

# Key Findings

This report expands upon the 2019/20 Community Life Survey statistical release, providing additional demographic breakdowns, and looking at estimated levels of loneliness against other key survey measures.

- Overall 6% of adults (16+) in England said they were often/always lonely, whilst 21% said they were never lonely.
- People who identify as heterosexual were less likely to say that they feel often/always lonely than people who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual.
- People who live in the most deprived parts of the country were more likely to report feeling lonely often/always than those who live in the least deprived parts.
- People who are unemployed were more likely to say they feel often/always lonely than people in employment.
- People who did formal volunteering at least once a month were less likely to say they feel lonely often/always than people who did not volunteer.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Formal volunteering is defined as giving unpaid help to groups or clubs, for example, leading a group, administrative support or befriending or mentoring people.

# 1. Introduction to direct and indirect loneliness

This report builds upon the Community Life Survey 2019/20 statistical release, including further information about adults (16+) experiences of loneliness in England. Respondents were asked four different questions relating to loneliness, a direct question and three indirect questions.<sup>2</sup>

## Direct loneliness

The direct question asked respondents 'how often do you feel lonely' and allowed them to select one of five responses: 'often/always', 'some of the time', 'occasionally', 'hardly ever' or 'never'.

## Indirect loneliness

There is variation in how people understand the term "loneliness" and some people might be reluctant to admit to loneliness. To address this the Community Life Survey also asks three indirect questions about loneliness.

The three indirect questions asked respondents:

- How often do you feel that you lack companionship?
- How often do you feel left out?
- How often do you feel isolated from others?

It allowed them to choose one of three responses for each question: 'Often', 'Some of the time' and 'Hardly ever or never'.

The three indirect questions are used to create a loneliness score between three and nine, three being the least lonely and nine being the most. This is done through assigning a score to each response (as below) and combining them:

- "Hardly ever or never" equals 1
- "Some of the time" equals 2
- "Often" equals 3.<sup>3</sup>

There is no standard accepted score for which someone would definitely be considered lonely. To maximise the statistical analysis possible, this report categorises the scores from the indirect measure in the following way:

- A score of 3 or 4 can be categorised as representing people who feel lonely least often.
- A score of 5 or 6 or 7 can be categorised as representing people who feel lonely some of the time.
- A score of 8 or 9 can be categorised as representing people who feel lonely most often.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Community Life Survey uses the Government Statistical Service (GSS) harmonised principle of loneliness to measure levels of loneliness. The estimates presented here are therefore comparable with other surveys that use this principle. Other statistical data sets that use this definition, and therefore have comparative data, are available from the GSS [guidance page](#).

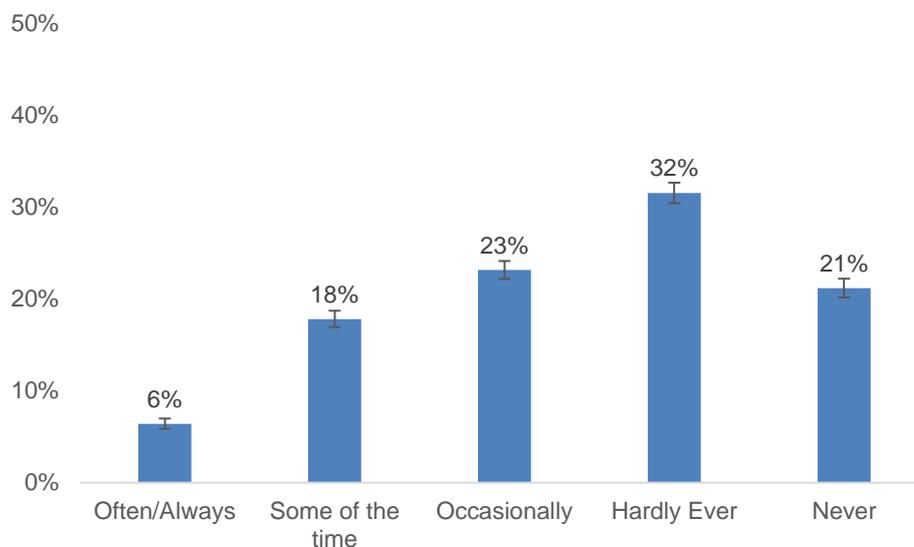
<sup>3</sup> More details on this method can be found in [Measuring loneliness: guidance for use of the national indicators on surveys](#).

The majority of the fieldwork took place prior to the pandemic, therefore the estimates in this publication will reflect pre-pandemic patterns of loneliness. More details of how the pandemic may have affected the estimates can be found in the main [Community Life Survey publication](#).

## 2. Loneliness by demographics

- The 2019/20 Community Life Survey annual publication provided headline findings on loneliness and showed that 6% of respondents reported often/always feeling lonely when responding to the direct question. This has remained broadly consistent since 2013/14.
- In 2019/20 18% reported feeling lonely some of the time, 23% reported feeling lonely occasionally, 32% reported feeling lonely hardly ever and 21% reported never feeling lonely.

**Figure 1 How often respondents feel lonely, England, 2019/20**



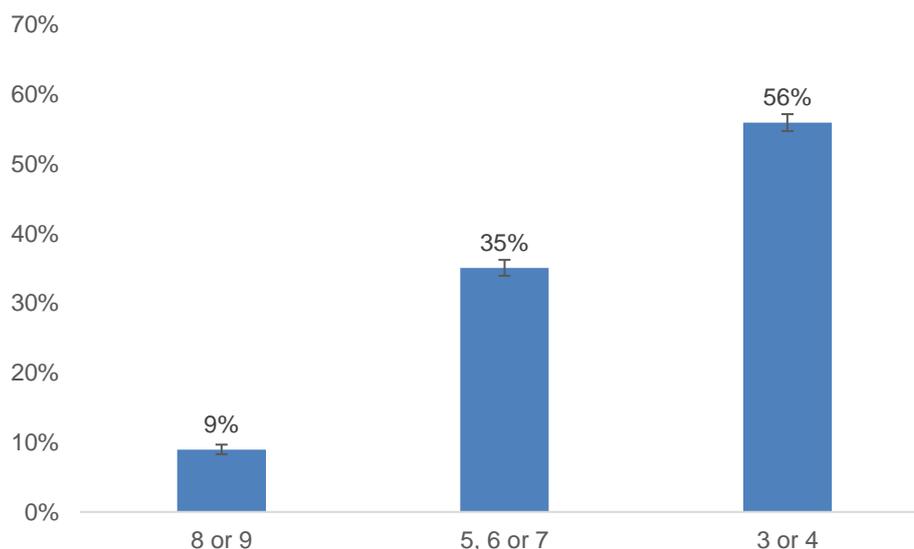
95% confidence interval has been shown on all figures in this report<sup>4</sup>

- Additionally, 9% of respondents scored 8 or 9 on the indirect loneliness scale, indicating feeling lonely most often. 35% scored 5, 6 or 7 on the indirect loneliness scale, and 56% scored 3 or 4 on the indirect loneliness scale, indicating they feel lonely the least often.

---

<sup>4</sup> A confidence interval provides a range in which there is a specific probability that the true value for the population will fall. For the Community Life Survey, 95% confidence intervals are used which means, had the sampling been conducted 100 times, creating 100 confidence intervals, then 95 of these intervals would contain the true value for adults in England. When sample sizes are smaller we can be less certain in our estimate so confidence intervals are wider.

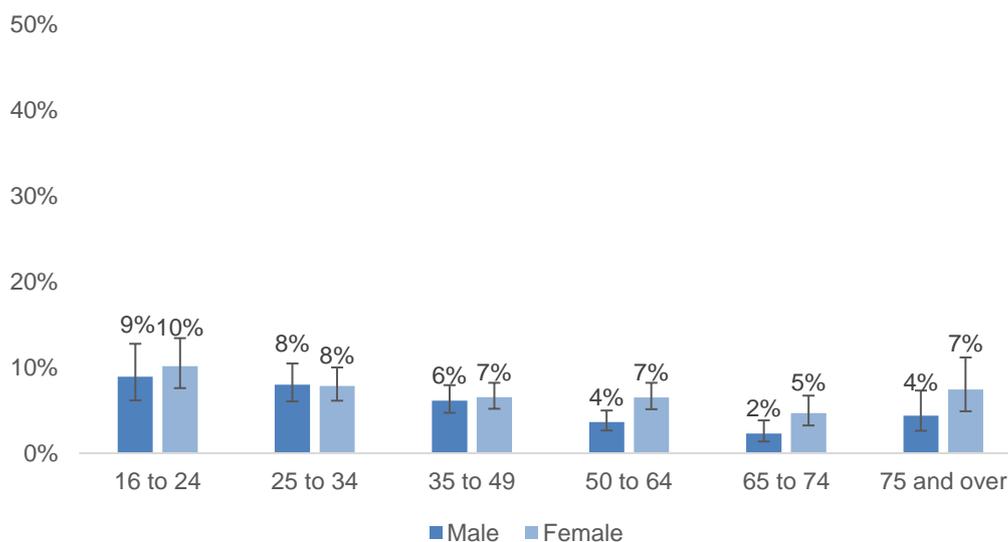
**Figure 2 Indirect loneliness scores, England, 2019/20**



### **Loneliness by age**

- Respondents from younger age groups (16-24 and 25-34 years old) (10% and 8% respectively) were more likely to report feeling lonely often/always than the oldest age groups (50+) (between 4% and 6%).
- Similarly, the two youngest age groups were more likely to report feeling lonely some of the time (24% and 22%) than all other age groups (between 13% and 18%).
- 65 to 74 year olds were the most likely to report never feeling lonely (30%), but this proportion drops to 23% for over 75s.
- The responses to the indirect questions are similar to the direct question.
- Respondents from the youngest age group (16-24) were more likely to score an 8 or 9 ('feel lonely most often') (14%) on the indirect loneliness scale than age groups over 24 years old (between 5% and 10%).
- Respondents aged 65 to 74 were less likely to score an 8 or 9 compared to other age groups.
- The two youngest age groups (16-24 and 25-34) were also less likely to score a 3 or 4 ('feel lonely some of the time') on the indirect scale than all other age groups.

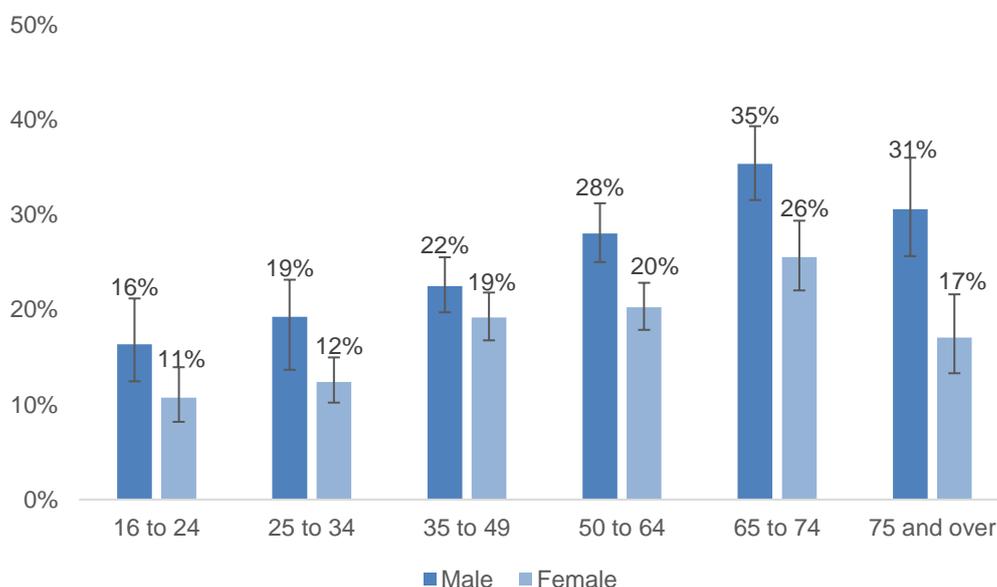
**Figure 3 How many respondents felt lonely often/always, by age and gender, England, 2019/20**



### Loneliness by age and gender

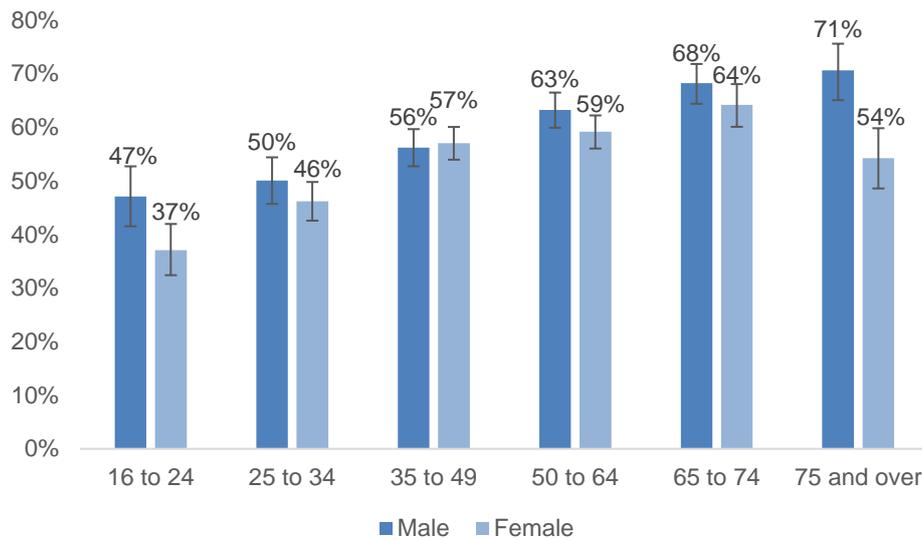
- The percentage of men and women feeling lonely often/always was similar in every age group except amongst 50 to 64 year olds where women reported being lonely often/always more than men (4% compared to 7%).
- The pattern was similar with the indirect question where there were no significant differences between men and women at any age.
- Men were more likely than women to report never feeling lonely in all age groups over 50, whereas there was no significant difference in response by gender in the age groups under 50 years old.

**Figure 4 How often respondents never felt lonely, by age and gender, England, 2019/20**



- In contrast, responses to the indirect question showed that only men over 75 were more likely to have a score of 3 or 4 than women of the same age.

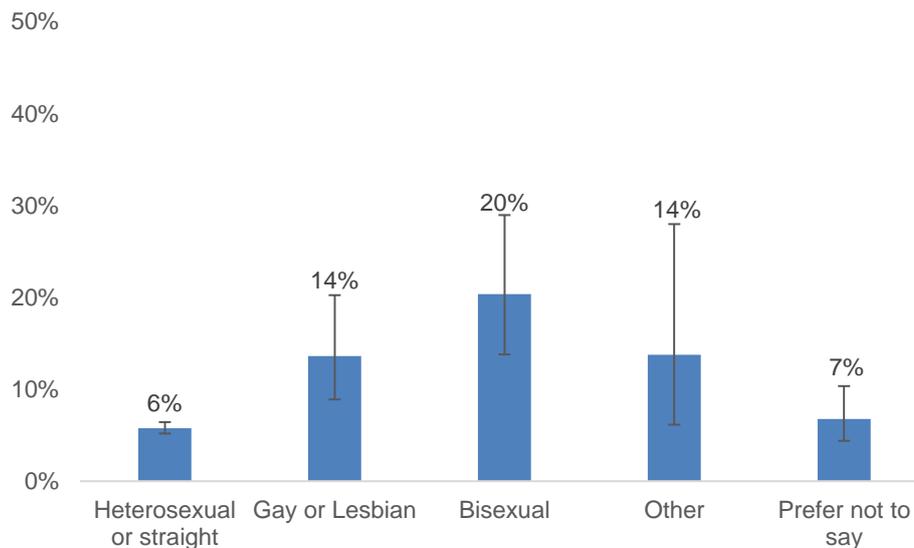
**Figure 5 Indirect loneliness scores of 3 or 4, by age and gender, England, 2019/20**



### Loneliness by sexual identity

- Respondents who identify as heterosexual/straight were less likely to report feeling lonely often/always (6%) than respondents who identify as either gay/lesbian or bisexual (14% and 20% respectively).

**Figure 6 How many respondents felt lonely often/always, by sexual identity, England, 2019/20**



- There was a similar pattern in the proportion of respondents scoring an 8 or 9 on the indirect loneliness scale, with heterosexual/straight respondents less likely to score an 8 or 9 (9%) than gay/lesbian or bisexual respondents (16% and 26% respectively).

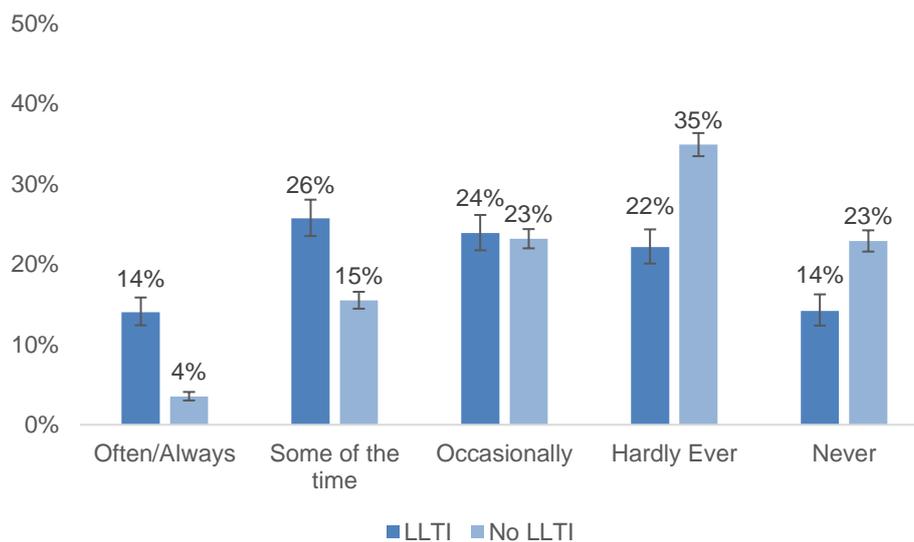
### Loneliness by caring responsibility

- Overall, in 2019/20 there was no variation in those who felt lonely often/always by caring responsibility.

### Loneliness by limiting long term illness<sup>5</sup>

- Respondents with a limiting long-term illness or disability were more likely to report feeling lonely often/always than those without (14% compared with 4%) and less likely to say they never felt lonely (14% compared to 23%).

**Figure 8 Responses to the direct loneliness question, by limiting long term illness or disability (LLTI), England, 2019/20**



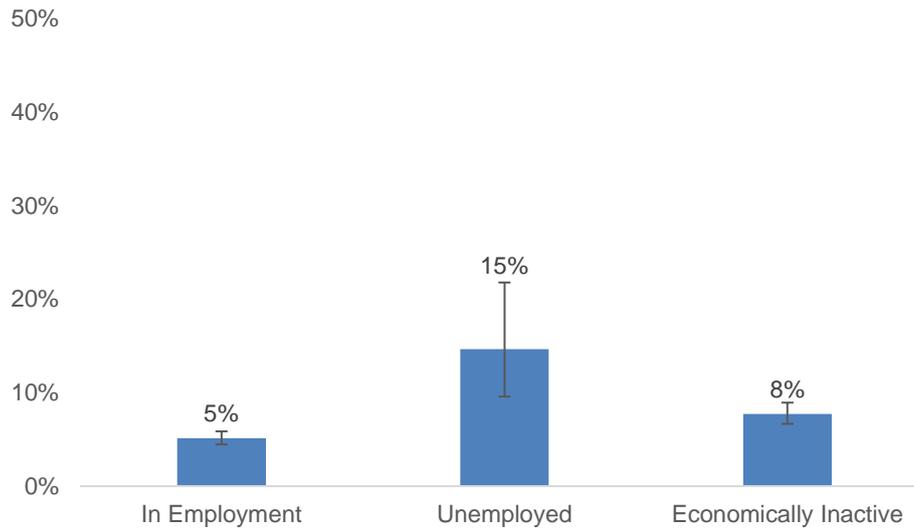
- The responses to the indirect question follow a similar pattern with respondents with a limiting long term illness or disability more likely to score an 8 or a 9 (19% compared to 6%) and less likely to score a 3 or a 4 (40% compared to 60%).
- Across all age groups, respondents with limiting long term illnesses were more likely to report feeling lonely often/always than respondents without limiting long term illnesses. This pattern is repeated across both the direct and indirect questions.

### Loneliness by employment

- Unemployed respondents were more likely to report feeling lonely often/always (15%) than employed respondents (5%) or those respondents who are economically inactive (8%).
- Additionally, respondents who were economically inactive were more likely to report feeling lonely often/always than respondents in employment.

<sup>5</sup> A limiting long term illness (LLTI) or disability is classified as someone having any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses which are expected to last for 12 months or more and their condition and/or illness reduces their ability to carry out day to day activities.

**Figure 9 How many respondents felt lonely often/always, by employment status, England, 2019/20**



### 3. Loneliness by geography

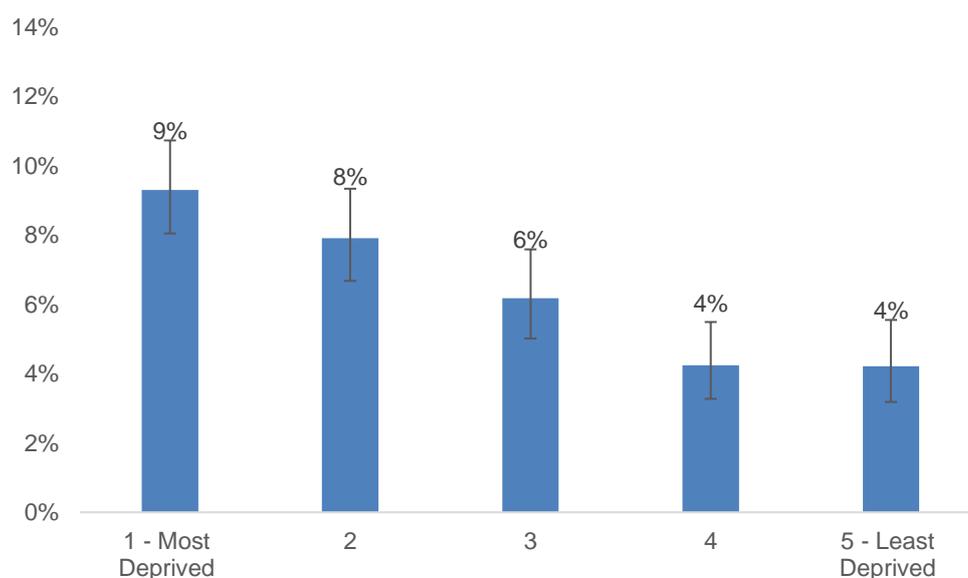
#### Loneliness by Index of Multiple Deprivation<sup>6</sup>

- Respondents living in more deprived areas of the country were more likely to feel lonely often/always, with those who lived in the two most deprived quintile more likely to feel lonely often/always (8-9%) than those who lived in the two least deprived quintiles (4%).
- There was a similar pattern in the responses to the indirect questions. Respondents from the two most deprived quintiles were more likely to score an 8 or a 9 (11-12%) than those from the two least deprived quintiles (6-7%).

---

<sup>6</sup> The Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks every small area in England from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area). Deciles are calculated by ranking the 32,844 small areas in England from most deprived to least deprived and dividing them into 10 equal groups.

**Figure 11 How many respondents felt lonely often/always, by Index of Multiple Deprivation Quintile, England, 2019/20**



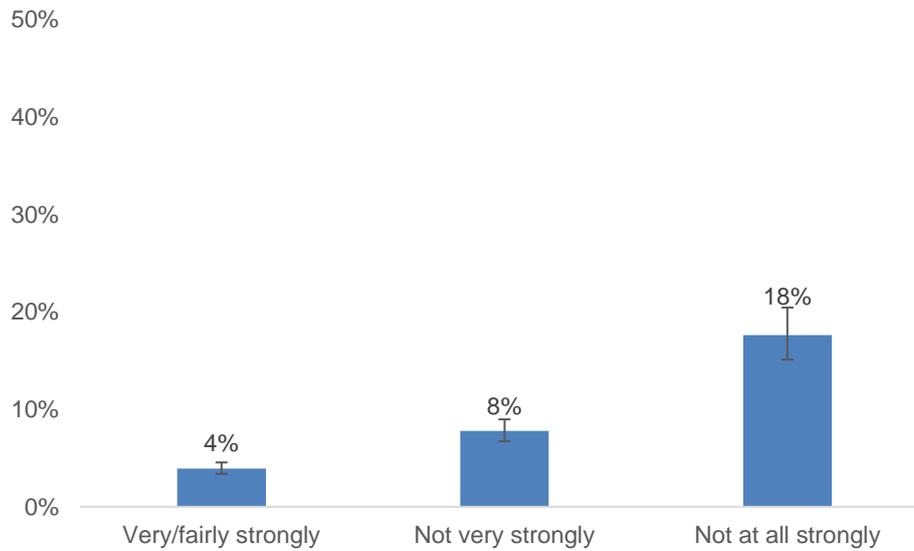
#### **Loneliness by urban/rural classification**

- There was no variation in feeling lonely often/always between those who live in rural areas versus those that live in urban areas.
- However, respondents who live in urban areas were more likely to feel lonely some of the time, than respondents living in rural areas (14% compared to 19%). There is a similar pattern with the indirect loneliness measure, with similar rates of respondents from urban and rural areas scoring an 8 or a 9.
- However, respondents from urban areas were less likely to score a 3 or a 4 ('people who feel lonely some of the time') than respondents in rural areas (55% compared to 62%).

## **4. Loneliness by community engagement**

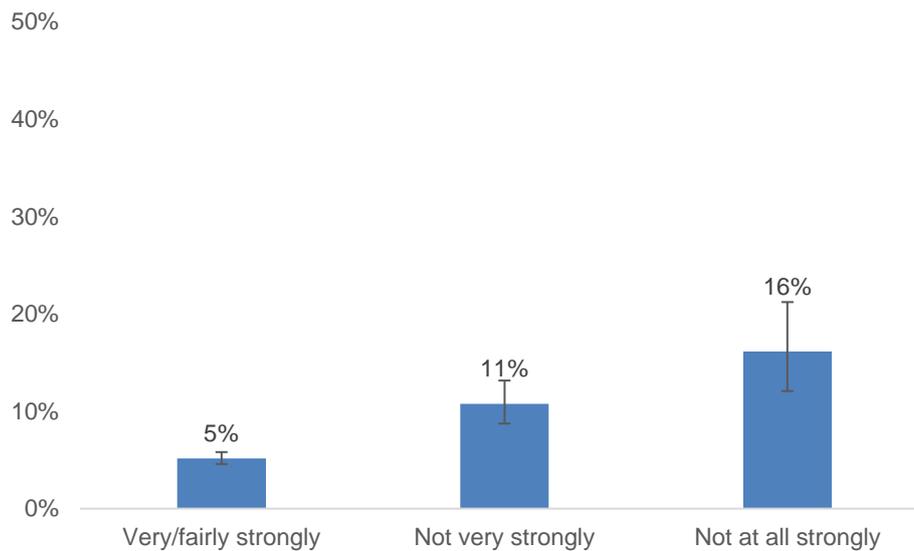
- Respondents who 'not at all strongly' felt they belonged to their immediate neighbourhood were more likely to report feeling lonely often/always (18%) than those who answered 'very/fairly strongly' (4%) and were less likely to say they 'never' feel lonely (17% compared with 25%).

**Figure 12 How many respondents felt lonely often/always, by feelings of belonging to their neighbourhood, England, 2019/20**



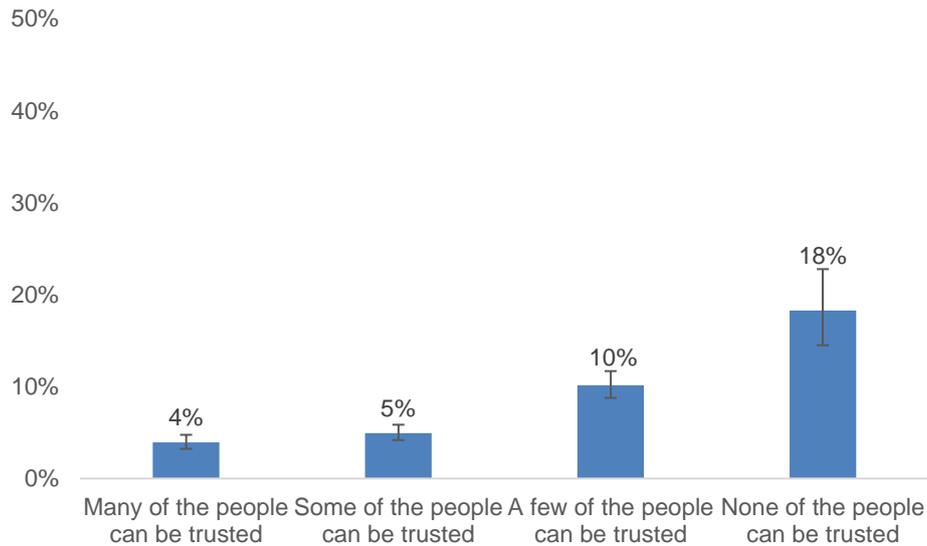
- Similarly, those who did not feel a strong sense of belonging to Britain were more likely to report feeling lonely often/always, 16% compared to 5% who felt very/fairly connected to Britain.

**Figure 13 How many respondents felt lonely often/always, by feelings of belonging to Britain, England, 2019/20**



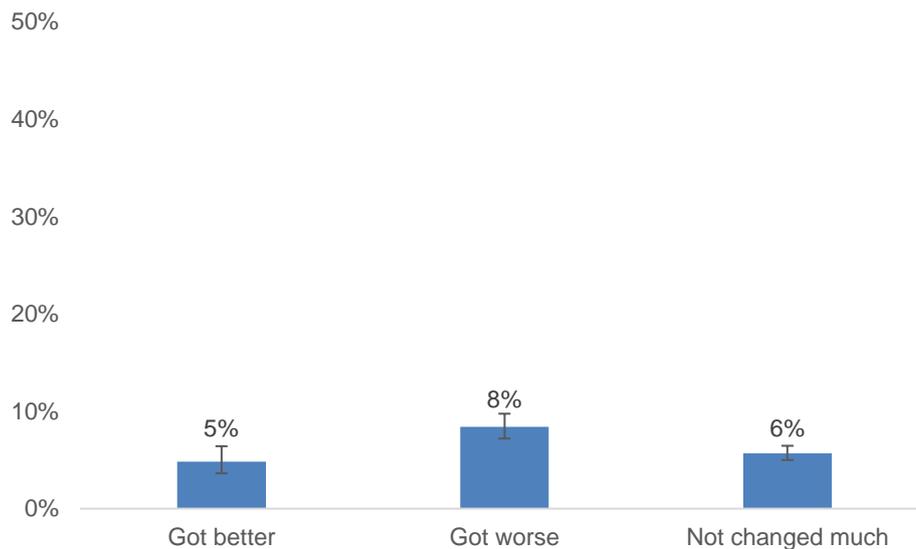
- Those who felt that none of the people in their local area can be trusted were more likely to report feeling lonely often/always than those who felt that many of the people can be trusted (18% compared to 4%).

**Figure 14 How many respondents felt lonely often/always, by how many people they trust in their neighbourhood, England, 2019/20**



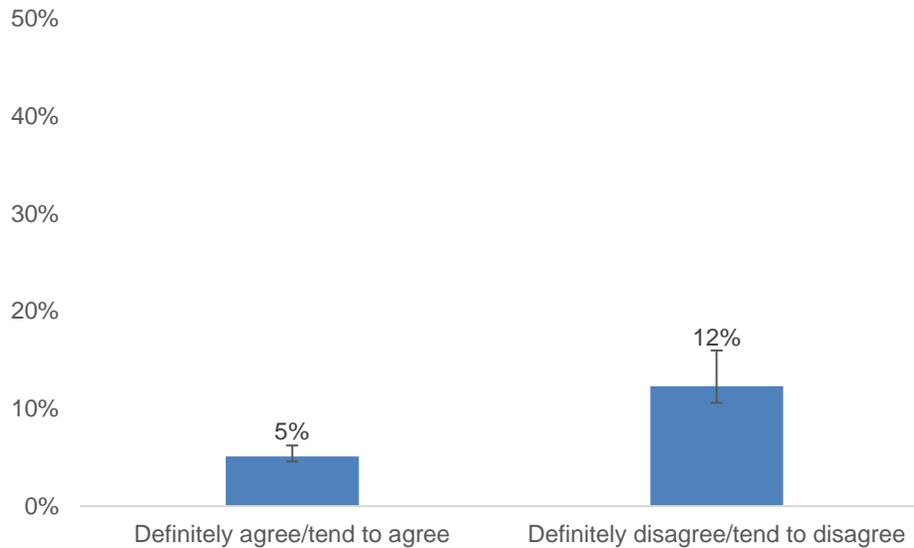
- Respondents who felt that their local area got worse over the last two years were more likely to report feeling lonely often/always than respondents who thought their local community has got better (5% compared to 8%).

**Figure 15 How many respondents felt lonely often/always, by how they think their local area has changed in the past two years, England, 2019/20**



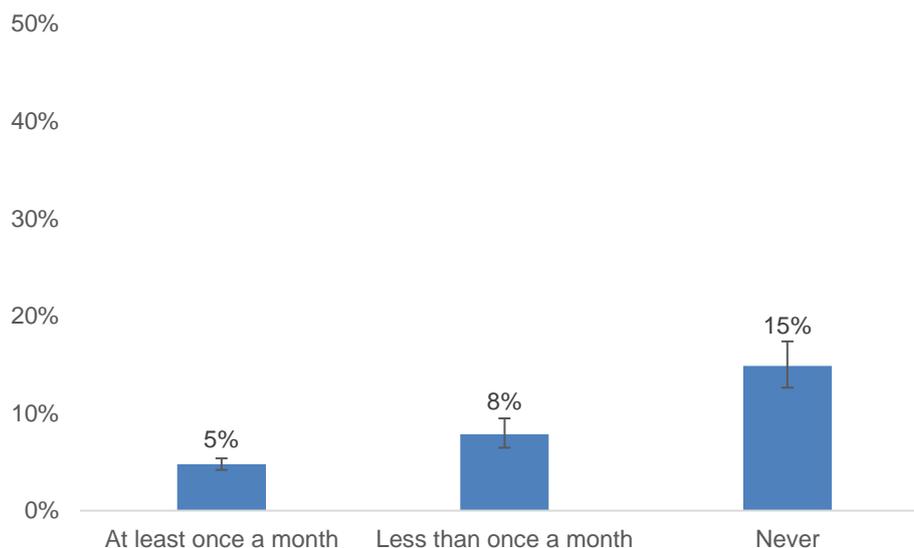
- Respondents who agreed with the statement “my local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together” were less likely to report feeling lonely often/always than those who disagreed (5% compared to 12%).

**Figure 16 How many respondents felt lonely often/always, by whether they agree with the statement “my local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together”, England, 2019/20**



- Respondents who spoke to their neighbours at least once a month were less likely to report feeling lonely often/always than those respondents who never talk to their neighbours (5% compared to 15%).

**Figure 17 How many respondents felt lonely often/always, by how often they speak to their neighbours, England, 2019/20**



- Similar patterns were seen with the indirect questions, with respondents who never spoke to their neighbours more likely to score an 8 or a 9 than respondents who spoke to their neighbours at least once a month (18% compared to 7%).

## 5. Loneliness by social engagement

### Loneliness by how people engage with their friends/family

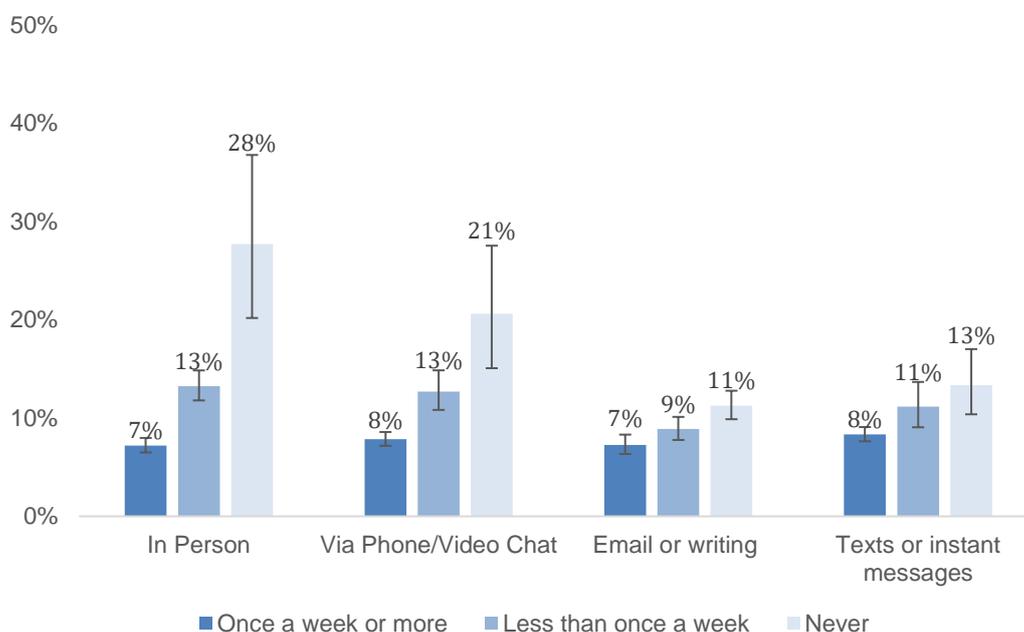
Respondents were asked how often they communicated with family members or friends via a range of methods. Overall, 74% of respondents said they meet up in person at least once a week, 81% speak on the phone/video call/audio call via internet, 37% email or write and 84% exchange texts or instant messages (see [Community Life Survey 2019/20 publication](#) for further detail).

For all engagement methods, those who never engage with family/friends were more likely to report feeling lonely often/always than those who engaged at least once a week.

- Meet up in person with family and friends: 5% of those who reported doing this at least once a week reported feeling lonely often/always, compared with 28% of those who never did this.
- Speak on the phone or video or audio call via the internet with family members and friends: 6% of those who reported doing this at least once a week reported feeling lonely often/always, compared with 16% of those who never did this.
- Email or write to family and friends: 4% of those who reported doing this at least once a week reported feeling lonely often/always, compared with 9% of those who never did this.
- Exchanged texts or instant messages with family or friends: 6% of those who reported doing this at least once a week reported feeling lonely often/always, compared with 11% of those who never did this.

Additionally, respondents who engaged with family/friends less than once a week were more likely to feel lonely often/always than those who engage at least once a week, for all types of engagements.

**Figure 18 How many respondents felt lonely often/always, by types of engagement with family/friends, England, 2019/20**



## Loneliness by quality of social networks

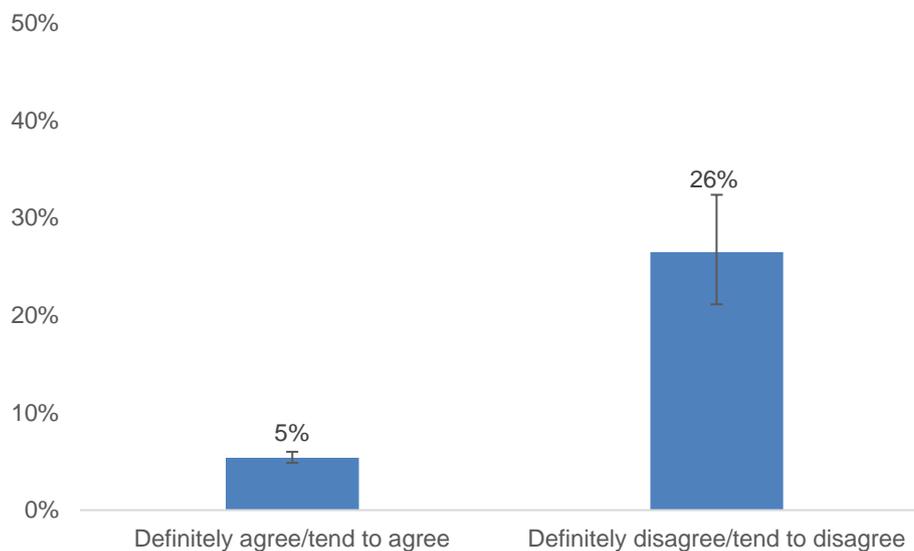
Overall, most respondents said they had someone if they needed support (see [Community Life Survey 2019/20](#) publication):

- 95% agreed that if they needed help there are people who would be there for them
- 92% agreed that if they wanted company or to socialise there are people they could call on
- 95% agreed that there is someone they can really count on to listen when they need to talk

However, the frequency of loneliness differed between those who agreed they had social networks to call or count on, and those who did not.

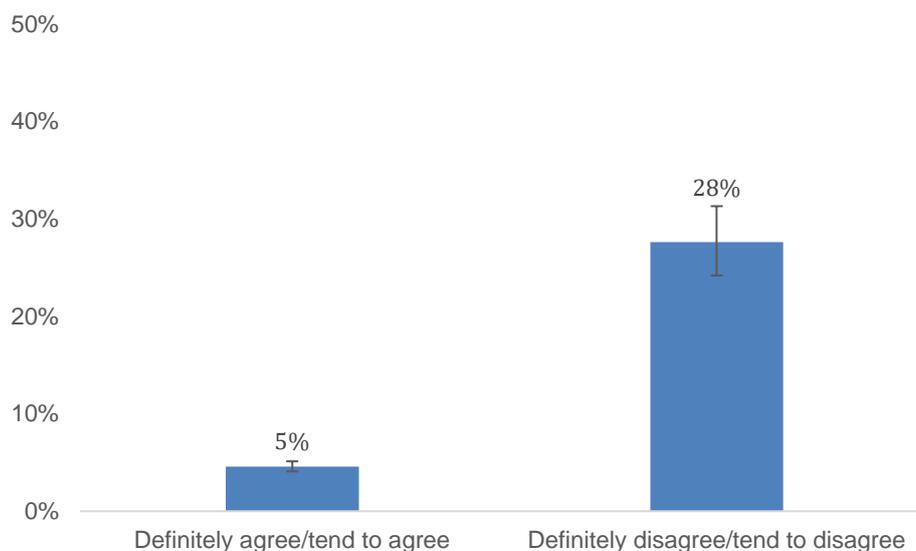
- Respondents who agreed that there are people who would be there for them if they needed help were more likely to report never feeling lonely (22% never feel lonely compared with 11% among those who disagreed).
- On the other hand, those who disagreed were more likely to feel lonely often/always (26% compared with 5% of those who agreed).

**Figure 19 How many respondents felt lonely often/always, by whether they agree/disagree that there are people there for them if they needed help, England, 2019/20**



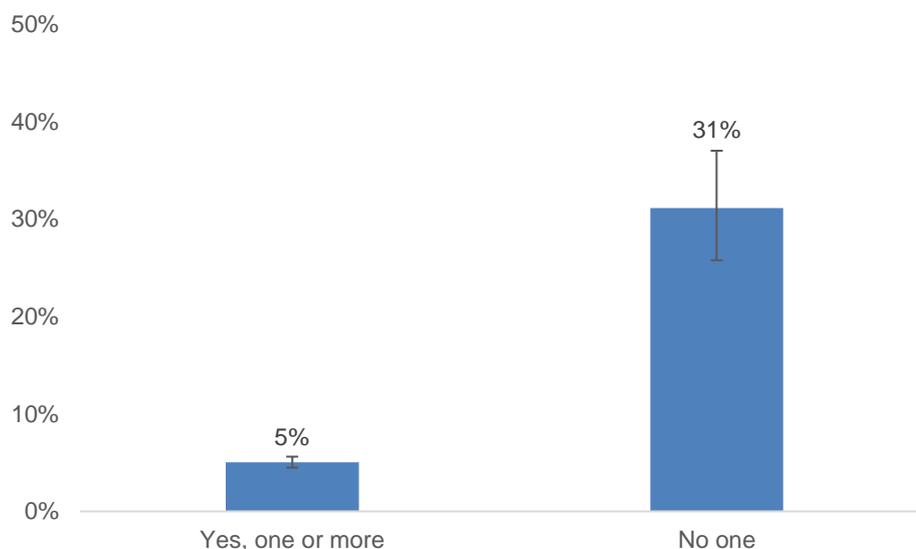
- Those who agreed that if they wanted company or to socialise there are people they can call on, were more likely to report never feeling lonely than those who disagreed (22% compared with 10%).
- Respondents who disagreed were more likely to feel lonely often/always than those who agreed (28% felt lonely often/always compared with 5%).

**Figure 21 How many respondents were often/always feel lonely, by agreement with there being people they can call on if they wanted company or to socialise, England, 2019/20**



- Those who reported having no one they can really count on when they need it were more likely to report feeling lonely often/always than those who had one or more person (31% compared with 5%).
- Those who report having one or more person they can talk to were more likely to report never feeling lonely than those who didn't (21% compared with 9%).

**Figure 22 How many respondents felt lonely often/always, by whether they agree there are people they can really count on to listen to them when they need to talk, England, 2019/20**

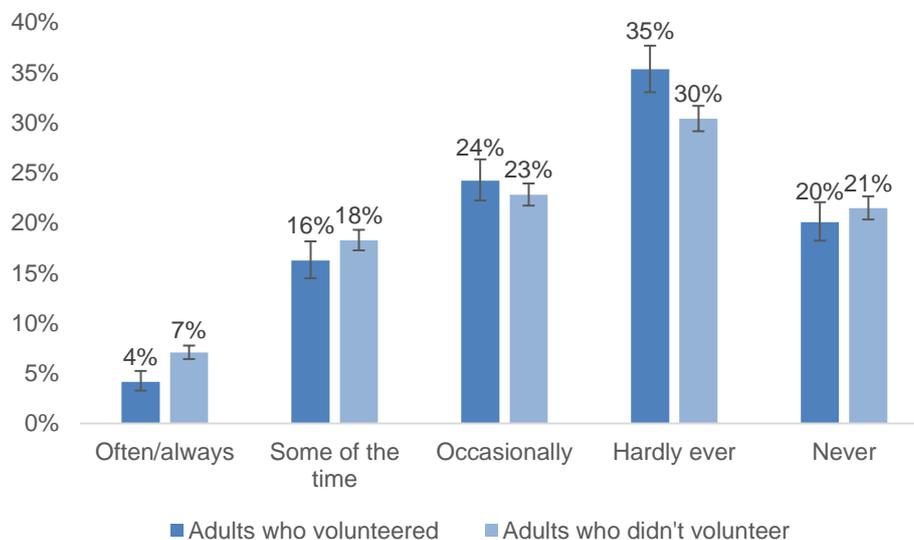


- Similar patterns were seen in the indirect questions if slightly more stark. 41% of respondents who said they had no one they could count on scored an 8 or a 9, compared to 8% who had at least one person.

## 6. Loneliness by volunteering

Those who did formal volunteering at least once a month were less likely to report being lonely often/always than those who did not (4% compared to 7%).<sup>7</sup>

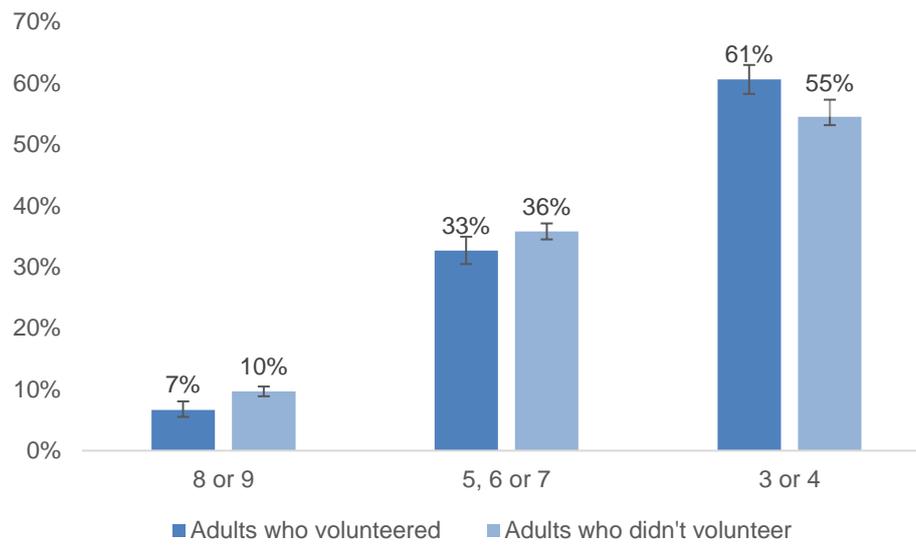
**Figure 23 Responses to the direct loneliness question, by formal volunteering once a month, England, 2019/20**



- Similar patterns were seen with the indirect questions. Those respondents who volunteered at least once a month were less likely to score an 8 or a 9 than those who did not (7% compared to 10%).
- Respondents who volunteered at least once a month were also more likely to score a 3 or a 4 than those who did not (61% compared to 55%)

<sup>7</sup> Formal volunteering is defined as giving unpaid help to groups or clubs, for example, leading a group, administrative support or befriending or mentoring people.

**Figure 23 Responses to the direct loneliness question, by formal volunteering once a month, England, 2019/20**



## 7. Annex A: Background

The Community Life Survey is commissioned by DCMS. The fieldwork is conducted by Kantar Public (formerly TNS-BMRB). It is an annual household survey, conducted via self-completion questionnaire.

1. This release is based on self-completion online/paper questionnaires, completed between June 2019 and March 2020. The exact total sample size for the 2019/20 period was 10,243. Sample sizes for each breakdown can be found in the accompanying tables. All households sampled were invited to complete the survey online with the option to request a paper version. A targeted sample were also sent two paper questionnaires in their second reminder letter. In 2019/20, 2,394 people (23%) completed paper version of the questionnaire and 7,849 (77%) completed the survey online. Due to space limitations in the paper questionnaire booklet, not all questions from the online survey are included in the paper version. This includes information about limiting long term illness/disability and caring responsibility.
2. Stringent quality assurance procedures have been adopted for this statistical release. All data and analysis has been checked and verified by at least two different members of the DCMS team to ensure the highest level of quality. Descriptive statistics have been calculated using complex samples analysis. Upper and lower estimates may vary slightly from analysis using other methodology or different software packages.
3. The upper and lower estimates presented in this report and in the accompanying tables have been calculated using a 95% confidence interval. This means that had the sample been conducted 100 times, creating 100 confidence intervals, then 95 of these intervals would contain the true value. When the sample size is smaller, as is the case for certain groups, the confidence intervals are wider as we can be less certain that the individuals in the sample are representative of the population. This means that it is more difficult to draw inferences from the results.
4. Differences between groups have only been reported on in the text of this report where they are statistically significant at the 95% level. This means that we can be confident that the differences seen in our sampled respondents are reflective of the population. Specifically, the statistical tests used mean we can be confident that if we carried out the same survey on different random samples of the population, 95 times out of 100 we would get similar findings. When sample sizes are smaller we can be less confident in our estimates so differences need to be greater to be considered statistically significant.
5. The responsible analyst for this release is Sam Burthem. For enquiries on this release, please contact Sam at [ocs-analysts@dcms.gov.uk](mailto:ocs-analysts@dcms.gov.uk).