



## Community Life Survey: Focus on Loneliness 2017-18

This report expands upon the 2017-18 Community Life Survey statistical release and loneliness fact sheet, providing additional demographic breakdowns, and looking at estimated levels of loneliness against other key survey measures.

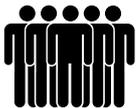
### Key findings:



Overall 6% of adults said they often/always feel lonely...



...and 23% said they never feel lonely.



16-34 year olds were more likely to report feeling often/always lonely than those aged over 50.



Across most age groups, men were more likely to say they 'never' feel lonely than women.



Adults with stronger social networks were less likely to say they often/always feel lonely.



Adults who feel people in their local area can be trusted, who regularly chat to their neighbours or who feel like they belong to their neighbourhood and/or Britain were less likely to say they often/always feel lonely.

**Note:** Differences between groups and over time are only reported on where they are statistically significant, i.e. where we can be confident that the differences seen in our sampled respondents reflect the population

### About

The Community Life Survey is a household self-completion study of adults aged 16+ in England. The survey is a key evidence source on social cohesion, community engagement and social action.

Estimates presented in this report are based on data collected between August 2017 and March 2018.

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# Introduction

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This report builds upon the Community Life Survey 2017-18 statistical release, including further information about adults' (aged 16+) experiences of loneliness. Respondents are asked the question 'how often do you feel lonely' and are asked to select one of five responses: 'often/always', 'some of the time', 'occasionally', 'hardly ever' or 'never'. This gives estimates about the frequency of loneliness but not about the intensity of loneliness.

In October 2018, the Prime Minister launched the government's first loneliness strategy for England, '[A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness](#)', with a commitment to tackle loneliness among all ages. To support the strategy's aims to build the evidence base on loneliness, this report includes further demographic breakdowns across different age groups, as well as looking at levels of loneliness split by some of the survey's other key measures.

**Note:** The analysis in this report comments on differences between groups, but does not determine causality, nor does it take into account how the combination of multiple factors might lead to feelings of loneliness.

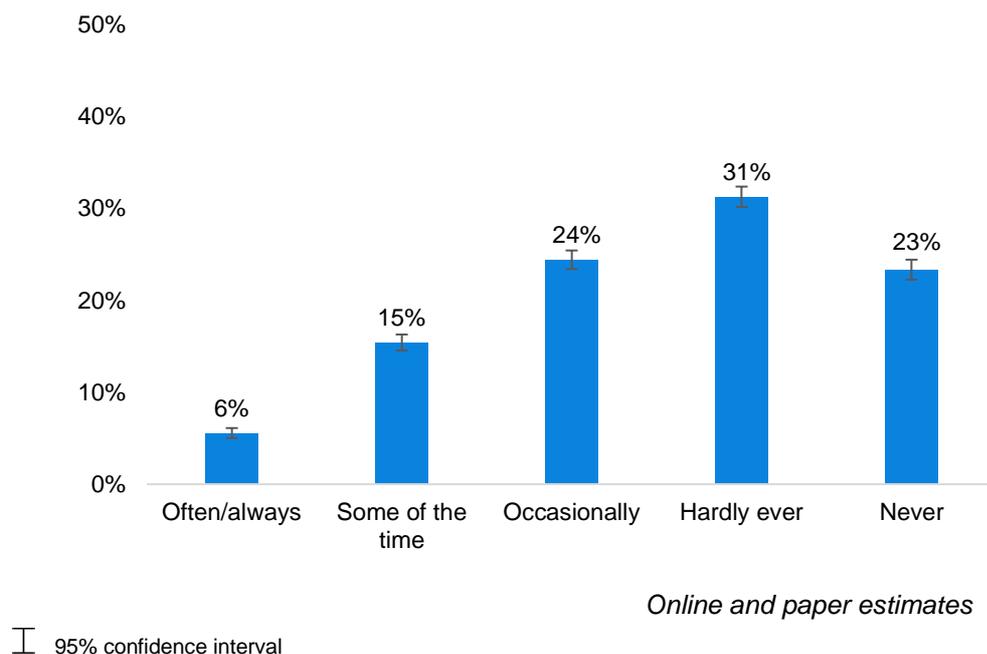
There are likely to be interactions between different demographics and measures reported in this publication. For example, younger people have different responses to neighbourhood engagement measures than older people. This report largely focuses on individual characteristics and responses, so differences cited here cannot necessarily be attributed directly to the characteristics outlined in this report.

# Chapter 1: Experiences of loneliness across age groups by gender, disability and caring responsibility

## 1.1 Overall findings

The 2017-18 Community Life Survey annual publication provided headline figures on loneliness, and showed that 6% of adults (16+) in England reported often/always feeling lonely, while 23% said they never feel lonely. This has remained broadly consistent since 2013-2014.

**Figure 1.1 Percentage of adults giving the following responses when asked ‘how often do you feel lonely?’**



### What is a 95% confidence interval?

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.

Looking at gender, men were more likely than women to say they never feel lonely (27% compared with 20%).

Looking at age, 16-24 and 25-34 year olds were more likely to report feeling often/always lonely (both 8%) than 50-64 year olds (5%), and over 65 year olds (both 3%). In addition, 16-24 and 25-34 year olds were also less likely to say they never feel lonely than all other age groups.

### Loneliness among children and young people

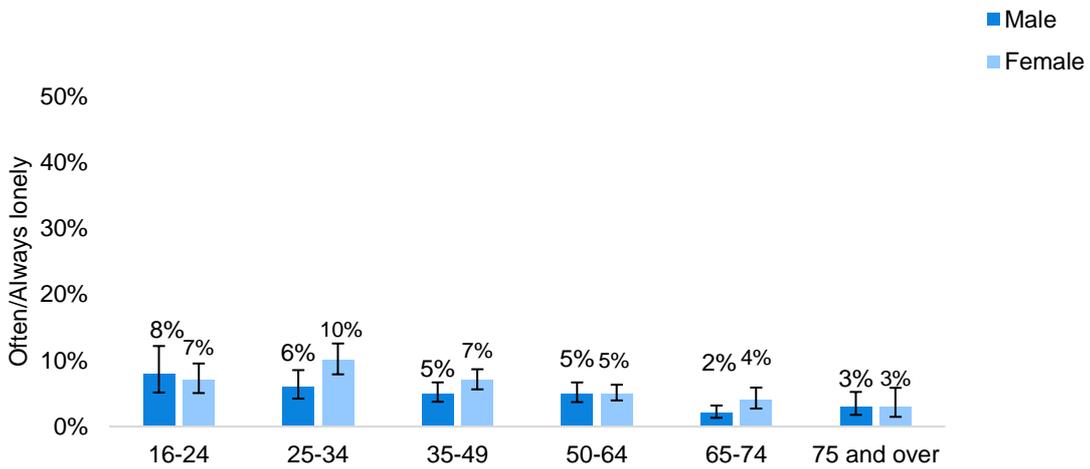
In December 2018, the Office for National Statistics published analysis of children's and young people's views, experiences and suggestions to overcome loneliness<sup>1</sup>, using in-depth interviews, the Community Life Survey 2016 - 17 and Good Childhood Index Survey, 2018. The full report can be found [here](#). (Please note statistics in the report from the Community Life Survey will differ to those found here as the data are taken from different survey years)

<sup>1</sup>Office for National Statistics (2018) Children's and young people's experiences of loneliness: 2018 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/childrensandyoungpeoplesexperiencesofloneliness/2018> [Accessed online 19/12/2018]

## 1.2 Loneliness by age and gender

The percentage of men and women who said they feel lonely often/always was similar in each age group.

**Figure 1.2** The percentage of adults who reported feeling lonely often/always split by age and gender

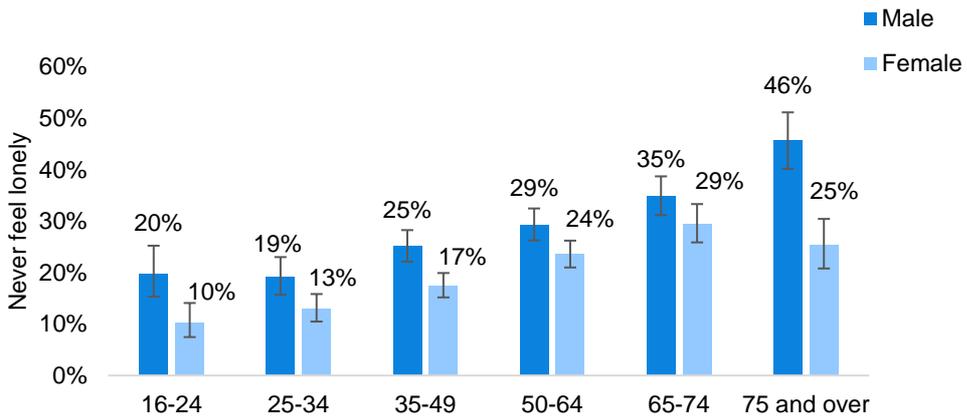


*Online and paper estimates*

┆ 95% confidence interval

Across all the age-groups apart from 65-74 year olds, men tended to be more likely to say they never feel lonely than women.

**Figure 1.3** The percentage of adults who reported never feeling lonely split by age and gender



*Online and paper estimates*

┆ 95% confidence interval

### 1.3 Loneliness by age and caring responsibility

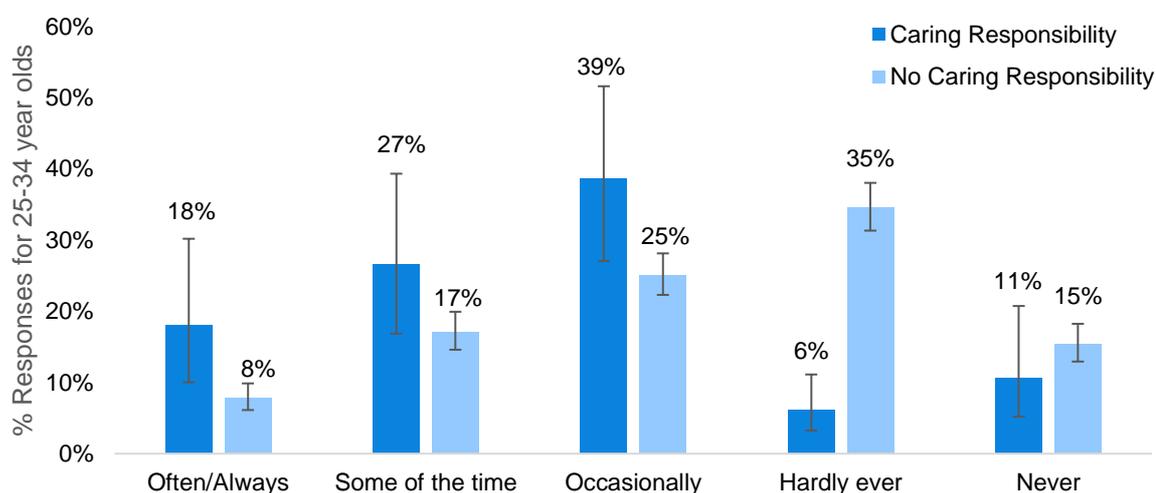
Overall, in 2017-18 there were no significant differences in the percentage of people who reported feeling lonely often/always between those who have a caring responsibility (7%) and those who do not (6%).

Among those aged 25-34 years old, those who reported having a caring responsibility were less likely to report 'hardly ever' feeling lonely than those without a caring responsibility (6% compared with 35% among those without caring responsibilities).

#### Loneliness among carers

Carers UK 'State of Caring' 2017 survey of 7,286 carers and former carers, found that 81% of carers have felt lonely or socially isolated as a result of their caring role, rising to nearly 86% of carers providing 50 hours or more a week<sup>2</sup>. Further information about the experiences of carers can be found in the full report [here](#).

**Figure 1.4** The percentage of reported loneliness levels in adults aged 25-34 split by whether they have a caring responsibility or no caring responsibility.



┆ 95% confidence interval

Online estimates only

**Note:** In April 2018 [The Office for National Statistics](#) conducted logistic regression analysis using the 2016-17 survey data, and found that when holding all other factors constant (e.g. age, gender) caring responsibility had a significant impact on loneliness<sup>3</sup>.

Estimates in this 'Focus on Loneliness' report for those with caring responsibilities are based on small sample sizes in some age groups. This means it is difficult to detect differences between groups and estimates may be less accurate. In addition it is possible that the complex interaction of multiple factors makes it difficult to detect the impact of caring responsibility.

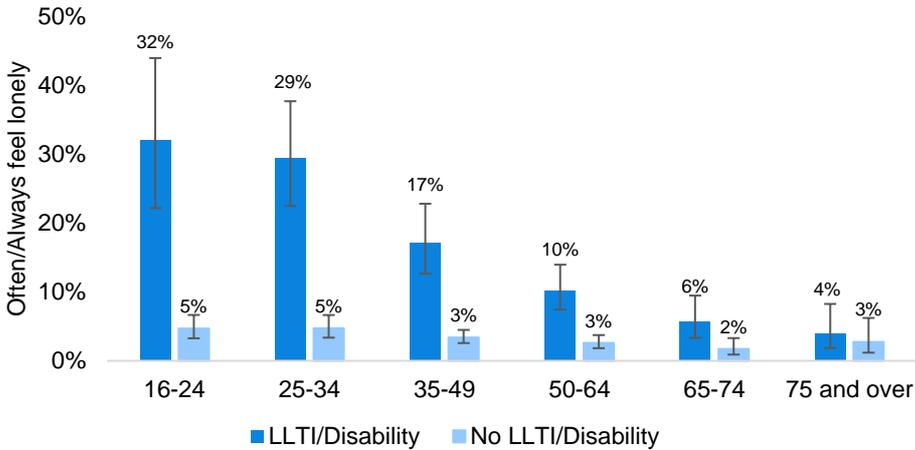
<sup>2</sup> Carers UK (2017) The world shrinks: Carer Loneliness [Online] <https://www.carersuk.org/for-professionals/policy/policy-library/the-world-shrinks-carer-loneliness-research-report> [Accessed online 14/12/2018]

<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics (2018) Loneliness - What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely? <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/lonelinesswhatcharacteristicsandcircumstancesareassociatedwithfeelinglonely/2018-04-10> [Accessed online 14/12/2018]

Overall, adults with a limiting long-term illness or disability were more likely to report feeling lonely often/always than those without (13% compared with 3%) and less likely to say they never feel lonely (16% compared with 24%).

When looking at experiences among different age groups, adults with a limiting long term illness or disability across most age categories were more likely to report often/always feeling lonely than those without (see figure 1.5). However, rates were similar for those aged 75 or over. The estimates indicate that the impact of having a limiting long-term illness or disability on a person’s feeling of loneliness may be greater among younger age groups than older age groups.

**Figure 1.5** The percentage of adults who often/always feel lonely by limiting long term illness (LLTI)/ disability and age group



⊥ 95% confidence interval

*Online estimates only*

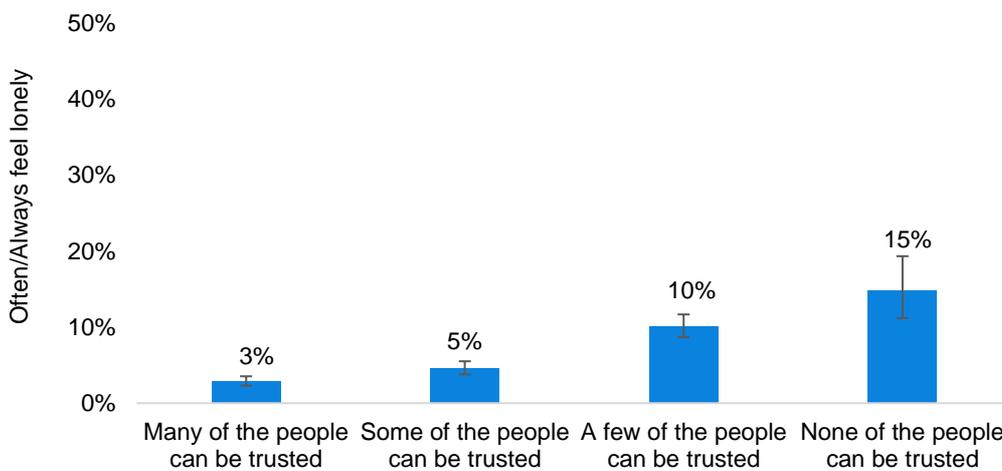
**Note:** Estimates for those with a limited long term illness/disability are based on small sample sizes in some age groups. This means it is difficult to detect differences between groups and estimates may be less accurate

# Chapter 2: Loneliness by community engagement

## 2.1 Loneliness and trust in neighbours

People who said they feel that none or a few of the people in their local area can be trusted were more likely to say they feel lonely often/always (15% and 10% reported feeling often/always lonely respectively) than those who feel some or many of the people in their local area can be trusted (of whom 5% and 3% reported feeling often/always lonely respectively).

**Figure 2.1** The percentage of adults who often/always feel lonely split by levels of trust in people in local area



┆ 95% confidence interval

Online and paper estimates

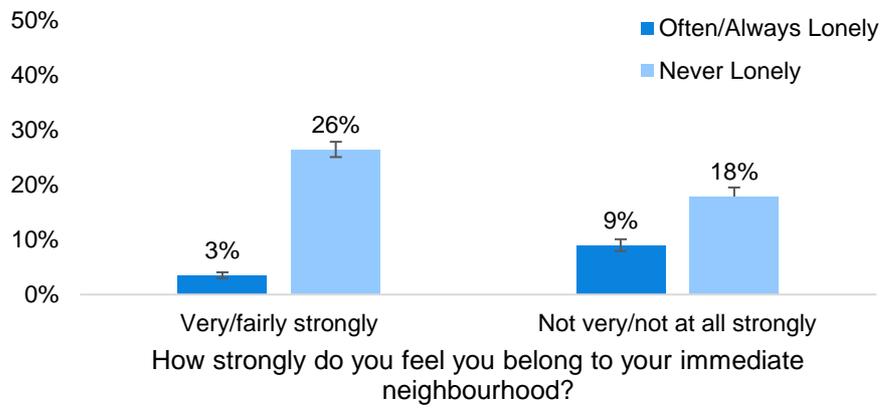
## 2.2 Loneliness and feeling of belonging to neighbourhood or to Britain

When asked how strongly they feel they belong to their immediate neighbourhood, those who answered 'not very strongly' or 'not at all strongly' were more likely to say they feel lonely often/always than those who answered 'fairly strongly' or 'very strongly' (9% compared with 3%) and were less likely to say they 'never' feel lonely (18% compared with 26%).

Analysis in the 2017-18 Community Life Survey publication showed that younger age groups (16-34 year olds) were less likely to say they feel they belonged to their immediate neighbourhood than older age groups. Given that younger people are also more likely to report feelings of loneliness (see chapter 1), there is likely to be some overlap between these variables.

Similarly, when asked how strongly they feel they belong to Britain, those who answered 'not very strongly' or 'not at all strongly' were more likely to say they feel lonely often/always than those who answered 'fairly strongly' or 'very strongly' (10% compared with 5%) and were less likely to say they 'never' feel lonely (18% compared with 23%).

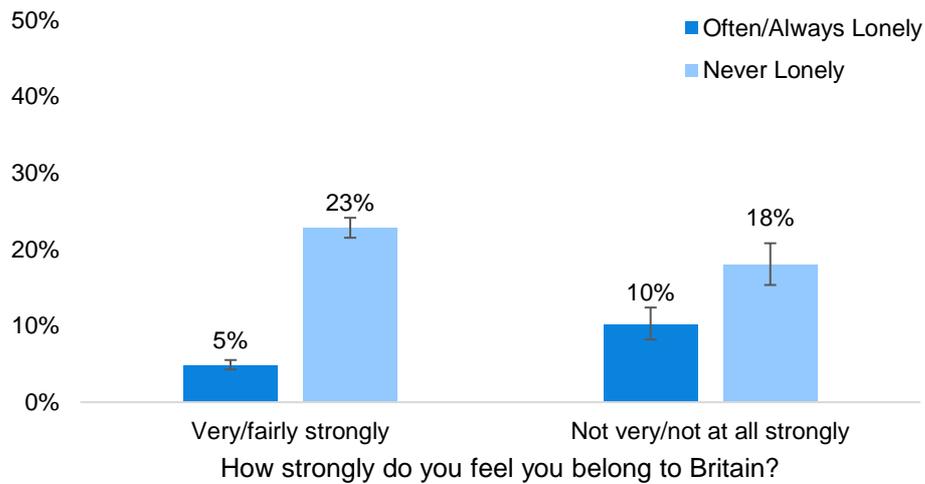
**Figure 2.2** The percentage of adults who often/always feel lonely, or who never feel lonely split by feeling of belonging to neighbourhood



I 95% confidence interval

Online and paper estimates

**Figure 2.3** The percentage of adults who often/always feel lonely, or who never feel lonely split by feeling of belonging to Britain



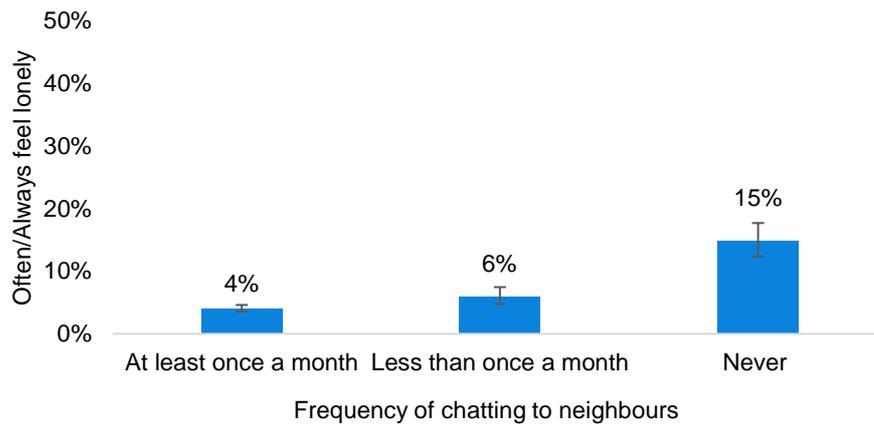
I 95% confidence interval

Online estimates only

### 2.3 Loneliness, interaction with neighbours and attitudes towards local neighbourhood

Adults who said they never chat to their neighbours were more likely to report feeling lonely often/always than those who said they chat to their neighbours at least once a month or less than once a month (15% compared with 4% and 6%). Analysis in the 2017-18 Community Life Survey publication found that younger people were less likely to chat to their neighbours regularly than older people. Again, as chapter 1 shows that young people were more likely to feel lonely often/always than older people, there is likely to be some interaction between these three variables.

**Figure 2.4** The percentage of adults who often/always feel lonely split by frequency of chatting to neighbours

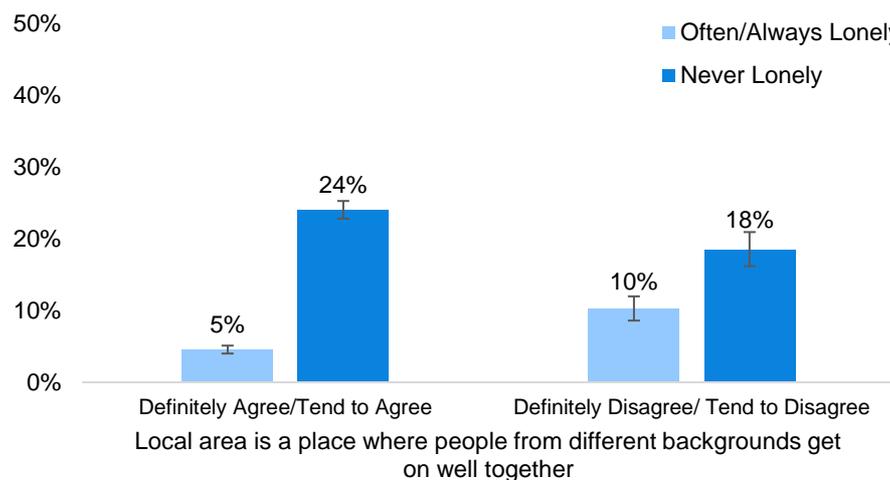


I 95% confidence interval

Online and paper estimates

Those who agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together were less likely to feel lonely often/always (5% compared with 10%) and more likely to never feel lonely than those who disagree (24% compared with 18%).

**Figure 2.5** The percentage of adults who often/always feel lonely, or who never feel lonely split by whether people agree/disagree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together

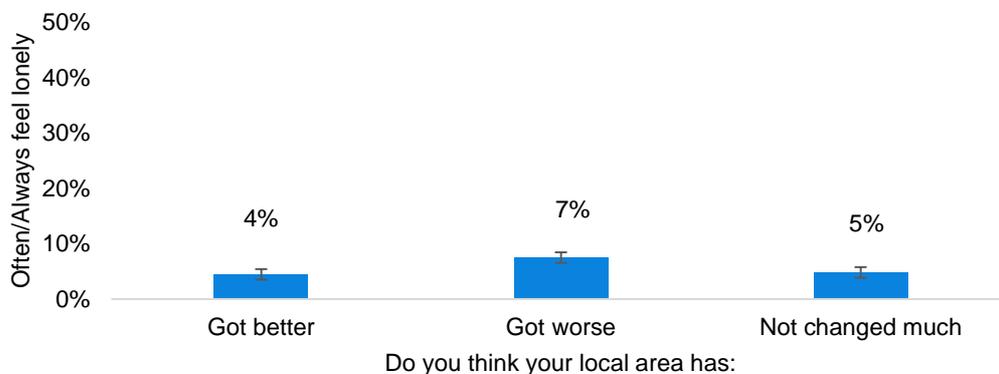


I 95% confidence interval

Online and paper estimates

Further, people who said they think their area had got worse in the two years prior to interview were more likely to say they feel lonely often/always than those who think it has got better or those who think it hasn't changed much (7% compared with 4% and 5% respectively).

**Figure 2.6 The percentage of adults who often/always feel lonely by whether someone believes their area has got better, worse or unchanged**



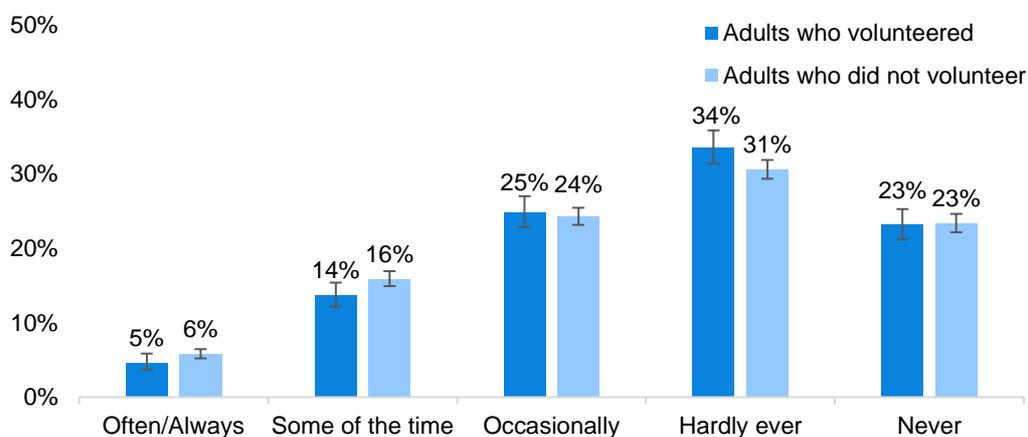
┆ 95% confidence interval

Online and paper estimates

## 2.4 Loneliness by age and volunteering engagement

Frequency of loneliness between those who engaged in formal volunteering at least once a month and those who did not were similar in 2017-18. There were no significant differences overall in the percentage who often/always feel lonely or who never feel lonely between those who engaged in regular formal volunteering and those who did not. This remained the case when split by age groups.

**Figure 2.7 The percentage of reported loneliness levels in adults (all ages) split by whether they volunteered formally at least once a month or not**



**Formal volunteering** is defined in the Community Life Survey as giving unpaid help to groups such as clubs or

┆ 95% confidence interval

Online and paper estimates

**Volunteering and loneliness among older age groups:** In 2018, the Centre for Ageing Better published a report<sup>4</sup> that reviewed community contributions among older people. The review highlights the benefits of all forms of community contributions, including formal volunteering, on people's life satisfaction, happiness and well-being. There was some qualitative evidence in the review that volunteering has positive impacts on people's loneliness levels. The full report can be found [here](https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-11/Age-friendly-and-inclusive-volunteering-review-2018.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Centre for Ageing Better (2018) Age friendly and inclusive volunteering: Review of community contributions in later life. <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-11/Age-friendly-and-inclusive-volunteering-review-2018.pdf>

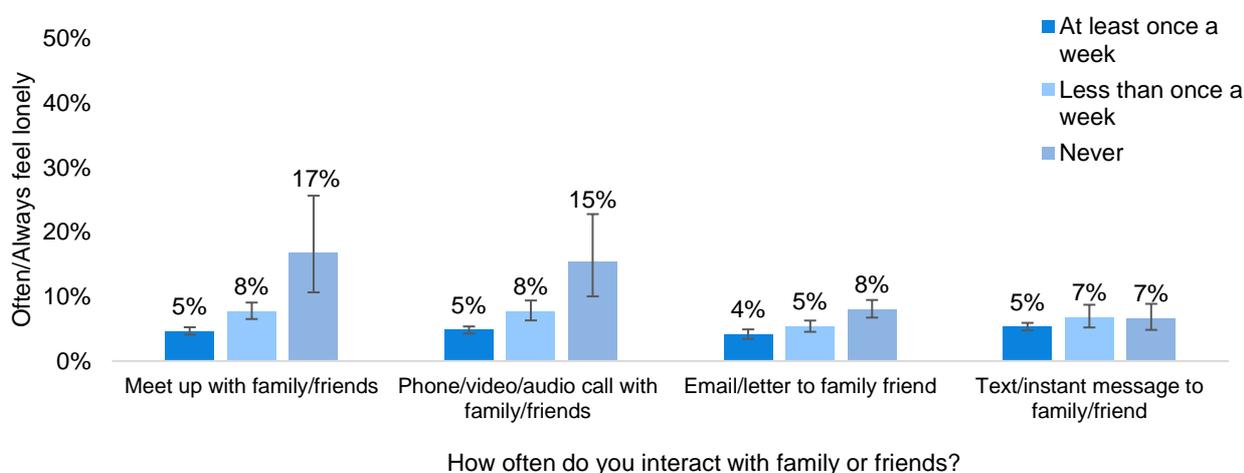
# Chapter 3: Loneliness and social engagement

## 3.1 Loneliness by social engagement

Participants were asked how often they communicated with family members or friends via a range of methods. Overall, 73% of people said they meet up in person at least once a week, 80% speak on the phone/video call/audio call via internet, 38% email or write and 82% exchange texts or instant messages (see Community Life Survey 2017-18 publication).

For all engagement methods (with the exception of text or instant messages), those who never engage with family/friends were more likely to report feeling often/always lonely than those who engaged at least once a week.

**Figure 3.1 The percentage of adults who often/always feel lonely split by types of engagement with family/friends**



I 95% confidence interval

Online and paper estimates

## 3.2 Loneliness by social networks

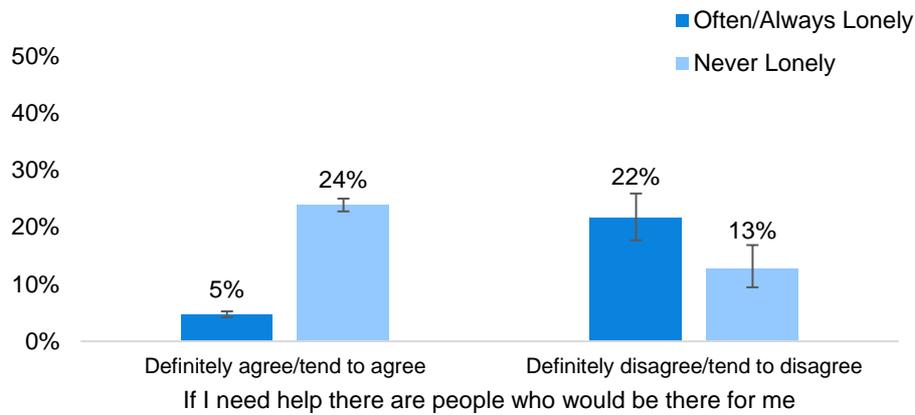
Overall, most people said they had someone if they needed support (see Community life Survey 2017-18 publication):

- 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
- 96% 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.

Adults who agreed that there are people who would be there for them if they needed help were more likely to say they never feel lonely (24% never feel lonely compared with 13% among those who disagreed). On the other hand, adults who disagreed that people who would be there for them were more likely to feel lonely often/always (22% compared with 5% of those who agreed) (see figure 3.2).

**Figure 3.2** The percentage of adults who often/always feel lonely, or who never feel lonely split by whether people agree/disagree that there are people there for them if they needed help

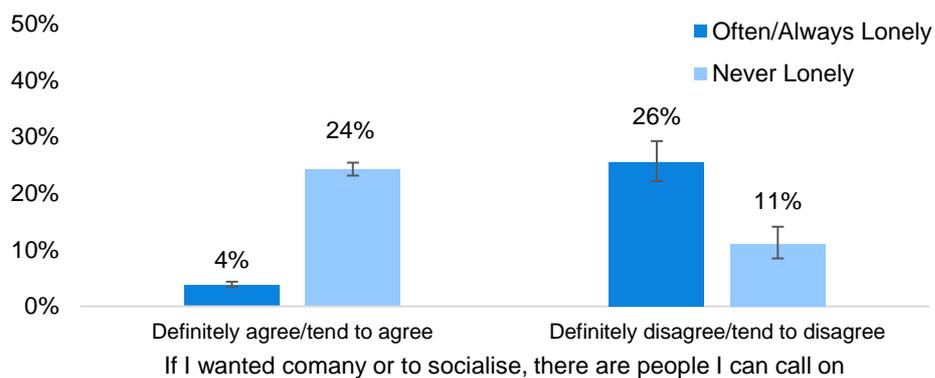


I 95% confidence interval

Online and paper estimates

Also, 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 disagree (24% compared with 11%), and people who disagreed were more likely to feel lonely often/always than those who agreed (26% felt lonely often/always compared with 4%).

**Figure 3.3** The percentage of adults who often/always feel lonely, or who never feel lonely split by whether people agree there are people they can call on if they wanted company or to socialise

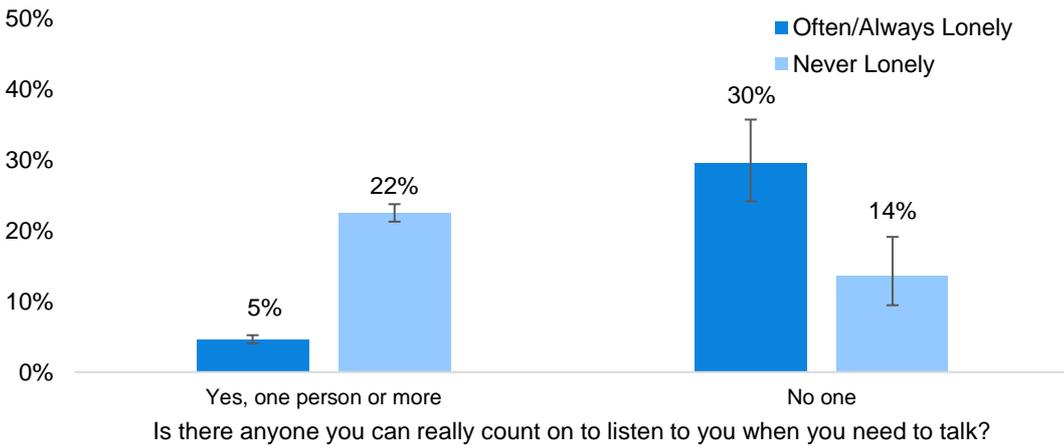


I 95% confidence interval

Online and paper estimates

Finally, adults 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 (30% compared with 5%), and those who report having one or more people they can talk to were more likely to report never feeling lonely than those who didn't (22% compared with 14%).

**Figure 3.4** The percentage of adults who often/always feel lonely, or who never feel lonely split by whether people agree there are people they can really count on to listen to them when they need to talk



I 95% confidence interval

Online estimates only

## Annex A: Background

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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 August 2017 and March 2018. The exact total sample size for the 2017-18 period was 10,217. 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 2017-18, 2,659 people (26%) completed paper version of the questionnaire and 7,558 (74%) 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. Further analysis on loneliness using the data collected in the 2016-17 Community Life Survey has been conducted by ONS, producing both the 'Loneliness - What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?' article published April 2018 and 'Children's and young people's experiences of loneliness: 2018' published December 2018.
6. Information about volunteering is also collected in the DCMS Taking Part Survey. This asks about volunteering in a different way to estimates can differ to those from the Community Life Survey. Statistics from the Community Life Survey should be used for headline measures of volunteering, while Taking Part can be used to understand volunteering in the DCMS sectors.
7. The responsible statistician for this release is Rosanna White. For enquiries on this release, please contact Rosanna at [evidence@culture.gov.uk](mailto:evidence@culture.gov.uk).



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