

IS LONELINESS LINKED TO PROSOCIALITY?

A META-ANALYSIS OF 32 STUDIES WITH 42,353 PARTICIPANTS.

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INTRODUCTION

The Evolutionary Theory of Loneliness

- Loneliness may motivate individuals to approach others but also, paradoxically, increase focus on self-preservation and safety [1].
- Loneliness may then negatively impact social expectations, decrease trust toward others and increase social threat monitoring resulting in egocentric behavior [2].

Although the recent meta-analysis of behavioral studies has shown a large effect on the attenuation of prosocial behavior in response to being socially excluded [3], the pattern of findings regarding chronic loneliness is less clear.

AIM: to address that gap by estimating the strength of the link between loneliness and prosociality and exploring factors impacting it.

METHODS

A systematic search was conducted to identify peer-reviewed studies investigating the link between loneliness and prosociality using quantitative methods (k=32; n=42,353; 53.79% females; mean age=25.46; see Fig. 1).

Statistical analyses:

1. Main meta-analysis using random effects model;
2. Meta-regressions using age, sex ratio and type of the sample (WEIRD vs non-WEIRD) as predictors;
3. Subgroup analysis based on 6 subscales (altruism, anonymous, public, dire, emotional, compliant) of Prosocial Tendencies Measure (k=3).

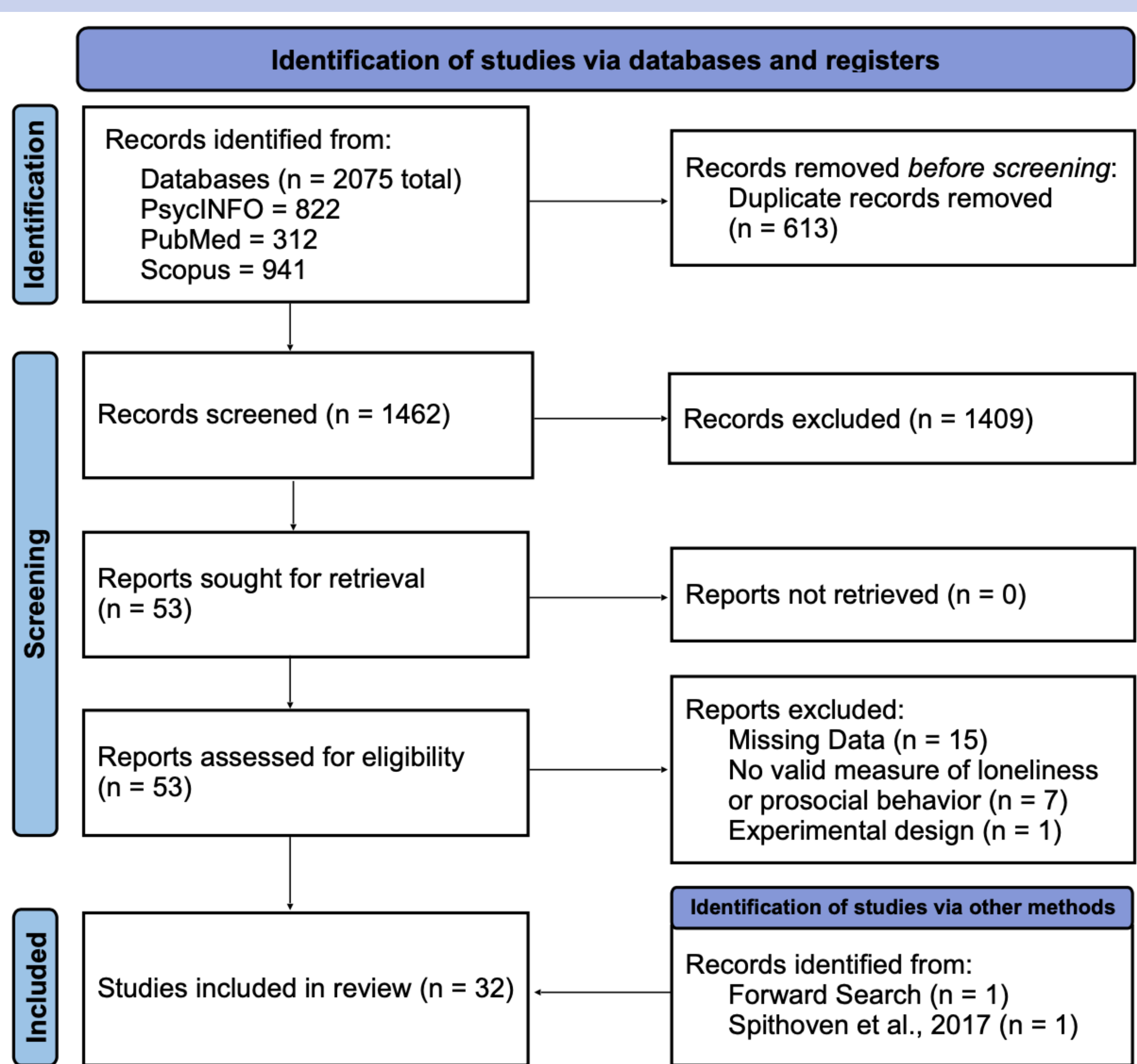


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram.

RESULTS

1. Main Effect

A significant weak negative correlation between loneliness and prosociality [$r=-0.109$, 95%CI: (-0.183, -0.034), $p=0.004$] (see Fig. 2).

2. Meta-Regression

Female ratio identified as a significant meta-regressor [$\beta=0.008$, 95% CI: (0.002, 0.015), $SE=0.003$, $p=0.015$].

3. Subgroup Analysis

Significant negative correlation between loneliness and:

- responding to help requests [$r=-0.141$, $p<0.001$];
- helping in emergencies [$r=-0.202$, $p<0.001$].

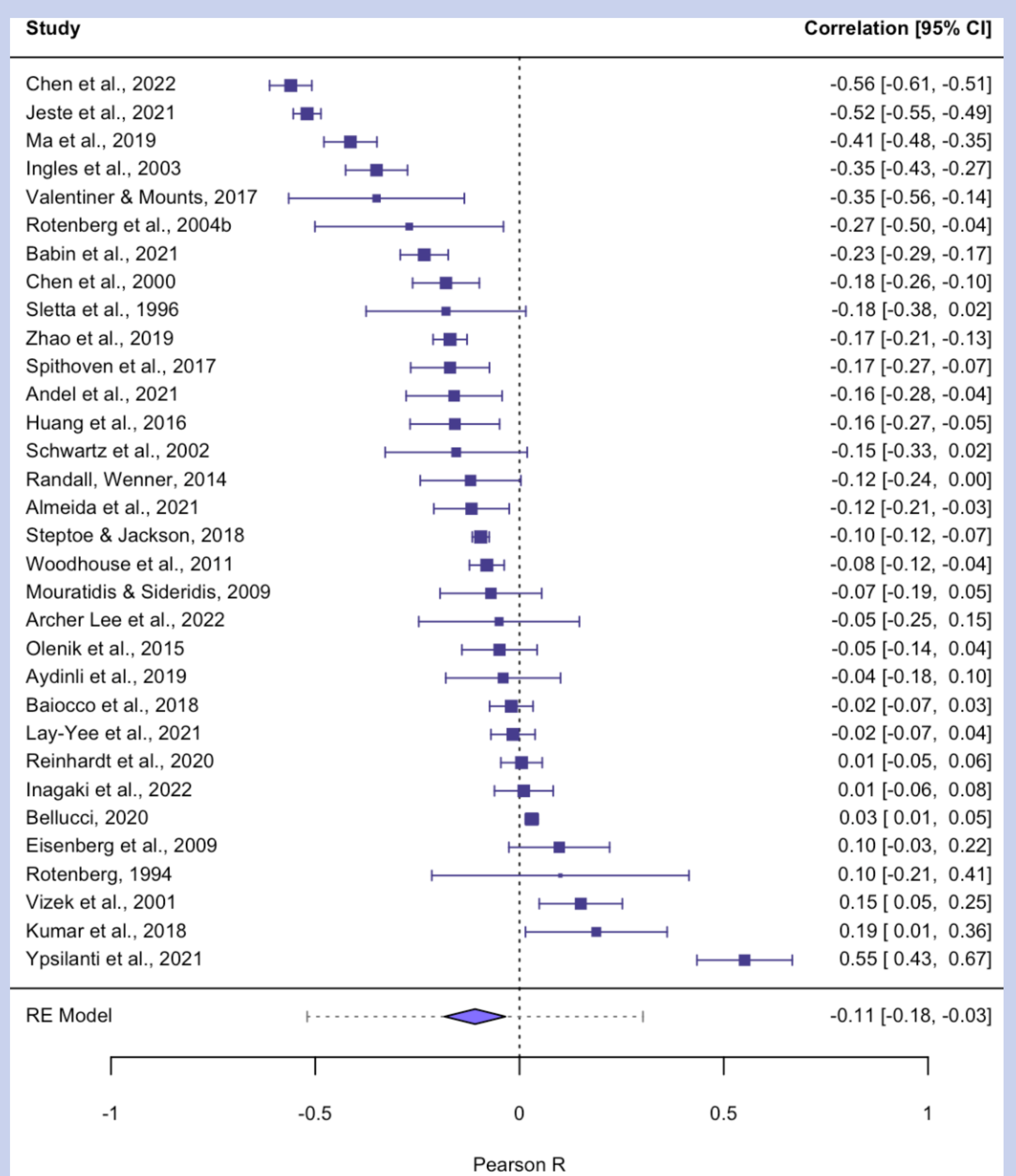


Figure 2. Forrest plot for the main meta-analysis (k=32; n=42,353).

DISCUSSION

- To our knowledge this is the first meta-analysis focused on the link between chronic loneliness and prosociality.
- This connection should be further investigated as loneliness explains only a small amount (1%) of the prosociality variance.
- A considerable lack of behavioral studies conducted on adult samples was found.
- Further exploration of factors making one able to overcome loneliness and behave prosocially is needed.



SEE REFERENCES