



Ipsos MORI
Social Research Institute

November 2017

Ipsos SRI

Social Isolation in London

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Prepared for Octavia

Ipsos MORI

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1 Summary of Key Findings

Octavia commissioned Ipsos MORI to carry out research out among 467 adults aged 15 and over in Greater London in September and October 2017, using face-to-face interviews.

When asked about their own experiences of loneliness, **over one-quarter of participants reported that they often or some of the time lack companionship (29%), feel left out (27%) or feel isolated from others (32%)** and over half report ever feeling each of these. When asked about feeling in tune with others, **18% reported they never or hardly ever feel in tune with others**. This means that loneliness affects a substantial proportion of the population to varying degrees.

Under one-quarter reported that they worry about being lonely (23%) or that they would be embarrassed to admit feeling lonely (21%). A larger proportion (29%) agree that they spend too much time communicating with family or friends online rather than seeing them in person.

Despite the focus in the media and charities on loneliness in older people, **signs of loneliness were found across all ages** with no significant difference by age in the percentage reporting often or sometimes feeling lonely. However, the ways in which the youngest age group experience loneliness were different from middle aged and older adults. The youngest age group (15-34 years) were most like to report ever feeling that they lack companionship or feel left out.

While there are no significant gender differences in reporting signs of being lonely, **men are more likely than women to say they would be embarrassed to admit feeling lonely** (26% and 17%). Younger people and non-white people were also the groups most likely to say they would be embarrassed to admit feeling lonely.

Those who are **married or living with a partner and those living with at least one other person are the least likely to report signs of being lonely** (e.g. 15% of those living as married reported lacking companionship often or some of the time compared with 40% of single people). Single people are most likely to worry about being lonely and to say that they would be embarrassed to admit feeling lonely (25% compared with 8% of those who are divorced and widowed).

Renters, particularly social renters, are more likely than those who own their own home to report often or sometimes feeling signs of loneliness and to worry about being lonely (e.g. 44% of social renters lack companionship some of the time or often compared with 22% of home owners). Those with higher household incomes and in higher social grades are the least likely to report loneliness and least likely to worry about it.

2 Introduction and background to research

Octavia provides thousands of people in London with good quality, affordable, well-planned and well-managed homes, alongside care and support services and community projects.

Inspired by the founder, the social reformer Octavia Hill, Octavia is a not-for-profit organisation that provides thousands of people with affordable homes in inner London. Octavia aims to build happier lives and resilient communities by focusing on people as individuals, providing them with a range of services and the opportunity to support themselves.

Octavia commissioned Ipsos MORI to carry out a survey of people in Greater London to explore the extent of and level of concern about loneliness in the capital among people of all ages. The findings will be used by Octavia to plan the development of suitable services.

Loneliness and social isolation are frequently discussed and the terms are often used interchangeably. However, there is a distinction; social isolation relates to a lack of social contact, while loneliness relates to emotions and how people feel¹. People may live alone and not be lonely, while others may have contacts or live with others but still feel lonely. This research specifically addresses the issue of loneliness rather than social isolation.

Loneliness is important as it is related to poor physical and mental health, mortality and poor quality of life (Bolton, 2012). Loneliness is often discussed in relation to older people for whom risk factors for loneliness include low income, living alone, being single, widowed or divorced. Research among older people with social care needs showed loneliness was an issue for people with care needs, whether or not the needs for care were met². Loneliness does not just affect older people³ but the focus of previous research has tended to be on older people.

¹ Bolton, M. (2012) Loneliness: The state we're in. A report of evidence compiled for the Campaign to End Loneliness. Age UK Oxfordshire.

Bernard, S. (2013) Loneliness and Social Isolation Among Older People in North Yorkshire. WP2565. University of York, SPRU.

² Ipsos MORI (2017) Unmet need for care. Final report. <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/2017-07/unmet-need-for-care-full-report.pdf>

³ <https://www.damekellyholmestrust.org/News/7-out-of-10-young-people-suffering-from-loneliness>

3 Methodology

Seven questions related to loneliness were added to the Ipsos MORI face-to-face omnibus survey for two waves between 22nd and 28th September and 6th and 12th October 2017. The questions were asked only to participants in Greater London. The interviews were conducted using computer assisted personal interviewing as part of a longer questionnaire covering a variety of topics. The survey included 467 adults aged 15 and over in Greater London sampled using a quota sample.

In addition to the loneliness questions, a range of demographic questions were also asked and these have been used in analysis. These include questions about:

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Marital status/living arrangements
- Number of people in household
- Household income
- Tenure
- Household income
- Working status
- Occupation which was used to code social grade
- Internet use

There were two groups of questions about loneliness:

1) Four questions from the UCLA four item scale

- How often do you feel you lack companionship?
- How often do you feel left out?
- How often do you feel isolated from others?
- How often do you feel in tune with the people around you?

Responses were: never; hardly ever; some of the time; often.

These questions are the shortened form of a widely used 20-point scale developed at UCLA in the 1970s. This four-point scale is also widely used and is included in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing⁴. The scale measures several dimensions of loneliness including self-perceived isolation, and relational and social connectedness (Demakakos et al, 2006).

⁴ Demakakos, P., Nunn, S., Nazroo, J. (2006) 'Loneliness, relative deprivation and life satisfaction', Chapter 10 in Banks, J. Breeze, E., Lessof, C., Nazroo, J. (2006) ELSA Wave 2 report: Retirement, health and relationships of the older population in England (2004)

These four questions can also be amalgamated into a score with answers on the first three questions having these values: never (1), hardly ever (2), some of the time, (3) often (4) and answers on the final question having these values: never (4), hardly ever (3), some of the time, (2) often (1). This generates a minimum score of 4 and a maximum score of 16 across the four questions.

In the report where the term ever is used it includes hardly ever, some of the time and often. In the charts red is used to indicate loneliness so for the first three questions, some of the time and often are shown in red and for the third question never and hardly ever are shown in red.

2) Three questions asking their views about loneliness and online communication:

How strongly do you agree/disagree with the following statements? (to all participants):

- I worry about feeling lonely
- I would be embarrassed to admit to feeling lonely
- I spend too much time communicating with family and friends online when I should see them in person

Responses: five-point scale strongly agree to strongly disagree

In the report where the term agree is used it includes strongly agree and tend to agree.

Data are weighted to reflect the population profile in London. Data are weighted to age, region, working status and social grade within gender, as well as household tenure and participant ethnicity using rim weighting.

Results are subject to sampling tolerances which means that the true value will lie around the percentage quoted. Where figures are reported as being significantly different this means they are significantly different at a 95% confidence level, meaning we can be 95% sure that the true figures are different for the two groups being compared. It should be noted that these confidence intervals are based on a random sample design. The sample design for this survey was a quota sample which means that the confidence intervals may be slightly wider than in our calculations of statistical significance.

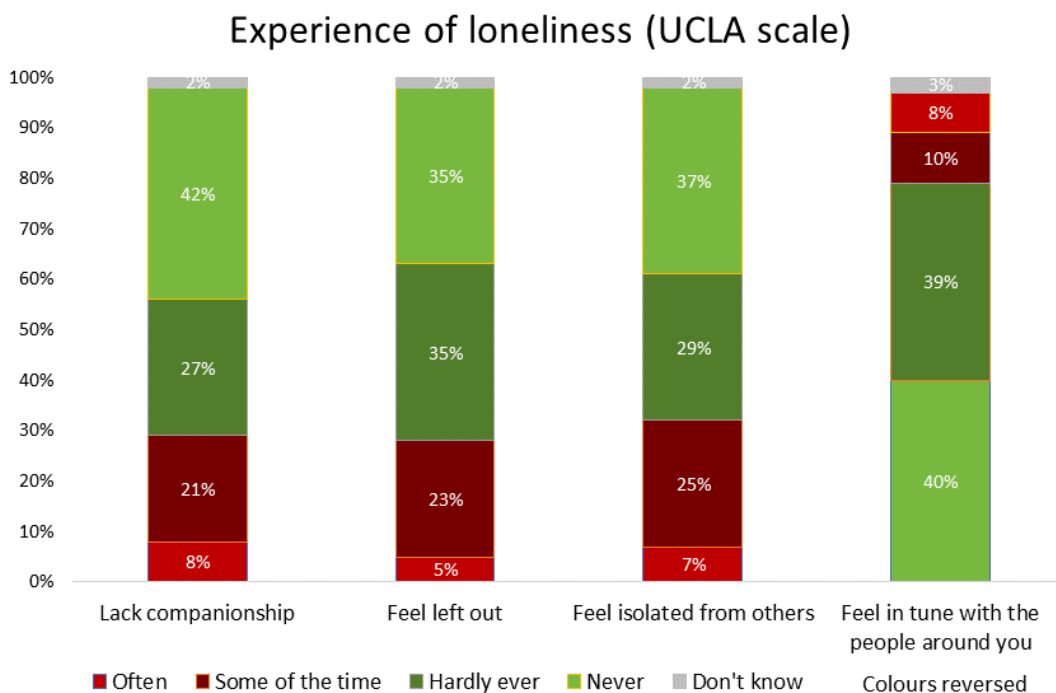
4 Overall Findings

Experiences of loneliness

Participants were asked four questions (UCLA four item scale) in order to understand their experience of loneliness. These focussed on different aspects of loneliness including companionship, feeling left out, isolation and feeling in tune with others (Figure 1.1). A minority (8% or less) reported often lacking companionship, feeling left out or feeling isolated from others and 8% reported never feeling in tune with others (colours reversed on chart). Participants were more likely to report experiencing these things some of the time than often. Overall about one-third (32%) reported that they feel isolated from others some of the time or often and well over a quarter reported that they lack companionship (29%) or feel left out (27%) some of the time or often. Looking at whether people feel in tune with the people around them, 18% reported that they hardly ever or never feel this.

For each of the indicators of loneliness the largest group was those who never feel they lack companionship (42%), never feel left out (35%), never feel isolated (37%) or often feel in tune with the people around them (40%). Therefore, for each measure the group reporting regular signs of loneliness is smaller than the group who do not. However, it also means that over half of participants reported ever lacking companionship (55%), ever feeling left out (63%) or ever feeling isolated from others (60%).

Figure 1.1



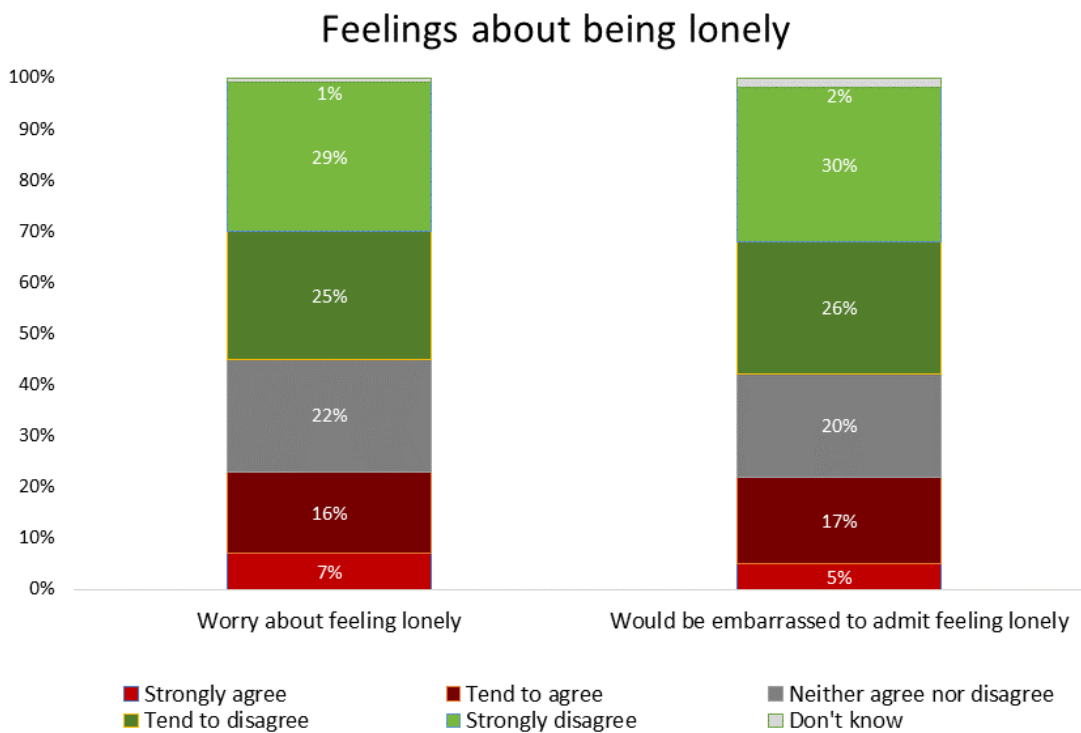
Question: How often do you feel you...

Base: representative sample of 467 adults aged 15 and over, interviewed face-to-face in Greater London by Ipsos MORI, 22-28 Sept and 6-12 Oct, 2017

Views of loneliness

Regardless of whether or not they reported feeling lonely, participants were asked how they would feel about being lonely in terms of worry or embarrassment and they were also asked about whether they spend too much time communicating with family or friends online when they should see them in person. This shows that over half of participants disagree that they worry about feeling lonely (54%) or that they would be embarrassed to admit feeling lonely (56%). A sizeable minority neither agree nor disagree that they worry about feeling lonely (22%) or that they would be embarrassed to admit feeling lonely (20%), suggesting that this is an issue which not everyone has considered. These issues are a concern for some with 23% agreeing they worry about being lonely and 21% saying that they would be embarrassed to admit to feeling lonely.

Figure 1.2



Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree...
I worry about feeling lonely
I would be embarrassed to admit to feeling lonely

Base: representative sample of 467 adults aged 15 and over, interviewed face-to-face in Greater London by Ipsos MORI, 22-28 Sept and 6-12 Oct, 2017

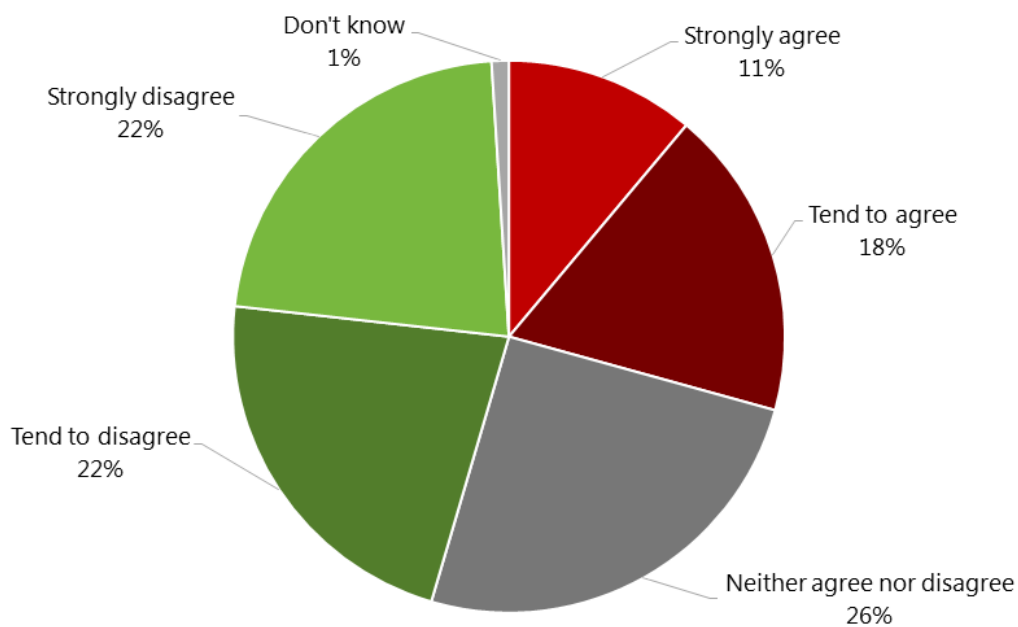
Overall 29% of participants reported that they spend too much time communicating with family and friends online when they should see them in person. A quarter (26%) neither agreed nor disagreed and 45% disagreed with this statement.

The four UCLA questions can be combined into a score (see methodology for details). Analysis of the mean score on the questions about loneliness by agreement with the questions about worry and embarrassment about loneliness show there is a link. The group who agree that they worry about feeling lonely have a significantly higher loneliness score (9.3) than those who disagree that they worry about feeling lonely (6.8). Those who agree they would be embarrassed to admit

feeling lonely also have a higher loneliness score (8.8) than those who disagree (7.4). Therefore, loneliness is experienced more among those who agree they worry about feeling lonely and who feel embarrassed to admit feeling lonely than among those who did not agree with these statements.

Figure 1.3

Spends too much time online rather than in person



Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree...
I spend too much time communicating with family and friends
online when I should see them in person

Base: representative sample of 467 adults aged 15 and over, interviewed face-to-face in Greater London by Ipsos MORI, 22-28 Sept and 6-12 Oct, 2017

5 Findings by demographic group

In this chapter, we explore how participants' experiences of loneliness and perceptions of it vary according to their demographic characteristics including age, gender, ethnicity, marital status and household size, tenure and socio-economic status. This analysis reveals some important differences between groups in their experiences and perceptions.

Age, Gender and Ethnicity

The research reveals few statistically significant relationships between gender or ethnicity and reported loneliness. The broad categorisation of 'non-white' includes a number of diverse ethnic groups which means the analysis could be hiding patterns related to ethnicity.

In terms of age, the findings challenge any preconception that loneliness only affects older people. There were no significant differences between the age groups in terms of often or sometimes feeling they lack companionship. However, the youngest group, aged 15-34, are significantly more likely than those aged 55+ to feel that they ever lack companionship (62% of those aged 15-34 and 48% of those aged 55+).

There are no statistically significant patterns for age, gender or ethnicity when considering whether or how often individuals feel left out.

Those aged 15-34 are significantly more likely than those aged 55+ to ever feel isolated from others, with 68% of them reporting this compared to 49% of those aged 55+. It is worth noting that 55+ is a broad age group but a sample size of 49 in the 65 years and over category limits the analysis than can be done looking at older age groups specifically.

When considering how often individuals feel in tune with others, those aged 34-54 were significantly more likely than the youngest (15-34) to report they feel this often or some of the time (86% and 75% respectively).

White people are also significantly more likely than non-white people to report feeling in tune with others often or some of the time. Indeed, 85% of white people report this, in comparison to 72% of non-whites.

These four questions can also be amalgamated into a score, combining answers across the four questions. This analysis shows that there are no statistically significant differences in the mean UCLA scores for people of different ages, gender or ethnicity. However, when UCLA scores are grouped into quartiles, the youngest group (15-34) are significantly more likely to be in the group with the highest UCLA scores (29% of 15-34 year olds have a combined score of 10-16 compared with 19% of 35-54 year olds).

Whilst there are no significant gender differences when considering people worrying about loneliness, men are significantly more likely than women to agree they would be embarrassed to admit feeling lonely, with 26% of men reporting this compared to just under a fifth of females (17%). Similarly, the youngest group (15-34) are significantly more likely than the eldest group (55+) to agree they would be embarrassed to admit feeling lonely (27% and 12% respectively).

The youngest age group (15-34) are also the most likely to think they spend too much time communicating online instead of in person, with nearly two-fifths (39%) agreeing with this statement. In contrast, one-quarter (25%) of those aged 35-54

and 15% of those aged 55+ agree with this statement. Non-white people are significantly more likely than white people to agree with this statement (37% and 23% respectively).

Marital Status and Living Arrangements

Findings indicate that being in a relationship is associated with lower levels of loneliness than being single. Additionally, those living alone are more likely to report signs of loneliness than those who live with others. There is no statistically significant relationship between living with children and loneliness.

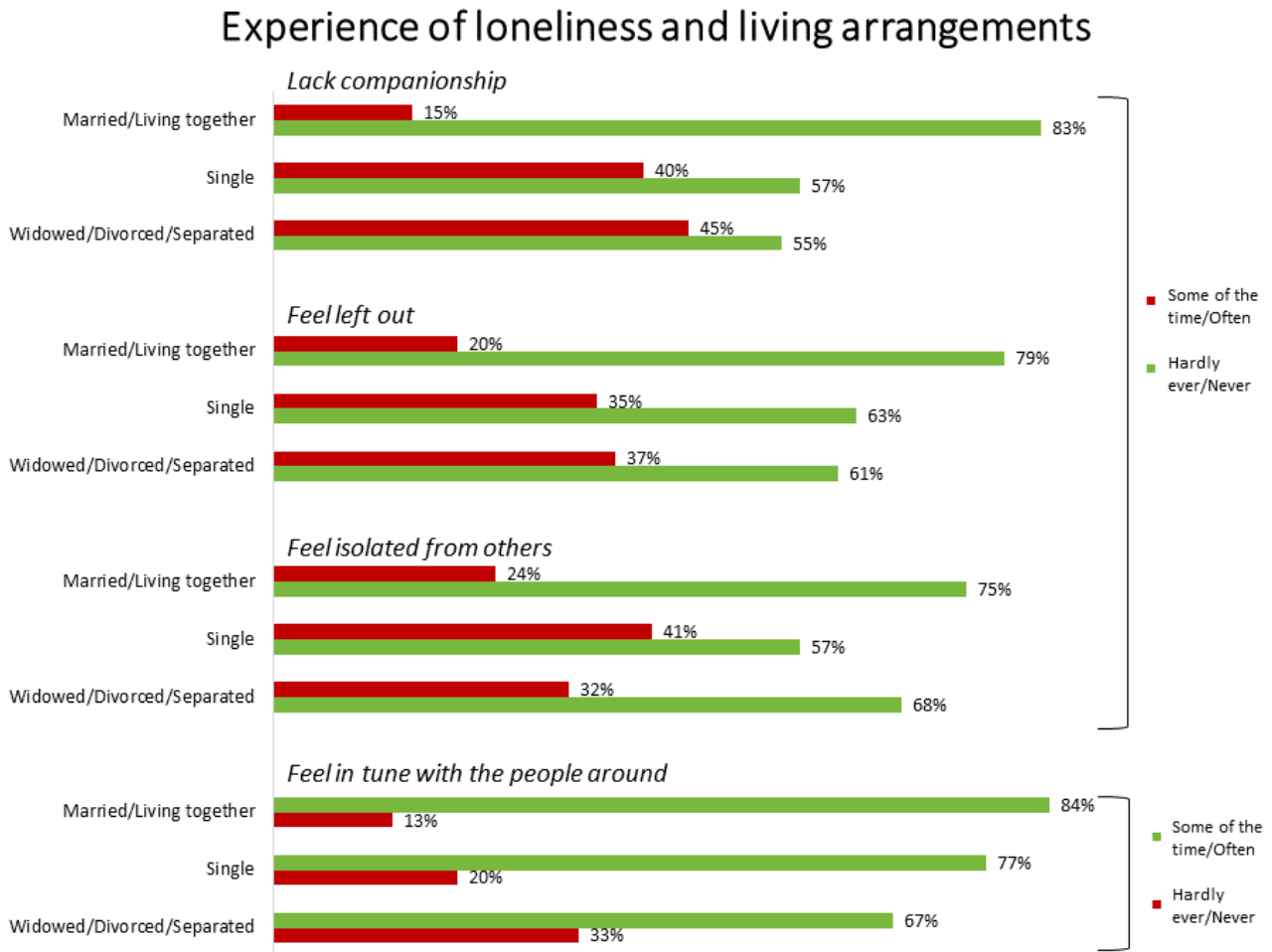
Participants who are single are more likely than those who are married or living with a partner to feel they often or sometimes lack companionship (40% and 15% respectively). Similarly, those who live alone are significantly more likely to report they often or sometimes lack companionship (42%) compared with 26% of those who live with one other person and 27% of those who live with two or more people.

Those who are married or living with a partner are the most likely to never or hardly ever feel left out (79%) compared with 63% of single people and 61% of those who are widowed or divorced.

People living alone are most likely to often feel isolated from others (19%), compared to 4% of those living with one other and 6% of those living with two or more other people. Likewise, single people are significantly more likely than married people or those who live with a partner to report often feeling isolated from others (12% in contrast to 1% of those who are married or living with a partner).

Nearly half of participants who are married or living with a partner (48%) agreed that they often feel in tune with others compared with 31% of single people. Widowed, divorced and separated people were significantly more likely than people living as married to say they never feel in tune with others (19% and 3% respectively). The size of household is also important, with those who live alone being most likely to report never feeling in tune with others (23%) compared to 6% of those living with one other person and 5% of those living with two or more people.

Figure 2.1



Bases: Married/living together: 235; Single: 177; Widowed/Divorced/Separated: 50

Base: representative sample of 467 adults aged 15 and over, interviewed face-to-face in Greater London by Ipsos MORI, 22-28 Sept and 6-12 Oct, 2017

Scoring the first four questions together, the mean UCLA score for married people and those living with partners is calculated at 6.9. This is significantly lower than that of widowers or divorcees (8.3) and single people (8.7). There are no statistically significant differences according to the number of people in the household.

Over a quarter of widowed and divorced people agree they worry about feeling lonely (27%). Single people are also significantly more likely than those who are married to agree they worry about being lonely (28% and 17% respectively). Single people are also significantly more likely than those who are widowed, divorced or separated to agree they would be embarrassed to admit feeling lonely. A quarter of single people agree (25%), compared to 8% of those who are widowed, divorced or separated and 21% of those living as married. These findings suggest that those who are societally expected to experience loneliness - e.g. widowed, divorced or living alone –are less likely to agree they would be embarrassed to admit feeling lonely.

Those who are divorced, separated or widowed are most likely to strongly disagree that they spend too much time communicating online (37% compared with 18% of those who are single) but this may well be related to the age profile of these groups rather than being related to their marital status.

Tenure

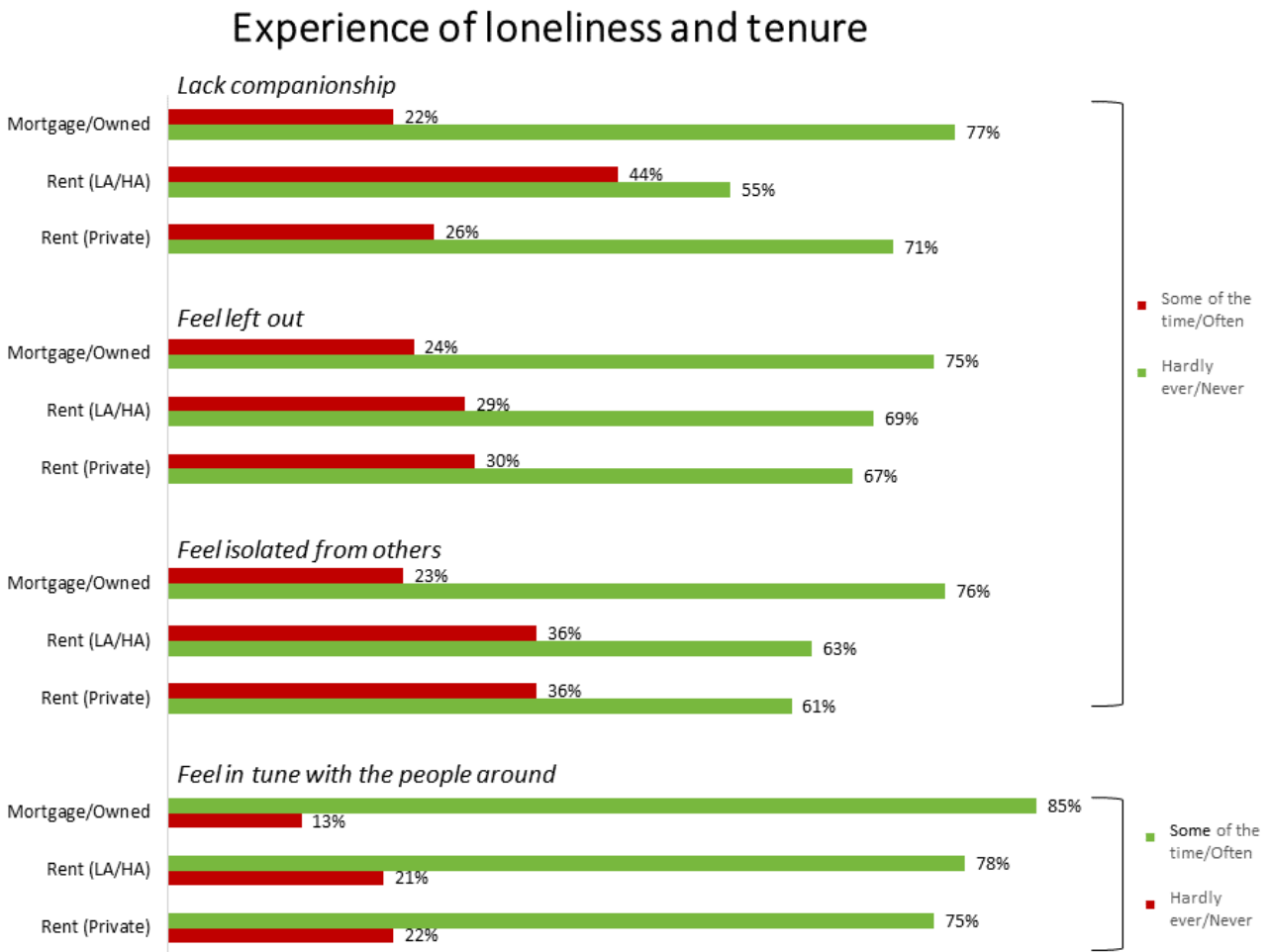
The data suggest that renters are more likely to report indicators of loneliness than those who own their own homes or have a mortgage.

Those renting from the local authority or a housing association are the most likely to report that they often feel isolated, with 14% reporting this, compared to 5% of homeowners (including those buying with a mortgage) and 6% of private renters. Renters in general are significantly more likely than non-renters to ever feel isolated from others (68% and 48% respectively). Social renters are also significantly more likely than home owners to report they lack companionship some of the time or often (44% compared with 22% of home owners).

Private renters are significantly more likely than non-renters to ever feel left out (70% compared to 57%). Conversely, those with a mortgage or who are home owners are more likely than renters to hardly ever or never feel isolated (76% of owners, 63% of social renters and 61% of private renters).

Those who own their own home are also significantly more likely to feel in tune with others some of the time or often (85%), when compared to social renters (78%) and private renters (75%).

Figure 2.2



Bases: Mortgage/owned: 236; Rent (LA/HA): 82; Rent (private): 118

Base: representative sample of 467 adults aged 15 and over, interviewed face-to-face in Greater London by Ipsos MORI, 22-28 Sept and 6-12 Oct, 2017

Scoring the response to these first four questions, home owners have a mean UCLA score of 7.1. This is significantly lower than private renters (8.2) and local authority and housing association renters (8.4). This means that overall social renters show the greatest signs of loneliness, followed by private renters.

Those who own their own home are significantly more likely than local authority and housing association renters to strongly disagree that they worry about feeling lonely (35% and 21% respectively). There are no clear associations between tenure and embarrassment to admit feeling lonely. Private renters are significantly more likely than social renters and home owners (40%, 24% and 21% respectively) to agree they spend too much time communicating with family and friends online instead of in person. It should be noted that these findings may be related to age, with private renters being more likely to be young.

Working Status, Social Grade and Income

Findings suggest that those working and in high paid jobs are less likely to experience loneliness than their counterparts who earn less or who are not working. It should be noted that the sample sizes in some income groups are small, limiting the scope of the analysis. The lowest earners, earning up to £17,499, are significantly more likely to report lacking companionship at least some of the time or often than the top two wage earning groups (£30,000 to £49,999 and £50,000+). Forty-four percent of the lowest earners report this, compared to 19% of the upper middle bracket and 25% of those in the top income group.

Retired people are the group most likely to report never feeling isolated from others (55%) compared to 37% of those who are working. In contrast, retired people are significantly more likely than those who are working to never feel in tune with others, with 14% reporting this compared to 5% of working people.

Those belonging to the C2DE (lower) social grade are more likely to hardly ever or never feel in tune with others (23%), in contrast with 14% of the ABC1 (higher) social grade. Those in the ABC1 social grade are significantly more likely than those belonging in the C2DE social grade to disagree that they worry about feeling lonely (62% and 46% respectively). Likewise, the two highest earning wage brackets are significantly more likely to disagree with this statement, than the lowest earning (58% of those with a household income of £50,000+ and 37% of those with a household income up to £17,499).

There are no statistically significant differences by working status, social grade or income when considering whether an individual would be embarrassed to admit they are lonely.

Retired people are the most likely to disagree that they spend too much time communicating with family and friends online instead of in person (68% disagreeing compared with 40% of working people) but this may be related to age rather than working status.

Internet Use

Participants were asked about their internet use. The majority used the internet (433) and a small number (34) reported never using the internet. The analysis by internet use has therefore been based on a split between those who use it multiple times a day (390) and those who use it less often or never (77).

Internet users who use it multiple times a day are more likely to report they often or sometimes feel isolated from others (33%) than those using the internet once a day or less (23%). Nearly a quarter (23%) of those who use the internet multiple times a day agree they would feel embarrassed to admit they are lonely, compared with 14% of those with low to no internet usage, which may also be related to age.

Nearly a third (32%) of those who use the internet multiple times a day agree that they spend too much time communicating with friends and family online compared with 16% of those who use it less often.

6 Conclusions

While signs of the most acute loneliness affect a small minority (often feeling a lack of companionship, left out or isolated, or never feeling in tune with others) over half the sample reported that they ever felt each of these. While particular support may be needed for those living with frequent loneliness, it is clear that loneliness occasionally affects a much wider group of people.

This research has shown that loneliness is something which affects men and women and all age groups. Indeed, younger people are more likely than older people to report ever lacking companionship and feeling left out, challenging the widespread assumption that loneliness is a problem of older age. Younger adults (15-34) were most likely to say they would be embarrassed to admit feeling lonely, suggesting that the focus on loneliness among older people may make it easier for that group to acknowledge their loneliness.

There is a strong link between living arrangements and loneliness. While social isolation and loneliness are not the same, it is clear people who are married or living with a partner or living in a household with other people are less likely to report signs of loneliness than those who are single, widowed, divorced or separated or living alone. In London in 2011, 32% of households were single person households so addressing loneliness among people in single person households is important.⁵ Those who are single are more likely to say they would be embarrassed to admit being lonely, particularly compared with widowed, divorced or separated people. This may be related to age and the more widespread discussion of loneliness being an issue for older people, especially when they have lost their partner. There is a need for loneliness among younger people to be discussed and debated to avoid a stigma being attached to loneliness in young working age people.

Loneliness and worries about being lonely were more prevalent among social renters than private renters and home owners. There were similar links with income and social grade with those on the lowest income and of lower socio-economic status being more likely to report being lonely. Since Octavia is a provider of social housing, it potentially has a key role to play in providing services and offering support to tackle loneliness among social renters.

⁵ ONS (2014) Households and Household Composition in England and Wales, 2001-11
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160107121126/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_361923.pdf

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About Ipsos MORI's Social Research Institute

The Social Research Institute works closely with national governments, local public services and the not-for-profit sector. Its c.200 research staff focus on public service and policy issues. Each has expertise in a particular part of the public sector, ensuring we have a detailed understanding of specific sectors and policy challenges. This, combined with our methods and communications expertise, helps ensure that our research makes a difference for decision makers and communities.