

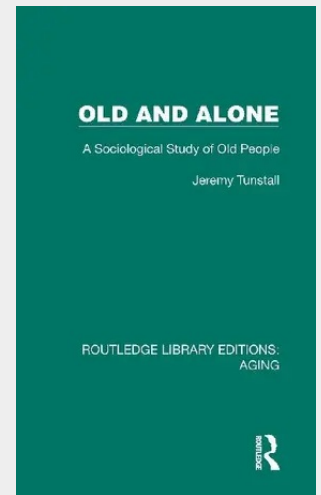
Tunstall

Old and Alone

A Sociological Study of Old People

What is it like to be an isolated old widow, living alone on the bare old-age pension? In the 1960s, the question had become a standard refrain. Originally published in 1966, this was the first full-length study by a sociologist of isolation in old age. Although the majority of old people were in no sense a problem group at the time, a substantial minority of the elderly were 'alone' in one or more ways. About 1.3 million people aged sixty-five and over in Britain lived alone; a large number admitted to feeling lonely, at least sometime. About a million were actually socially isolated in terms of low level and frequency of social contact. Mr Tunstall also uses a fourth category of aloneness – namely anomie (as developed by Durkheim, Merton, and Srole). This report uses careful and statistical analysis of the four types of aloneness and of specially affected groups such as the single, the recently widowed, and the housebound. But it also includes details of interviews with ten highly individual old people from suburban Harrow, booming Northampton, industrial revolution Oldham, and rural South Norfolk. The book contains a discussion of the problem of personality in isolation, and a commentary on the inadequacies of social theory about old age. Finally, the concluding chapter suggests a wide variety of policy measures which might help to alleviate social isolation in old age.

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170,60 €
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Lieferfrist: bis zu 10 Tage

Artikelnummer: 9781032701875
Medium: Buch
ISBN: 978-1-032-70187-5
Verlag: Routledge
Erscheinungstermin: 10.05.2024
Sprache(n): Englisch
Auflage: 1. Auflage 2024
Serie: Routledge Library Editions:
Aging
Produktform: Gebunden
Gewicht: 584 g
Seiten: 358
Format (B x H): 145 x 222 mm

