The UCLA 3-Item Loneliness Scale

This scale comprises 3 questions that measure three dimensions of loneliness: relational connectedness, social connectedness and self-perceived isolation. The questions are:

1. **How often do you feel that you lack companionship?**
2. **How often do you feel left out?**
3. **How often do you feel isolated from others?**

The scale generally uses three response categories: **Hardly ever / Some of the time / Often**

See Appendix C for the scale and responses in full.

Using this scale: how to score and interpret your results

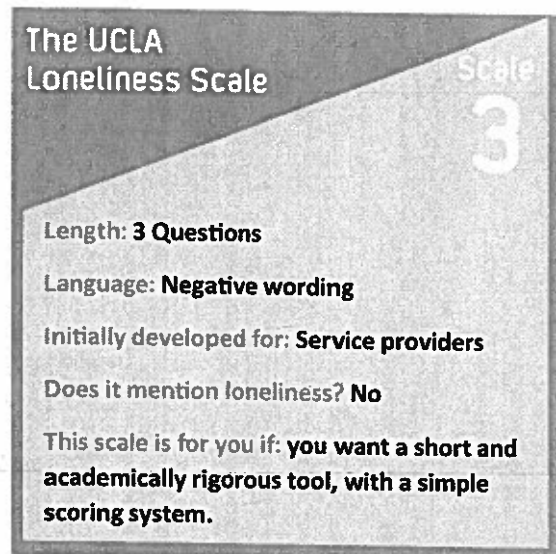In order to score somebody's answers, their responses should be coded as follows:

Response	Score
Hardly ever	1
Some of the time	2
Often	3

The scores for each individual question can be added together to give you a possible range of scores from 3 to 9. Researchers in the past have grouped people who score 3 – 5 as "not lonely" and people with the score 6 – 9 as "lonely".[19]

Least lonely | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | → **Most lonely**

19 Steptoe, A., Shankar, A., Demakakos, P. and Wardle, J. 2013. Social isolation, loneliness, and all-cause mortality in older men and women. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.* 110(15) pp.5797–5801

SUMMARY

The UCLA Loneliness Scale

Scale 3

Length: **3 Questions**

Language: **Negative wording**

Initially developed for: **Service providers**

Does it mention loneliness? **No**

This scale is for you if: **you want a short and academically rigorous tool, with a simple scoring system.**

STRENGTHS

- **Widely used:** Both the longer and shorter versions of the UCLA loneliness scale are widely used across the world. The original paper has been cited over 1,500 times.

- **Can be used in different ways:** The tool has been found to be accurate when it is part of a self-completed questionnaire, and when an interviewer asks questions over the phone.[20]

- **Comparability to national studies:** The scale is regularly asked of over 12,000 people aged 50+ as part of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA). This means that UCLA results from a small population can be compared to a national sample, which may be of benefit to some services.

LIMITATIONS

- **Original development:** One of the main criticisms of the full UCLA scale is that it was developed in the USA with students – and therefore is not necessarily suitable for a UK context or use with older adults. However, the shorter, 3-item questionnaire has since been tested with older people.

- **Only uses negative wording:** Another limitation is that it does not use a mix of positive and negative wording, which could lead to a 'response set' – where participants give the same answer without really thinking about what they are being asked.

- **Easy to distort results:** The results of the UCLA scale across a population are sometimes turned into an average, e.g. a mean score of 4.2 in a group of 30 older adults. Creating a mean could prove unreliable as the scale does not quantify loneliness but simply gives it a numerical category.

- **Tricky questions on a tricky subject:** Some staff or volunteers may also find it difficult to ask negatively-worded questions, and may require support and training to ask these sensitively.

20 Hughes, M. E., Waite, L. J., Hawkley, L. C. and Cacioppo, J. T. 2004. A Short Scale for Measuring Loneliness in Large Surveys: Results from two population-based studies. *Research on Ageing*. 26(6) pp.655-672.

How was this tool developed?

Developed in the 1970s and revised in the 1990s, the scale uses the cognitive discrepancy theory of loneliness (i.e. loneliness occurs when there is a gap between the quantity and quality of connections we have and want). It is drawn from two older scales, including a 75-item scale based on statements describing loneliness from 20 psychologists. 25 questions were selected from these scales and tested with 239 students. Finally 20 items were selected, which aimed to measure both loneliness and social isolation.[21]

The longer scale was shortened to three questions in 2004 so that it could be used in larger surveys and over the telephone. The 3-item version was first tested with over 2,100 older adults and found to be a reliable and valid measure of loneliness by comparing the results against a self-identifying statement. The researchers concluded that the 3 question UCLA scale gauged general feelings of loneliness "quite well" and it was a robust measure of loneliness in self-administered questionnaires and telephone interviews.[22]

21 Russell, D., Peplau, L. A. and Ferguson, M. L. 1978. Developing a measure of loneliness. *Journal of Personality Assessment* 42(3) pp.290-294

22 Hughes, M. E., Waite, L. J., Hawkley, L. C. and Cacioppo, J. T. 2004. A Short Scale for Measuring Loneliness in Large Surveys: Results from two population-based studies. *Research on Ageing.* 26(6) pp.655-672.