

AUSTRALIAN LONELINESS REPORT

A survey exploring the loneliness
levels of Australians and the impact
on their health and wellbeing



**Psychology
Week 2018**

11-17 NOVEMBER

The power of human connection

Overview

Loneliness is a growing concern globally, because of its reported impact on health and wellbeing.

As part of Psychology Week 2018, the Australian Psychological Society is addressing loneliness with a campaign to help people to connect and thrive. More information about the “Power of Human Connection” campaign is available at psychweek.org.au.

As part of the campaign, the Australian Psychological Society and Swinburne University have produced *The Australian Loneliness Report*, based on a national survey of adults. This examines the prevalence of loneliness and how it affects the physical and mental health of Australians. It is the most comprehensive study of loneliness completed in Australia.

It is the latest in a series of surveys conducted by the Australian Psychological Society to examine issues affecting the wellbeing of Australians.

About loneliness

Loneliness is a feeling of distress people experience when their social relations are not the way they would like. It is a personal feeling of social isolation. It is different to feeling alone: we can be surrounded by others but still lonely, or we can be alone but not feel lonely.

Loneliness may be a sign that a person's relationships are inadequate or don't meet their expectations or needs.

As humans are essentially social animals, loneliness is thought to arise because an innate need to belong to a group is unmet. Loneliness signals a need to form a meaningful connection with others.

Research has found that loneliness is related more to the quality than the quantity of relationships. A lonely person feels that their relationships are not meaningful and that he or she is not understood by others.

References

Lim, M. H., Rodebaugh, T. L., Zyphur, M. J., & Gleeson, J. F. (2016). Loneliness over time: The crucial role of social anxiety. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 125(5), 620.

About the survey

- This 30-minute online survey explored loneliness and the physical and mental health of Australian adults. The survey fieldwork was conducted by research staff within Swinburne University (led by Dr Michelle Lim) and the Australian Psychological Society, with assistance with recruitment from Pureprofile, an independent research company.
- A national sample of Australian adults ($n=1678$), including a nationally representative sample of 500 adults, were asked to answer an online survey about their wellbeing between 29 May 2018 and 1 October 2018.
- The data presented has been selected on the basis of a preliminary analysis of noteworthy findings. The survey continues to be run by Swinburne University to track loneliness levels over time.

Note: Further information on the specific scales, demographics and methodology used in this survey are provided in the appendices.

Survey highlights

- One in four Australian adults are lonely.
- One in two (50.5%) Australians feel lonely for at least one day in a week, while one in four (27.6%) feel lonely for three or more days.
- Nearly 55% of the population feel they lack companionship at least sometimes.
- One in four Australians experience high levels of social interaction anxiety¹.
- Australians who are married are the least lonely, compared to those who are single, separated or divorced. Australians in a de facto relationship are also less lonely than those who are single or divorced.
- Lonely Australians have significantly worse health status (both physical and mental) than connected Australians.
- Lonely Australians are 15.2% more likely to be depressed and 13.1% more likely to be anxious about social interactions than those not lonely.
- Australians over 65 years are least lonely; other age groups experience similar levels of loneliness.
- Australians over 65 years also report better physical and mental health, lower levels of social interaction anxiety, fewer depression symptoms and greater social interaction than younger Australians.
- Younger adults report significantly more social interaction anxiety than older Australians.
- Higher levels of loneliness are associated with higher levels of social interaction anxiety, less social interaction, poorer psychological wellbeing and poorer quality of life.

1. See appendices for a definition of social interaction anxiety.

AUSTRALIANS' LEVELS OF LONELINESS

While most Australians are well connected within their environment, this doesn't stop them from feeling alone. Many experience difficulties with social interactions and feel socially isolated.

How lonely are Australians?

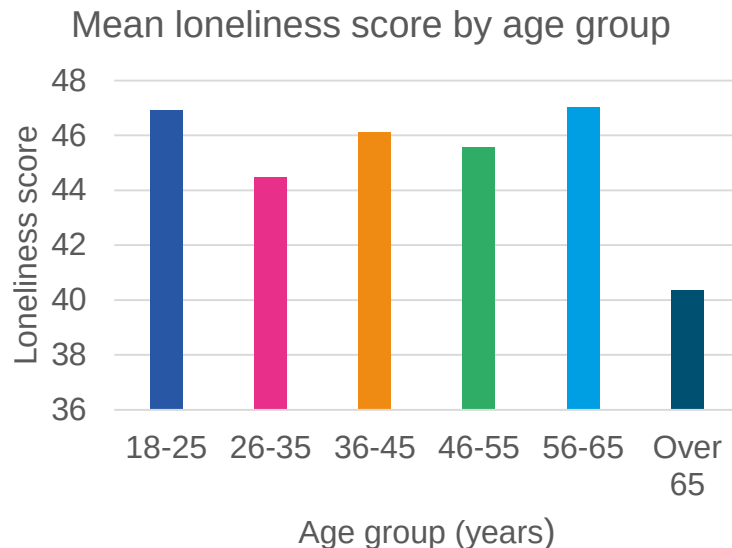
One in four Australian adults experience loneliness¹. The oldest Australians (over 65 years) are the least lonely; there are no differences between other age categories in loneliness levels.

Those Australians who are married are the least lonely compared to those who are single, separated or divorced. Australians in a de facto relationship are also less lonely than those who are not.

- Loneliness was measured with the UCLA Loneliness Scale – Version 3, a comprehensive gold standard measure of loneliness, with a range from 20-80.
- The average loneliness score for the whole sample was 45.16.
- There were no differences in loneliness by gender.
- When directly asked how lonely they felt² 50.5% Australians reported that they felt lonely for at least a day in the previous week; 27.6% felt lonely for three or more days.

1. Loneliness prevalence – see appendices.

2. Direct question about loneliness came from the Centre for Epidemiological Studies – Depression scale: how often during the last week respondents “felt lonely”. Response options: Less than 1 day, 1-2 days, 3-4 days, 5-7 days.



How many Australians experience characteristics of loneliness?

Half of those surveyed (50%) sometimes or always feel alone. Nearly 55% of the population feel they lack companionship at least sometimes. This number is highest in young adults (62%) compared to seniors (46%).

Proportion of Australians experiencing characteristics of loneliness



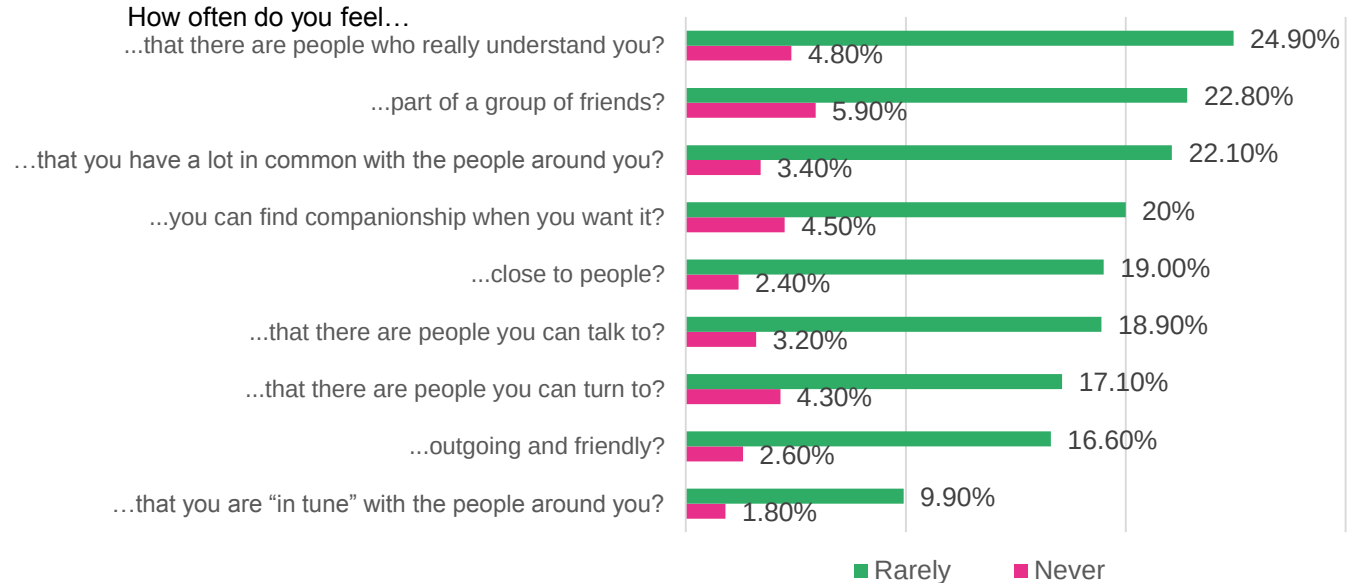
Q. For each statement, please indicate how often you feel the way described? A: Never, rarely, sometimes, always.

How many Australians experience characteristics of loneliness?

Nearly 30% of Australians rarely or never feel part of a group of friends. One in four (25.5%) do not feel they have a lot in common with the people around them.

One in five (21.4%) rarely or never feel close to people, rarely or never feel they have someone to talk to (22.1%) and don't feel they have people they can turn to (21.4%). Nearly a quarter (24.5%) say they can't find companionship when they want it.

Proportion of Australians experiencing characteristics of loneliness



Q. For each statement, please indicate how often you feel the way described? A: Never, rarely, sometimes, always.

LONELINESS AND HEALTH

Lonely Australians not only report poorer mental and physical health and quality of life, but their higher level of anxiety about social interaction, less frequent social interaction, and more frequent experience of negative emotions and depression symptoms can make it difficult to overcome loneliness.

How does loneliness affect physical and mental health?

Australians with higher¹ levels of loneliness have significantly worse physical and mental health than those with lower levels of loneliness.

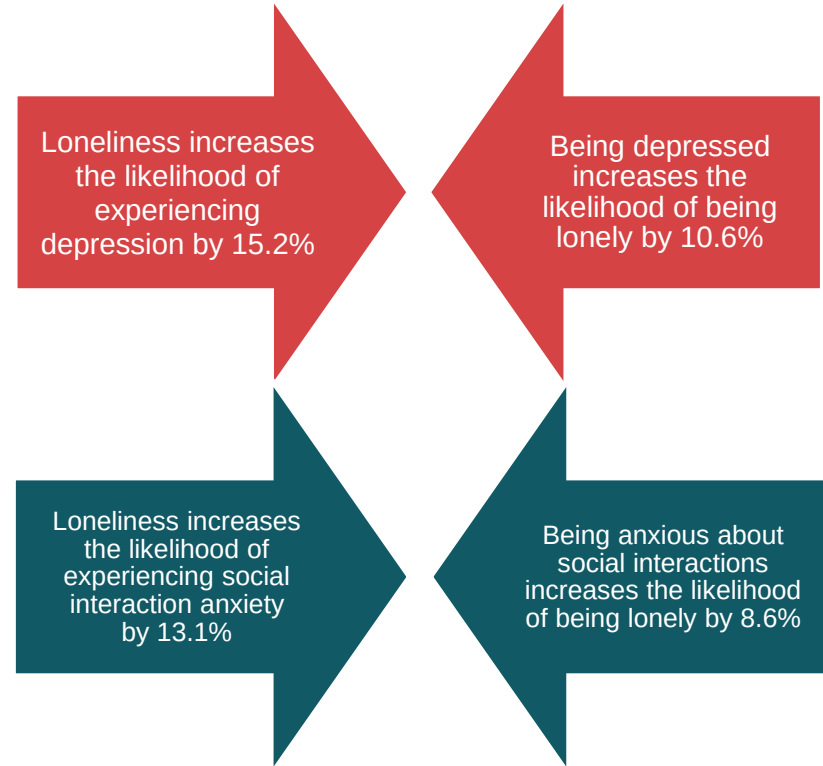
Compared to non-lonely people lonely people have/are...
More anxious about social interactions
More depression symptoms
Less social interaction with family, friends and neighbours
Poorer psychological health
More negative emotions
Fewer positive emotions
Poorer overall quality of life
More likely to suppress their emotions
Less likely to be able to change the way they think about a difficult situation
Poorer physical health

1. Level of loneliness calculated by “Visual Binning” approach in the statistical software used, which groups people into even size groups based on their score on a continuous variable. Specifically, low, moderate and high levels of loneliness were based on the following score ranges on the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3): Low risk = score 20-40, Moderate risk = score 41-51, High risk = 52-80.

How does being lonely increase the risk of mental health problems?

Loneliness has a substantial impact on the chances of being depressed and anxious about social interactions.

Experiencing depression and social interaction anxiety also increases the chance of being lonely.



Q. For each statement, please indicate how often you feel the way described? A: Never, rarely, sometimes, always.

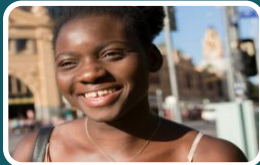
How does loneliness and health status vary with age and gender?

Older Australians (over 65 years) are less lonely than younger Australians, and also report better physical and mental health.



Australians over 65 (compared to younger Australians) report:

- Less loneliness
- Better psychological wellbeing
- Less social interaction anxiety
- Fewer depression symptoms
- Better physical health
- Greater social interaction



Younger adults (compared to adults over 35) report:

- More social interaction anxiety (among 18-35 year olds)
- More depression symptoms (among 18-25 year olds)

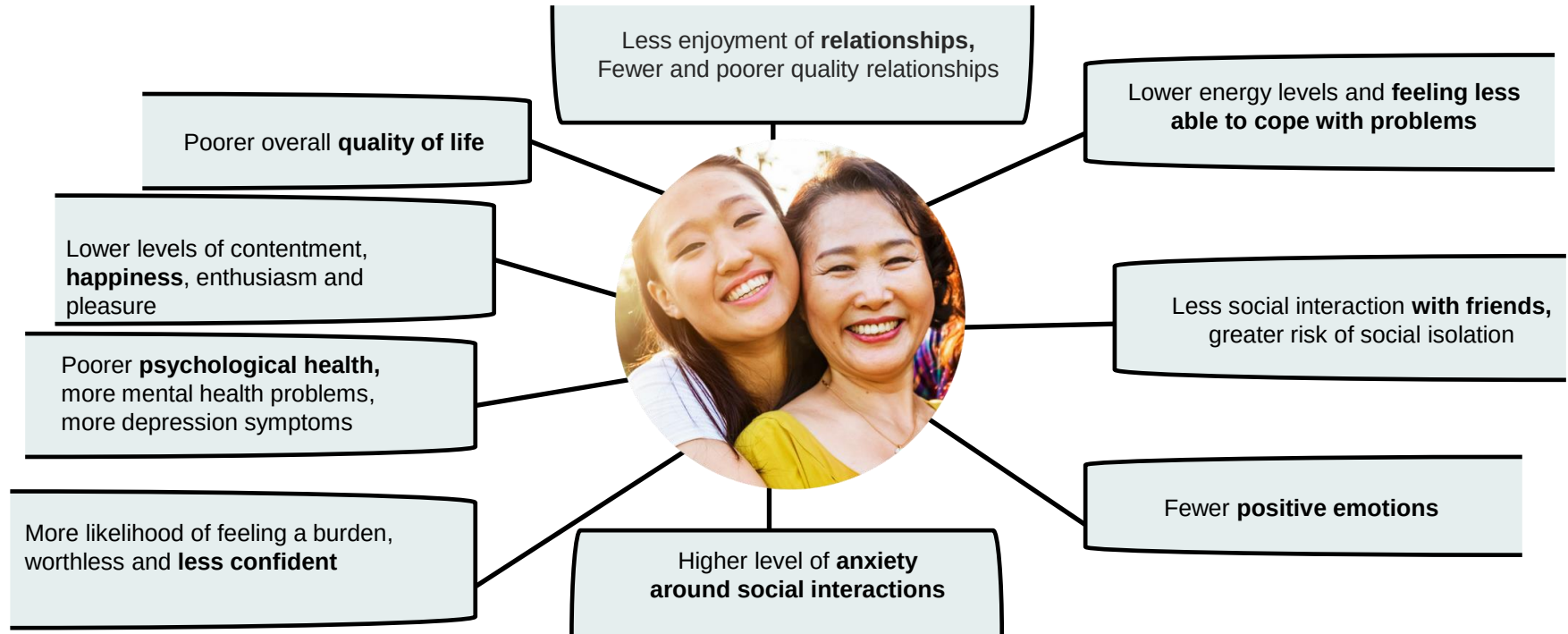


Males (compared to females) report:

- Less social interaction
- Better physical health

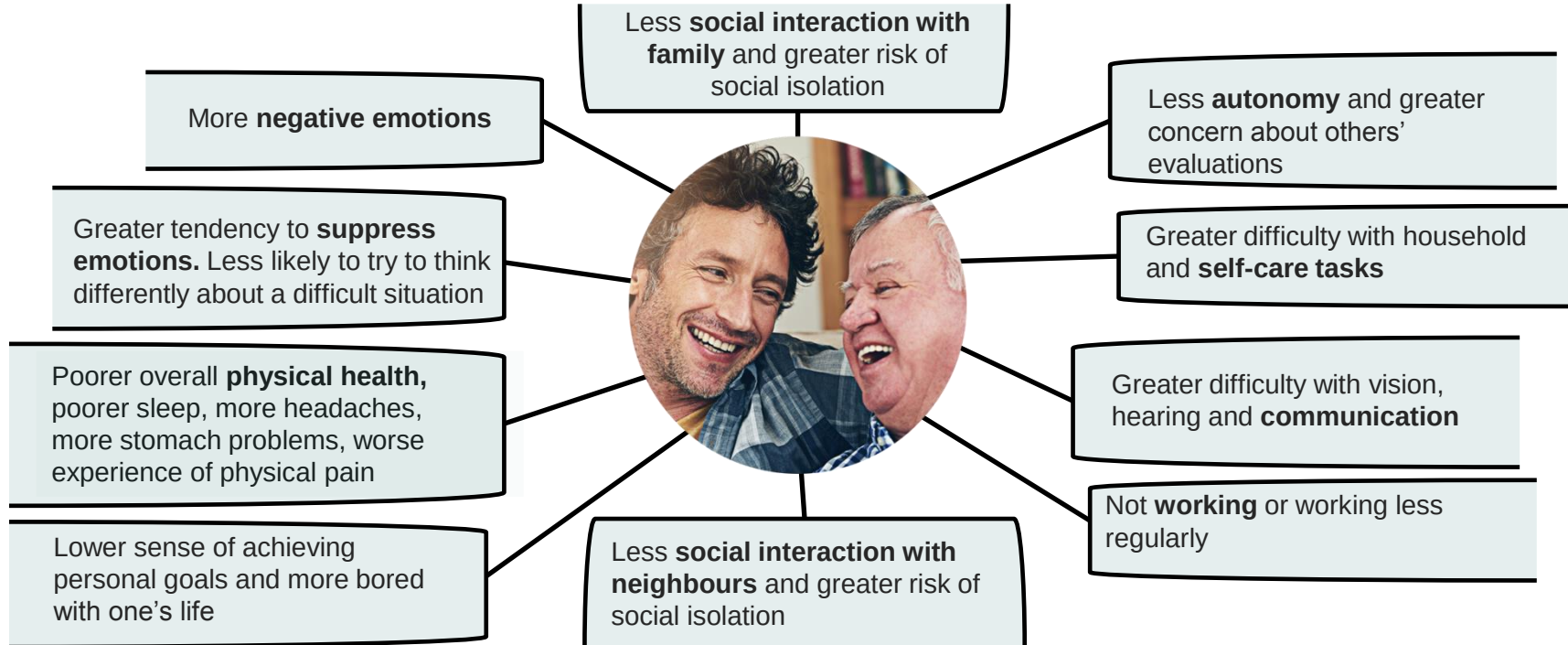
What factors are associated with loneliness?

Higher levels of loneliness are associated with...



What factors are associated with loneliness?

Higher levels of loneliness are associated with...



AUSTRALIANS' LEVELS OF ANXIETY ABOUT SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Anxiety about social interactions is common among Australian adults. The most challenging social situations include meeting people at parties, talking to unfamiliar people and speaking with someone in authority.

Are Australians anxious about social interactions?

One in four (24%) Australians experience high levels of social interaction anxiety. One in two (51%) report sometimes feeling shy, while 11% report that they always feel shy.

% of Australians reporting statements as very or extremely characteristic of them¹

42% are <i>(not at all or only slightly)</i> at ease meeting people at parties.
39% <i>(do not at all or only slightly)</i> find it easy to think of things to talk about
37% <i>(do not at all or only slightly)</i> find it easy to make friends of their own age
28% are nervous about mixing with people they don't know well
25% become tense if they have to talk about themselves or their feelings
24% worry about expressing themselves in case they appear awkward
23% get nervous if they have to speak with someone in authority
22% find themselves worrying that they won't know what to say in social situations
22% feel uncomfortable when mixing socially
21% are tense mixing in a group

Q. For each statement, please indicate how often you feel the way described. Responses: Not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely characteristic of me.

1. "Very or extremely characteristic" except the first three listed, for which percentages indicate proportion reporting the statements were not at all or only slightly characteristic of them.

Are Australians anxious about social interactions?

The most challenging social situations for Australians include meeting people at parties, mixing with people one doesn't know well, speaking with someone in authority, mixing in a group and talking to attractive persons. The easiest social situations are being alone with just one person, general talking and eye contact and meeting an acquaintance on the street.

% of Australians reporting statements as very or extremely characteristic of them

21% have difficulty talking to **attractive persons** of the sex they are interested in

21% feel they will **say something embarrassing** when talking

21%, worry **they will be ignored** when mixing in a group

18% are unsure whether to **greet someone** they know only slightly

15% find it difficult to mix comfortably with the **people they work with**

15% find it **difficult to disagree** with another's point of view

15% tense up if they meet an **acquaintance on the street**

13% have difficulty making **eye contact** with others

12% have difficulty **talking with other people**

9% feel tense if they are alone with **just one person**

Q. For each statement, please indicate how often you feel the way described. Responses: Not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely characteristic of me.

AUSTRALIANS' INTERACTIONS WITH FAMILY, FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS

Most Australians regularly see friends and family and can lean on them for support. However, Australians are not well connected to their neighbours.

How connected are Australians to their family?

Over a third of Australians (34%) hear from or see 3 to 4 relatives at least once a month, while a small number (8%) don't hear from any relatives on a monthly basis.

Nearly a third of people (32%) say they have 3 to 4 relatives they can call for help and/or talk to about private matters (29%). Others don't have close relationships: 13% say there is no relative they can call for help, while 17% say there is no relative they can talk to about private matters.

By number of relatives	Proportion of Australians that hear from relatives at least once a month	Proportion of Australians who have relatives they can talk to about private matters	Proportion of Australians who have relatives they can call on for help
None	7.6%	17.1%	12.5%
One	11.2%	20.4%	16.6%
Two	17.5%	22.4%	20.5%
Three to four	33.8%	29.1%	32.2%
Five to eight	22.5%	8.4%	12.6%
Nine or more	7.5%	2.6%	5.7%

- One in four (23%) hear from or see a relative daily or a few times a week
- 19% hear from or see a relative weekly, while 14% hear from or see a relative a few times a month
- A small number hear from or see a relative monthly (9%) or less often than monthly (12%)

How connected are Australians to their family?

Members of Australian families generally talk to each other about important decisions. About 3 in 5 (59%) Australians frequently have a relative available to talk to about important decisions, while 37% say their relatives frequently speak with them about important decisions.

A smaller number (21%) never or seldom have a relative available to talk to and their relatives rarely or never consult with them (29%) about important decisions.

How often?	Proportion of Australians who have relatives available to talk to when they have an important decision to make	Proportion of Australians who have relatives who talk to them when they have an important decision to make
Never	11.0%	13.9%
Seldom	9.6%	14.7%
Sometimes	20.0%	34.0%
Often	23.1%	19.7%
Very often	14.3%	11.9%
Always	22.0%	5.8%

How connected are Australians to their friends?

Most Australians (92%) have at least one friend that they see at least once a month, and they can talk to about private matters (88%) or get help from (88%). Only 1 in 10 (11%) have a large friendship group that they see at least once a month.

A small number of Australians don't see any friends regularly (8%), have anyone to talk to about private matters (12%) or anyone to call for help (12%). One in four (25%) have at least two friends they can call for help. Nearly a third (29%) have 3 to 4 friends they can call for help.

By number of friends	Proportion of Australians who hear from friends at least once a month	Proportion of Australians who can talk to friends about private matters	Proportion of Australians with friends they could call on for help
None	8.1%	11.8%	12.3%
One	12.1%	17.1%	17.0%
Two	18.5%	23.2%	25.2%
Three to four	30.8%	32.5%	28.9%
Five to eight	19.2%	10.4%	11.6%
Nine or more	11.3%	5.0%	5.1%

- One in five (20%) see their closest friend a few times a week, while similar numbers see a friend weekly (23%) or a few times a month (22%)
- A small number (9%) see their closest friend daily
- 1 in 4 Australians see their closest friend only monthly (12%) to less than once a month (14%)

How connected are Australians to their friends?

Australian friends generally talk to each other about important decisions. About half (51%) of Australians frequently have a friend available to talk to about important decisions, while 29% say their friends frequently speak with them about important decisions.

A smaller number (22%) never or seldom have a friend available to talk to and their friends rarely or never consult with them (27%) about important decisions.

How often?	Proportion of Australians with friends available to talk to when they have an important decision to make	Proportion of Australians who have friends who talk to them about an important decision
Never	10.5%	12.9%
Seldom	11.5%	14.2%
Sometimes	27.5%	34.4%
Often	23.6%	21.4%
Very often	14.0%	12.4%
Always	12.9%	4.7%

How connected are Australians to their neighbours?

A third of Australians (34%) have no neighbours they see or hear from on a monthly basis. Nearly half of Australians (47%) have no neighbours they can call for help.

Our relationships with our neighbours are not close, with 70% of people saying they have no neighbours they would talk to about private matters.

However, those with close neighbour relationships see neighbours regularly – a third of Australians (30%) see a neighbour at least a few times a week or weekly.

By number of neighbours	Proportion of Australians with neighbours they hear from at least once a month	Proportion of Australians with neighbours they can talk to about private matters	Proportion of Australians with neighbours they could call on for help
None	34.1%	69.8%	46.7%
One	21.7%	13.9%	22.2%
Two	21.1%	9.2%	18.4%
Three to four	15.9%	5.7%	10.4%
Five to eight	4.9%	1.1%	2.0%
Nine or more	2.4%	0.3%	0.3%

- Two in five (40%) see their closest neighbour less than once a month
- One in four see their closest neighbour monthly (11%) or a few times a month (17%)
- Smaller numbers see their closest neighbour weekly (16%), a few times a week (14%) or daily (2%)

How connected are Australians to their neighbours?

Australians rarely talk to their neighbours about important decisions. Only 10% of Australians frequently have a neighbour available to talk to about important decisions, while 5% say their neighbours frequently speak with them about important decisions.

Three quarters of Australians (75%) never or seldom have a neighbour available to talk to and their neighbours rarely or never consult with them (82%) about important decisions.

How often?	Proportion of Australians with neighbours available to talk to when they have an important decision to make	Proportion of Australians with neighbours who talk to them when they have an important decision to make
Never	63.6%	68.6%
Seldom	11.4%	13.8%
Sometimes	14.6%	12.2%
Often	6%	3.8%
Very often	2.3%	1.1%
Always	2.1%	0.5%

APPENDICES

About social interaction anxiety

Social interaction anxiety is anxiety that arises from social interactions, in particular, a fear of being judged negatively by others or of feeling embarrassed.

It can lead people to avoid a range of situations. In its extreme, where people experience high anxiety and are unable to operate in many typical situations, it may be classified as **social anxiety disorder**.

References

Mattick, R. P., & Clarke, J. C. (1998). Development and validation of measures of social phobia scrutiny fear and social interaction anxiety. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 36(4), 455-470.

Detailed methodology: Sample and timeframe

Who/What: Swinburne University (led by Dr Michelle Lim) and the Australian Psychological Society, with assistance from a market research agency, Pureprofile, conducted an online survey of a representative sample of Australian adults supplemented by recruitment by the research partner networks, community organisations, social media and advertising.

How: *Sampling approach:* An ISO-accredited sampling partner, Pureprofile, recruited a nationally-representative cohort of 570 (500 who completed the whole questionnaire), based on the 2016 census demographic profile. Adults in their panel lists were invited to start the survey and were screened out when quotas on completers were met until they reached 500 fully completed survey responses. The remaining sample of adults (1103) was recruited through networks of Swinburne University and the Australian Psychological Society, community organisations, social media and advertising. Ethics approval was obtained for all aspects of the research.

When: Data were collected over a period of 4 months, from 29 May 2018 to 1 October 2018. The survey continues to be open for recruitment (via <https://bit.ly/2w2ltS7>) until mid 2019 as part of a larger study run by Swinburne University. It will provide longitudinal data to track loneliness and wellbeing over time.

Detailed methodology: Psychological measures

The full survey covered questions relating to demographics, physical and mental health, social interaction anxiety, degree of social interaction, depression symptoms, coping style, experience of positive/negative emotions and quality of life. Several psychological and behavioural scales were employed, including the following:

- ❖ **Demographics:** Standard demographic questions were included.
- ❖ **Health history:** A measure was developed for this study to assess history of physical health problems.
- ❖ **UCLA Loneliness Scale – Version 3 (UCLA-LS, 1996):** A 20-item measure of subjective feelings of loneliness, scored on a 4-point Likert scale, 1 (never) to 4 (always).
- ❖ **Centre for Epidemiological Studies - Depression (CES-D, 1977):** A 20-item measure of depressive symptoms, scored on a 4-point Likert scale, 0 (less than 1 day) to 3 (5-7 days).
- ❖ **Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS, 1998):** A 20-item measure of social interaction anxiety, scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (not at all characteristic or true of me) to 4 (extremely characteristic or true of me). A modified non-heteronormative version (Lidner et al. 2013) was used.

References

- **UCLA-LS:** Russell, D. W. (1996). UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3): Reliability, validity, and factor structure. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 66(1), 20-40.
- **CES-D:** Radloff, L. S. (1977). The CES-D scale: A self-report depression scale for research in the general population. *Applied Psychological Measurement*, 1(3), 385-401.
- **SIAS:** Mattick, R. P., & Clarke, J. C. (1998). Development and validation of measures of social phobia scrutiny fear and social interaction anxiety. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 36(4), 455-470. Lidner, P., Martell, C., Bergström, J., Andersson, G., & Carlbring, P. (2013). Clinical validation of a non-heteronormative version of the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS). *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 11(1), 209.

Detailed methodology: Psychological measures

- ❖ **Expanded Lubbens Social Network Scale (LSNS-18, 2003):** An 18-item measure of the size, closeness and frequency of contacts in an individual's network, including family, neighbours and friends. There are three subscales for connections with family, friends and neighbours, each containing six 6-point Likert scales (with various scale anchors).
- ❖ **Assessment of Quality of Life – 8 Dimensions (AQoL-8D, 2011):** A 35-item measure of health-related quality of life, including wellbeing and life satisfaction. There are 8 dimensions of quality of life (independent living, happiness, mental health, coping, relationships, self-worth, pain and senses), each measured on different Likert scales.
- ❖ **Positive and Negative Affect Scale – Short Form (PANAS-SF, 1988):** A 10-item measure of the level of positive (e.g., excited) and negative (e.g., scared) emotions experienced. It is made up of 2 subscales for positive and negative emotions, each scored on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely).
- ❖ **Physical Health Questionnaire (PHQ, 2005):** A 14-item measure of the frequency of experiencing physical health symptoms (sleeping difficulties, headaches, stomach complaints, nausea, minor colds, respiratory infections, bad cold/flu). Each item is scored on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (all of the time).

References

- **LSNS-18:** Lubben, J., & Gironda, M. (2003). Centrality of social ties to the health and well-being of older adults. *Social Work and Health Care in an Aging Society*, 319-350..
- **AQoL-8D:** Richardson, J., & Iezzi, A. (2011). Psychometric validity and the AQoL-8D multi attribute utility instrument. *Melbourne Australia: Centre for Health Economics Monash University*, 13
- **PANAS-SF:** Watson, D., Clark, L. A., & Tellegen, A. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: the PANAS scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54(6), 1063.
- **PHQ:** Schat, A. C., Kelloway, E. K., & Desmarais, S. (2005). The Physical Health Questionnaire (PHQ): construct validation of a self-report scale of somatic symptoms. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 10(4), 363.

Detailed methodology: Psychological measures

- ❖ **General Health Questionnaire – Short Form (GHQ-SF, 1998):** A 12-item measure of poor psychological health including social dysfunction, anxiety and loss of confidence. It is scored on a 4 point Likert scale (various scale anchors).
- ❖ **Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ, 2003):** A 10-item measure of respondents' tendency to regulate their emotions in two ways: Cognitive Reappraisal (e.g., reframing a difficult situation) and Expressive Suppression (e.g., trying not to think about/talk about emotional feelings). Each subscale is scored on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) through to 7 (strongly agree).
- ❖ **Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB, 1989):** A 42-item measure of psychological well-being across six dimensions: autonomy, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life and self-acceptance. Items are scored on a 6-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6).

References

- **GHQ-SF:** Goldberg DP, Williams P. (1998). *A user's guide to the General Health Questionnaire*. Basingstoke NFER-Nelson.
- **ERQ:** Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. (2003). Individual differences in two emotion regulation processes: implications for affect, relationships, and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(2), 348.
- **PWB:** Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069.

Detailed methodology: Data analyses

Scoring/Grouping: For some of the analyses respondents were grouped into categories of high level of loneliness (score on UCLA-LS of 52 or more), moderate level of loneliness (UCLA-LS score of 41-51) and low level of loneliness (UCLA-LS score of 20-40) based on the “Visual Binning” approach in the statistical software used, which groups people into even sized groups based on their score on a continuous variable. Loneliness prevalence was based on those in the high level of loneliness category (score on UCLA-LS of 52 or more).

Group comparisons: Analyses were run for the total sample across all key demographic variables and where sub-sample sizes permitted. When comparing groups one-way Analyses of Variance were used in conjunction with Tukey’s post-hoc tests to look at differences in sub-groups and Bonferroni adjustments to p -values.

Findings: The results presented in this report have been selected based on issues or trends currently of interest in relation to loneliness, and any findings that were deemed noteworthy. All significance testing has been conducted at the 5% significance level. Where no significant findings were uncovered for given groups or demographic variables, results were omitted from this report.

Demographics of survey sample

		Percentage of respondents
AGE	18 - 25	13.2%
	26 - 35	21.1%
	36 - 45	17.8%
	46-55	17.6%
	56-65	16.9%
	Over 65	13.4%
GENDER	Male	27.4%
	Female	72.4%
	Other (please specify)	0.4%
STATE	Australian Capital Territory	2.6%
	New South Wales	23.0%
	Northern Territory	0.7%
	Queensland	18.5%
	South Australia	7.7%
	Tasmania	2.2%
	Victoria	35.9%
	Western Australia	9.0%
RELATIONSHIP STATUS	Single/never married	20.5%
	In a relationship	22.4%
	Married	43.1%
	Separated	3.3%
	Divorced	8.3%
	Widowed	2.4%
WORK STATUS	Part-time employment	22.3%
	Full-time employment	34.6%
	Casual employment	11.4%
	Not working	31.6%
	Total respondents	1673

Demographics of survey sample

		Percentage of respondents
HOUSEHOLD STATUS	Living alone	17.4%
	Living with housemates	7.5%
	Living at home with family/partner	70%
	Living with relatives/extended family	4.6%
	Living in college	0.4%
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	Heterosexual	84.6%
	Homosexual	4.9%
	Bisexual	5.1%
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION	Roman Catholicism	13.6%
	Protestant	14.0%
	Nonreligious/secular	33.6%
	Judaism	1.1%
	Islam	1.3%
	Buddhism	2.4%
	Agnostic	5.9%
	Atheist	13.8%
	Hinduism	1.1%
	Not listed	13.2%
ETHNICITY	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	1.2%
	Asian Australian or Asian (including Indian)	8.1%
	African Australian	0.7%
	Hispanic	0.4%
	Multiracial, biracial	2.4%
	White (including Caucasian, European Australian)	84.2%
	Pacific Islander	0.3%
	Total respondents	1673

Associations between loneliness and other factors

High levels of loneliness were associated with:	Pearson's R correlation ¹
Less enjoyment of relationships	-0.81
Poorer overall quality of life	-0.73
Lower levels of contentment, happiness, enthusiasm and pleasure	-0.69
Poorer psychological health	-0.66
Fewer and poorer quality relationships	-0.64
More likelihood of feeling a burden, worthless and less confident	-0.64
Higher level of anxiety around social interactions	0.63
More mental health problems	-0.63
Lower energy levels and feeling less able to cope with problems	-0.60
More depression symptoms	0.58
Less social interaction with friends, greater risk of social isolation	-0.51
Fewer positive emotions	-0.51
More negative emotions	0.48
Less social interaction with family and greater risk of social isolation	-0.43
Greater tendency to suppress emotions	0.42
Poorer overall physical health	-0.41
Poorer sleep	-0.40
Lower sense of achieving personal goals and more bored with one's life	-0.37
Less likely to try to think differently about a difficult situation	-0.35
Greater difficulty with household and self-care tasks	-0.35
Greater difficulty with vision, hearing and communication	-0.35
More headaches	-0.33
More stomach problems	-0.31
Worse experience of physical pain	-0.27
Less social interaction with neighbours and greater risk of social isolation	-0.27
Less autonomy and greater concern about others' evaluations	-0.23
Not working or working less regularly	0.08

1. All associations/correlations were significant at the $p < .01$ level..

RESOURCES

Find out more at psychweek.org.au

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Psychology Week 2018

11-17 NOVEMBER

The power of human connection



Tips to connect with others

#psychweek   

Social relationships support good mental and physical health. These tips will help you to enjoy better interactions with the people you encounter, so you can feel the benefits of positive connection.

1 Think positive

Worries about social situations can make you overthink your interactions. Don't dwell on worries about how you are perceived – shift your focus to the other person or the topic of conversation.

2 Forget comparison

Don't be concerned if others appear to have more or better friends than you. Quality and enjoyment matter more than quantity. Savour the moments of connection, wherever you can find them.

3 Expect change

Circumstances can leave us vulnerable to a sense of isolation. Relationships shift over time and we may lose touch with friends who were once important. Accepting change as normal can help you adjust.

4 Tolerate discomfort

Anxiety may cause you to avoid socialising. Understand that awkwardness does not mean you are doing anything wrong. Reach out to others and your skills will improve with time.

5 Listen well

Practice listening. Ask questions and really listen to the answers, rather than just waiting for a turn to talk. Respond warmly to people's experiences through your posture, facial expressions and words.

6 Rehearse

Out of practice with chat? Spend some time thinking about questions you can use when conversation stalls. You might ask if the other person has travelled far, visits this museum often, or liked the show.

7 Say names

Using someone's name when you know it demonstrates caring. Offer yours. Ask after their loved ones, or pick up a previous conversation topic, such as their pet, to show you have paid attention.

8 Go offline

Social media helps many people, but it can also increase disconnection. Ensure you have a healthy offline life. Perhaps invite trusted online friends to an offline meeting to build your relationship.

9 Chat to strangers

Unexpected moments of connection greatly improve your mood. Share a smile and eye contact with a stranger, or chat to a fellow commuter. Rise to the challenge of finding common ground with strangers.

10 Help

Helping someone gives a feel-good rush. Create a bond with someone by offering help, or asking for it. Something as little as assistance with a bag or holding a lift can help people feel seen and cared for.

11 Join in

Embrace opportunities to join, volunteer or participate. This connects you to other people, unites you in a shared activity, and provides an easy way to get to know people better.

12 Reconnect

Reach out to friends from your past. Many people welcome such efforts and the feeling that you care. If you plan a catchup, why not revisit a place or experience where you shared happy memories?

13 Manage stress

Everybody has some social situations they dread. Practice simple stress management techniques, such as breathing deeply and slowly, to help keep your stress in check through awkward moments.

14 Practice, practice, practice

Relationship skills can be learnt. Don't be discouraged. Remember that social connections are good for you. If you feel like you need support to build better connections skills, a psychologist can help.

Psychologists are experts in emotion, wellbeing and behavior. They can help you address relationship issues and learn practical skills and strategies that enhance your interactions with other people and your sense of life satisfaction. To find a psychologist who can work with you to build relationship skills, visit findapsychologist.org.au

Find out more at psychweek.org.au

