of persons of young and middle age in population (A) and in the group with a high degree of social isolation (B).

and women (14.7% and 21.1% accordingly). This result is absolutely not surprising because in this quite broad age category the said social problem not only occurs, but also acquires a considerable acuteness.

An important cause of solitude, primarily in the younger subgroup of this age category, and also in the middle age, was inability to solve age-related crises (17.6% of the men and 7.9% of the women). At the same time, it is hard to differentiate this problem among middle age people with others immediately connected with it (family

and job aspects of social isolation). An important point that remained was personal non-realization, while in the group of the men where it was revealed more often, reduction was reported in relation to the group of adolescents and youth (20.6%).

Also, increased frequency of dissatisfaction with social position was reported for the men (in contrast in the junior age group), which appeared to be the dominating cause of social isolation among the subjects. Unemployment and work not in specialty (8.8%) was pointed out only for the men as the leading cause. Just like in the previous age group, family problems dominated for women. However absence of family in the structure of the basic causes of solitude decreased almost three times, which is emphasized by absence of this indicator among men. Dissatisfaction with the family relations among the women, according to our data, occurred three times more frequently than among the men (18.4% and 5.9% accordingly).

In both gender groups, diseases were much more distributed among single tested persons of young and middle age as the leading cause of solitude than assumed in the population. The excess degree for the men was 176.5%, the women – 155.3% ($p < 0.01$ in the both cases). It is essential that this indicator seriously changed in relation to the group of the tested young men and women. More in-depth analysis of this cause demonstrated that genital and extra-genital pathology dominated among the women putting in doubt or excluding the possibility of childbearing. During the same term, the frequency of not having children in the structure of the basic causes of social isolation increases, it occurs among the men for the first time, because the single case in the young age group cannot be taken into account in comparison with this age category. Exceeding of this cause among lonely people over the population research is 85.6% ($p < 0.05$) for the women and almost 14 times for the men.

Impossibility of solving age crises was not reported for the women of this age category during the analysis of opinions of the population group respondents, very low value was assigned to it with the men too. During this period, both for women, and for men, this indicator was reported as the leading one in the group of lonely persons, besides the excess of its frequency was 5.5-fold among the males.

There were no considerable differences in the frequency of indicators of personal non-realization and dissatisfaction with social position among the men, whereas for

the women the real frequency of these causes according to the analysis results with the lonely people exceeded the population “impression” by 82.3% and 70.2%. The indicators of the number of cases of unemployment or work not by specialty with single persons appeared to be much lower in comparison with the expected in the population (63.8%, 74.5%, $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$ accordingly). Also, more rarely than in the opinion of the population group respondents, dissatisfaction with the family relationships and (for women) having no family appeared to be the cause of solitude of people of young and average age. Differences in gender groups on this parameter were 60.5% and 40.4% ($p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$), and on the second one – 68.1% ($p < 0.01$).

Besides, considerable mismatch with the population opinions about the causes of solitude were found in elderly persons group (Figure 3). In comparison with the above-stated findings of the population group, diseases, as a cause of solitude, were significantly more often determined among the men (by 75.8%, $p < 0.05$) and more rare (by 74.2%, $p < 0.05$) among the women. The difference in frequency of the solitude cause “absence of children” was similar in orientation, but lower in expression. This indicator was 23.6% higher for the women than that determined during the population polling and 23.1% higher for the men.

Increase of the role of diseases and pathological states as a factor determining the solitude was noted in the separate group of elder people. Besides, the fact that the whole growth is associated with males (calling this cause as the leading one in 15.4% cases) seems to be very considerable,

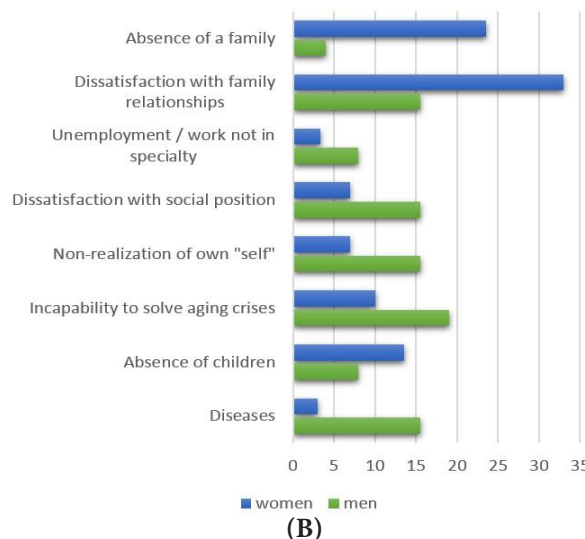
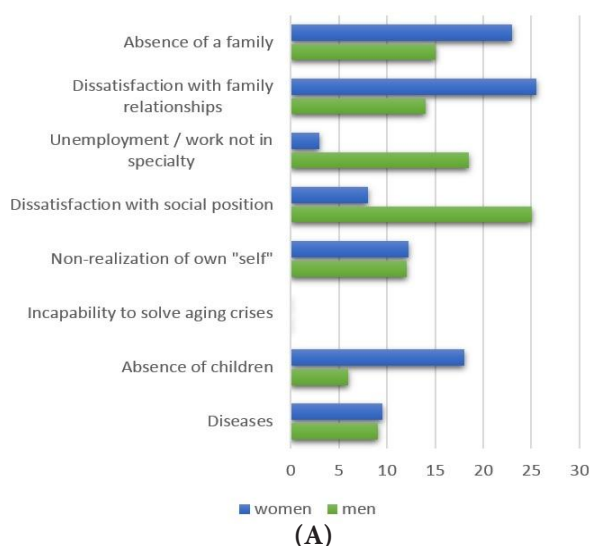


Figure 3. Comparative characteristics of visions about the basic causes of solitude of elder people in the population (A) and in the group with the high degree of social isolation (B).

while relative reduction of this cause to the minimum was reported for the women (3.3%, which is even less than in the adolescent and youth age category).

Considering the family composition dynamics that has occurred, “absence of children” lowers in the structure of leading solitude causes for the women (down to 13.3% versus 21.1% in the young and medium age), the similar tendency is found in males group.

The significance of the age crisis in the elderly age increases especially considering the relative extension of this period.

The idea of “non-realization of one’s “self” and considerable aspects of solitude among elder people associated with this concept also dominate in the male group, where their content reached 15.4% (6.7% among women).

In exactly the same relative number of cases in both gender groups the dissatisfaction with social position was indicated as the leading cause of the social isolation.

Frequency of unemployment and work not in specialty in the structure of the basic causes of social isolation almost did not change. Moreover, there was even moderate exceeding over the previous age group, which, considering the social and economic situation in general is not surprising.

Aspects of solitude connected with absence of a family increased greatly. In particular, the percentage of the

indicator of dissatisfaction with the family relationships reaching 33.3% for the women and 15.4% for the men increased. Besides, for the women this indicator moved to the first place according to the frequency.

Absence of a family appears to be another critical solitude cause for the women of this age category (22.3%), while for the men this indicator is equal only to 3.8%.

The notion of “incapability to solve age crises” of elder and old age people in the population group was absent, whereas it occurred in a considerable number of cases among the lonely subjects. The number of cases of personal non-realization as the leading cause of solitude of the men exceeded the indicator obtained during the population polling, and it was considerably lower for the women (by 47.9%, $p < 0.05$).

Dissatisfaction with social position as the real cause of solitude was reported more seldom than in the population polling analysis results, to a greater degree for men.

The unemployment or work not by specialty indicator had no difference in the female gender group and was considerably lower while testing lonely males (by 59.0%, $p < 0.05$).

The level of dissatisfaction with the family relationships had a considerable exceeding over the population expectation only with females by 30.3% ($p < 0.05$).

Absence of family as the leading factor of solitude for the women clearly matched the indicator received in the population. It appeared to be significant with the men (by 74.4%, $p < 0.01$ lower). The latter testifies to the considerable failure of the men from different age groups

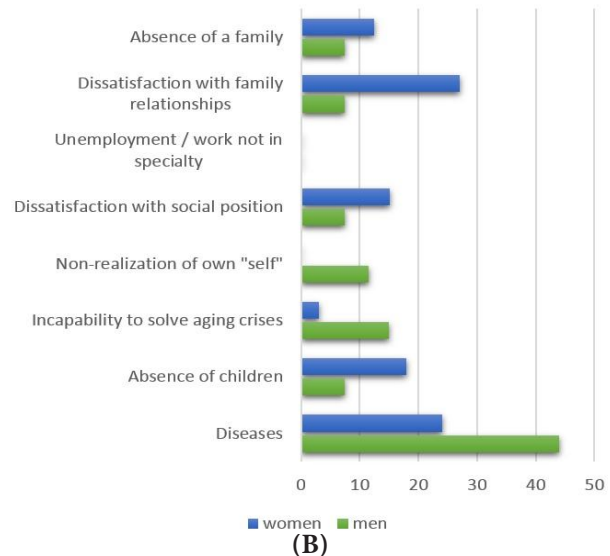
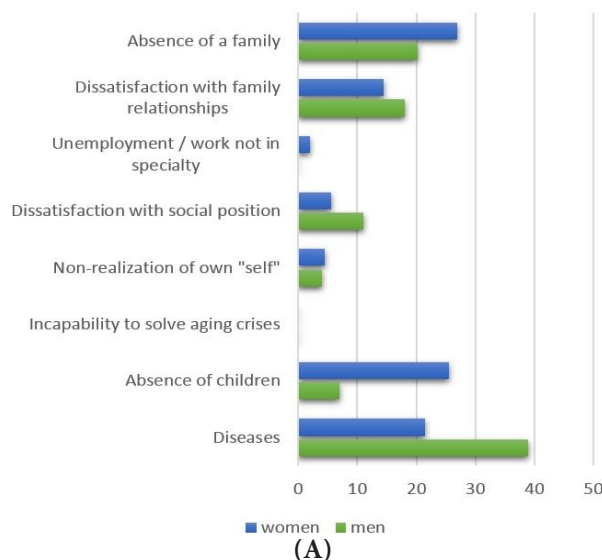


Figure 4. Comparative characteristics of visions about the basic causes of solitude of old people in the population (A) and in the group with the high level of social isolation (B).

to understand the role of family in formation of their personality and protection from solitude.

4. Conclusion

Among the old people in both gender groups, the most frequent main cause of solitude according to the data of the polling is diseases (Fig. 4). The existing level of spread of chronic diseases and the level of medical and social service clearly determines this situation. We have nothing but state that as the basic cause of solitude, this one was mentioned nearly twice as often among the men (44.4% of the total number of the tested group versus 24.2% of the women).

Nevertheless, having no children, as such, is the leading cause of solitude much more often with the women (18.2% versus 4.7%), which testifies to the remaining priority of family relationships and family values for the women in old age.

The retirement age of all the persons in this category determined the absence of unemployment or work not in specialty as a factor.

Dissatisfaction with social position dominating in this category of the women (15.2%) remained a very important aspect. For the men this factor continued to be present but it was the leading one in the structure of social isolation causes much more seldom. Non-realization of

“self” preserved only among men. Incapability to solve age crises also sharply dominated among the men of this age group.

The absence of a family and discontent with the family relationships dominated among the women (27.3% and 12.1%), where, as with the men, their frequency was equal to 7.4% each.

For the old age people, just as it was assumed during the population testing, the leading role in the solitude cause structure belongs to disease and pathologic states, while the contribution of this cause is 14.3% higher than the expected for the men and 13.1% for the women.

The absence of children to a considerably lower degree bothered the single women of old age than the results of the population polling showed. The frequency of personal non-realization appeared much higher in the group of single men of old age compared to the population assumptions. The same indicator was high for the women, although the absence of statistical significance assumed single cases of indication to this cause both in the population group, and among socially isolated persons.

Quite considerable differences, especially among the elder women from the population vision were revealed with regard to the parameter of dissatisfaction with the social position. The excess over this one was 165.2% among the women, and on the contrary – in the male group the frequency of this leading cause appeared to be lower by 33.3% compared to the population vision.

Dissatisfaction with the family relationships in the tested subjects of the group with expressed social isolation considerably exceeded the frequency of such sign in the tested population among the females by 99.0% ($p < 0.05$) and was lower than in the group of men by 60.0%. Considerable differences were also registered with the cause “absence of a family”, yet towards the decrease in the tested subjects of the high social isolation group in relation to the population group. The difference degree reached 63.6% among the men and 55.3% – among the women ($p < 0.05$ in both cases).

In general, among all researched age groups of persons with high degree of social isolation, a considerable domination of family problems was found in the structure of the basic causes of solitude for the women, and job and personal – for the men, which entirely corresponds to theoretic prerequisites of the research and data of the previous works.

The main difference in the vision of the solitude causes in the population under study and results obtained

in the group of socially isolated persons was the excessive frequency of diseases and personal problems, and relative decrease of job and family problems.

The provided data prove, first of all, the existence of a considerable dynamics of a subjective feeling of solitude during human life.

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