What prevents old people living alone from feeling lonely? Findings from the KORA-Age-study.

Living alone in later life is an important risk factor of loneliness for elderly people unless they have resources to compensate for that. The aim of this investigation was to identify these resources. Data were drawn from the population-based KORA-Age-study (KOoperativen Gesundheitsforschung in der Region Augsburg) conducted in the Region of Augsburg, Germany in 2008/2009 with 1079 elderly men and women (64-94 years). Loneliness was measured by the short version of the UCLA-Loneliness-Scale in a face-to-face interview. Multiple logistic regression analyses were conducted to identify associations between loneliness and potential protecting resources. A total of 346 (32%) subjects reported to be living alone, among them 70% (n = 241) expressed no feelings of loneliness. Participants with a stable social network had a fourfold higher chance (OR 4.08, 95% CI 1.20-13.88, p = 0.025) and with the absence of depression a threefold higher chance (OR 3.04, 95% CI 1.59-5.78, p-value< 0.001) of not feeling lonely. Physical or mental resources were not correlated with lower levels of loneliness. Absence of depression and a functioning social network are the most important protecting resources against loneliness for elderly people living alone, while income, level of education and age-related limitations have no impact. These findings should be considered when supporting the elderly in successful aging.