

## Loneliness

Loneliness is not a new problem among university students. For this reason, the topic was always addressed both in AU's previous study environment surveys (SMU) and in the extensive student survey conducted<sup>1</sup> by the Ministry of Higher Education and science every two years – most recently in the autumn of 2020.

In 2020, the results of the survey may be affected by coronavirus restrictions and the periodic physical shutdown of AU. The survey was conducted from 20 October to 15 December 2020. During this period, the university was subject to a number of coronavirus restrictions that impacted teaching, but was not physically shut down.

### Main findings: Loneliness

Have you experienced feeling lonely at your study?:

- Almost half (46%) of the respondents reported feeling lonely 'Sometimes', 'Often' or 'Always'. Nationwide, the percentage is 43% for post-secondary degree programmes. The faculty with the highest percentage of respondents who reported feeling lonely was BSS (50%); Tech had the lowest percentage (39%).
- With regard to degree programme level, 39% of professional Bachelor's student respondents reported feeling lonely 'Sometimes', 'Often' or 'Always', while the response rates were 48% for academic Bachelor's degree student respondents and 47% for Master's degree programme student respondents. The percentage among both types of Bachelor's degree student corresponds to the national average – while the percentage of Master's degree student respondents nationwide (51%) is a slightly higher than at AU.
- 50% of female respondents reported feeling lonely 'Sometimes', 'Often' or 'Always'. The percentage for male respondents is 40%.
- The percentage of students who reported experiencing loneliness on the degree programme has increased over the period 2014-2020. The increase was particularly marked from 2018 to 2020. The percentage of respondents who indicated that they 'Sometimes', 'Often' or 'Always' felt lonely increased from 40% in 2018 to 46% in 2020 – an increase of 6 percentage points. Nationwide there was also an increase, from 35% in 2018 to 43% in 2020.

Both in AU's previous surveys, as well as in the ministry's student survey, students at AU were asked whether they have felt lonely on their degree programmes.

The most recent survey (2020) shows that almost half (46%) of the respondents have 'Sometimes', 'Often' or 'Always' felt lonely on their degree programmes, cf. Table 1 on the next page. Nationwide, this applies to 43% of respondents on post-secondary degree programmes<sup>2</sup>. The faculty with the

<sup>1</sup> The student survey is carried out by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science. The study consists of a number of sub-elements, including the Learning Barometer (which measures the students' experiences of the learning environment on their degree programme and their own approaches to learning), Degree Programme Zoom (digital admissions tool that allows students to compare degree programmes), Teaching Environment (under the auspices of Dansk Center for Undervisningsmiljø (the Danish centre for the teaching environment)).

<sup>2</sup> <https://ufm.dk/aktuelt/pressemeddelelser/2021/filer/analyse-naesten-halvdelen-af-alle-studerende-foler-sig-ensomme.pdf>

highest percentage of respondents who reported feeling lonely was BSS (50%); Tech had the lowest percentage (39%). With regard to the percentage of respondents who replied 'Often' or 'Always', the percentage is also highest at BSS (18%) and lowest at Tech (10%).

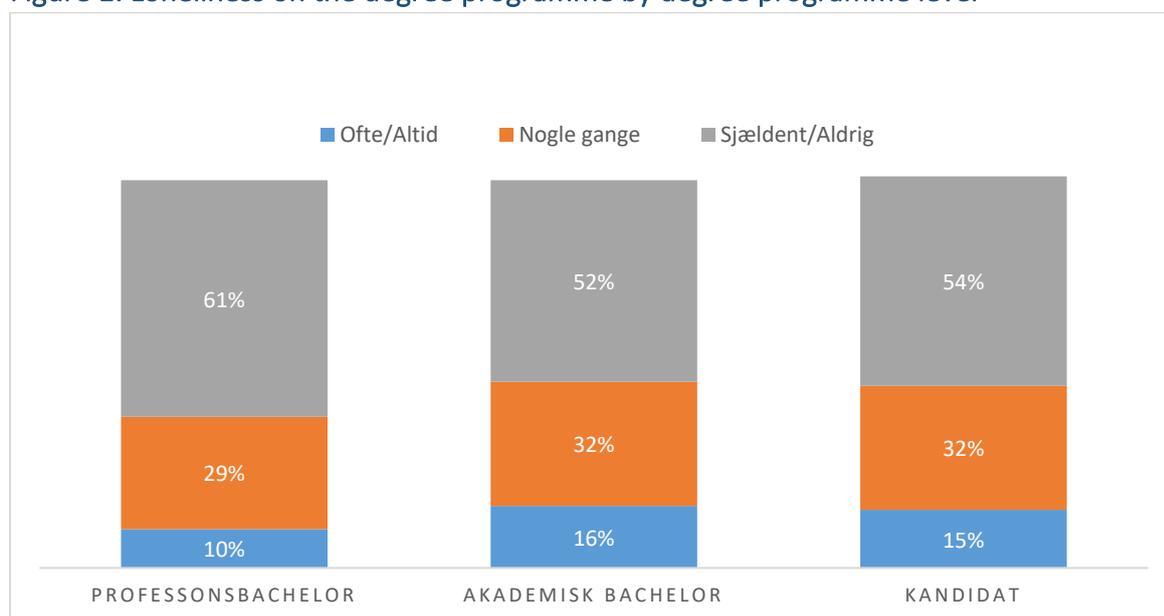
**Table 1: Have you experienced feeling lonely at your study?**

Have you experienced feeling lonely at your study	Aldrig	Sjældent	Sometimes	Ofte	Altid
AR	21%	31%	32%	13%	2%
BSS	19%	31%	32%	14%	4%
HE	23%	33%	33%	11%	1%
Nat	22%	35%	30%	11%	2%
Tech	26%	36%	29%	9%	1%
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>2%</b>

The response 'Unsure/not applicable' is not included in the calculations, n=11070

There are also differences in the percentage of respondents who have experienced lonely correlated with degree programme level. With regard to degree programme level, 39% of professional Bachelor's student respondents reported feeling lonely 'Sometimes', 'Often' or 'Always', while the response rates were 48% for academic Bachelor's degree student respondents and 47% for Master's degree programme student respondents. The percentage among both types of Bachelor's degree student corresponds to the national average – while the percentage of Master's degree student respondents nationwide (51%) is a slightly higher than at AU.

**Figure 1: Loneliness on the degree programme by degree programme level**



The response 'Unsure/not applicable' is not included in the calculations, n=11070

There are also differences in the percentages of respondents who report feeling lonely between male and female respondents. 50% of female respondents reported feeling lonely 'Sometimes', 'Often' or 'Always'. The percentage for male respondents is 40%.

### Development in feelings of loneliness

Table 2 on the next page shows the development in loneliness among students at AU over time. The percentage of students who reported experiencing loneliness on the degree programme has

increased, particularly over the period 2018-2020. The percentage of respondents who indicated that they 'Sometimes', 'Often' or 'Always' feel lonely increased from 40% in 2018 to 46% in 2020 – an increase of 6 percentage points. Nationwide there was also an increase, from 35% in 2018 to 43% in 2020.

We must assume that there is a correlation between the coronavirus restrictions and the dramatically reduced opportunities for social contact and in-person activities at the university, and that the coronavirus thus has contributed to exacerbating a pre-existing problem with loneliness among students.

**Tabel 2: Development in responses to the question: Have you experienced feeling lonely at your study**

Survey year	Never/rarely	Sometimes	Always or often
<b>2020</b>	54%	32%	14%
<b>2018</b>	60%	28%	12%
<b>2017*</b>	63%	24%	13%
<b>2014*</b>	66%	22%	12%

Please note that the questions in AU's 2014 and 2017 surveys were formulated slightly differently than in the ministry's survey. The question in the SMU was: How often have you felt lonely? The response 'Unsure/not applicable' is not included in the calculations.

**FACTS about the 2020 survey:**

AU's study environment survey is based on data collected by Epinion for the Danish Ministry of Science, Higher Education and Aarhus University. The results of the survey form the basis for the university's teaching environment evaluation, which is conducted every three years.

The survey is carried out every other year and was most recently conducted in the autumn of 2020.

The questionnaire was sent to 33,381 full-time students at Aarhus University and 11,133 students took the survey, which results in an overall response rate of 33.40%.