Does connection matter on its own?

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The question. Comparing countries with similar income, do those with stronger social ties live more years in good health?

What we found. Without adjusting for income, countries with more social support and less loneliness live considerably more years in good health. When countries with similar income are compared, the advantage shrinks sharply and none of the four hypotheses reaches the threshold set in advance. Loneliness is the signal that holds up best and, in middle- and low-income countries, loneliness and living alone are clearly associated with fewer years of healthy life.

Hypothesis	Countries	Effect*	Verdict
H1 · More social support, more years of healthy life	145	+0.11	Inconclusive
H2 · More loneliness, fewer years of healthy life	134	−0.20	Inconclusive
H3 · More associational membership, more years of healthy life	59	−0.12	Inconclusive
H4 · Living alone, in itself, is neutral	148	−0.11	Inconclusive

* Standard deviations of healthy life expectancy per standard deviation of the connection variable, at equal income. Smallest effect of interest: 0.10.

In middle- and low-income countries: loneliness −0.29 and living alone −0.24, both with intervals entirely below zero. In high-income countries, neither is associated.

What can be said. Countries with more social support and less loneliness live more years in good health. **What cannot.** That, at equal income, social ties extend a country's healthy life expectancy.

Limitations. Association is not causation; what holds for countries does not hold for each person. Loneliness was measured after the outcome. Membership is available for only 59 countries. The WHO estimates healthy life expectancy with models that partly use income.

Method. Cross-country regression controlling for income, standardised variables and robust standard errors; 98.3% intervals (H1-H3) and 90% equivalence test (H4). Plan registered before the analysis: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24085458

Sources. WHO (healthy life expectancy) · World Happiness Report 2026 · Gallup and Meta (2023) · World Values Survey, wave 7 · United Nations (households, 2022) · World Bank.

The Wellbeing Confederation (TWC) · https://thewellbeingconfederation.com/