

Rotary State of the Nation 2019 - Loneliness Report

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An online survey was conducted by Atomik Research among 2,610 respondents. The research fieldwork took place between the 11th and the 13th of March 2019. Atomik Research is an independent creative market research agency that employs MRS-certified researchers and abides to MRS code.

MAIN FINDINGS

In a typical day, the average British person spends over three and a half hours watching TV alone, and an hour and a half reading. In comparison, people spend two and a quarter hours on average socialising with their friends and families. Older respondents tend to spend less time socialising, with the average amount of time spent socialising with friends and family among this age group being two hours; that's compared to the three hours and twenty minutes spent on average by 25-34 year-olds.

When asked to estimate how many people they interact with in a typical day, the average amongst all respondents was 16 people. Men tend to interact with more people in a day, with male respondents estimating an average of 17.5, compared to the 14.75 average amongst female respondents to this survey.

Results here too vary significantly by age: respondents in their late twenties and early thirties interact with the most people in a typical day, with an average of 23 people amongst this age group. That's compared to an average of 7.7 amongst respondents between the ages of 65 and 75. Those in employment tend to interact with more people too- respondents in full-time employment interact with 23.6 people in a typical day on average; self-employed people and students estimate interacting with 12 people, whilst retired people give an average estimate of just 6.6 people a day.

People interact with fewer people in person, with the average British person estimating that they have face-to-face interactions with 14 people in a typical day. Over a fifth (22%) of retired people have face-to-face interactions with only one, or no people in a typical day, as do 20% of respondents who are not in employment or are homemakers.

A quarter (25%) of those surveyed say they would like to socialise with more people than they currently do. Two-thirds (66%) are happy with the number of people they socialise with, and only 4% of those surveyed say they would prefer to socialise with fewer people in a typical day. Women are more likely to want to socialise with more people, with 27% of female respondents and 22% of male respondents selecting this answer option.

Younger people are more likely to want to socialise with more people than older ones; 41% of those aged 25 to 34 say they wish they socialised with more people, more than double the proportion of respondents over the age of 55 (20%). Over a third (34%) of single people would want to interact with more people, as do 40% of parents with very young children under the age of five.

On average, British people have five friends with whom they feel close enough to discuss a personal issue. Those aged 25 to 34 have on average seven close friends, whilst the average amongst older people is 4.3. Almost a fifth (17%) of those surveyed say they either have no close friends or just the one.

When asked who they feel close to, a third (34%) of British people feel close to their mothers, yet only a fifth (22%) feel close to their fathers. Men are more likely to feel close to their dads than women, with a quarter (25%) of men and 19% of women deeming this relationship a close one. Respondents were more likely to feel close to their siblings (40%) and their partners (62%). A quarter (26%) feel close to their work colleagues, with other responses including friends from school or college (20%), neighbours (15%), friends from university (8%) and people that respondents met through playing sports (8%).

A third (33%) of British people whose parents are still alive catch up with their parents daily, whilst a further 41% contact them at least once a week. 11% only contact their parents on a monthly basis, whilst 15% of people whose parents are still alive speak to them less than once a month. Half (50%) of those in touch with their parents speak to them in person, whilst a quarter (26%) contact them most frequently via voice call.

14% of those with siblings speak to their brothers and sisters daily, and a further third (33%) catch up with them on a weekly basis. 20% contact their siblings once a month, whilst a third of Brits who have siblings contact their siblings less than once a month, including 5% who never speak to their brothers or sisters. Younger respondents speak to their siblings more frequently; 63% of 25-34 year-olds speak to their siblings at least once a week, compared to 42% of those over the age of 55.

When asked how they most frequently contact their siblings, a third (34%) speak to them in person, but the same proportion (33%) tend to text or message them, and a further fifth (22%) speak to them on the phone. Older people are most likely to speak to their siblings over the phone, with 35% of 65-75 year-olds calling their siblings more frequently than they see them in person. Younger respondents in contrast are more likely to text or message their siblings, with 43% of 25-34 year-olds texting their siblings as their main form of communication with them, compared to 31% who tend to speak to them in person more than communicating in any other way.

60% of parents catch up with their children every day, whilst a further quarter (26%) contact them on a weekly basis. 15% of parents catch up with their children less frequently than once a week, including 2% who never see their children. Amongst parents of adult children aged 18 or older, half (52%) catch up with their children daily, a third (32%) catch up on a weekly basis, and 13% contact their children less regularly. Two-thirds (65%) of parents speak to their children in person, whilst 17% say they most frequently contact their children via text or messaging. 11% of parents of teenagers say they tend to contact their children more by text or messaging than they speak to them in person.

8% of respondents say they don't have any close friends. Of those who do, 16% see them daily, and almost half (49%) see them on a weekly basis. A further fifth (20%) see their close friends monthly, whilst 16% see them less frequently. Younger people under the age of 35, and older people over the age of 65, see their close friends most frequently, with 70% of 20-24 year-olds, 67% of 25-34 year-olds, and 71% of 65-75 year-olds seeing their closest friends at least once a

week or daily. 47% of respondents speak to their close friends in person, a third (33%) tend to contact them most frequently via texting, and 11% tend to call them.

Older people are more likely to see their close friends face-to-face than their younger counterparts, with 57% of those between the ages of 55 and 75 having face-to-face conversation with their closest friends more than any other form of communication. That's compared to just 31% of respondents between the ages of 25 and 34, half of whom (47%) use texting or messaging as their main form of communication with their best friends.

Over half (57%) of respondents see texting as a worse form of communication than talking face-to-face, but 28% view it as the same as speaking in person. 15% see texting as a better form of communication than speaking to someone, of whom the majority (63%) are millennials. 41% of 25-34 year-olds, and 24% of 35-44 year olds believe that texting or messaging is better than speaking to somebody face-to-face.

30% of respondents view sending photos (e.g. via Snapchat) to be as good a form of communicating as speaking in person. 54% see it as a worse form of communication, whilst 15% say it's better than speaking face-to-face. Despite being the most frequent users of apps like Snapchat, the youngest people surveyed were among the least convinced that this form of communication is worthwhile. 56% of 20-24 year-olds surveyed say that sending photos is a worse form of communication than speaking to someone in person. That's compared to just a third (35%) of those between the ages of 25 and 44.

A quarter (24%) of those surveyed see a voice phone call as a better means of communicating than having a face-to-face conversation. Half (49%) regard this method as the same as speaking in person, and only 27% regard it as a worse form of communication. Older respondents are most likely to see voice calls as worse than speaking to someone in person, but even amongst 65-75 year-olds, only 31% see it is a worse method of communication, whilst half (51%) see it as the same.

Fewer respondents see a video phone call as a better means of communication than a voice-only call; a fifth (20%) see it as better than speaking face-to-face, while half (49%) see it as the same, and almost a third (31%) see it as a worse means of communication. Younger respondents are most likely to see video calling as the same as, if not better than, speaking to someone in person; 53% of 20 to 24 year-olds view video calls as the same as face-to-face conversations, and 35% of 20-34 year-olds see video calls as better than speaking in person.

56% of those surveyed view emailing as a worse form of communication than speaking face-to-face, while 31% see it as the same as an in-person conversation. 13% of respondents see emailing as a better method of communicating than speaking in person, with a higher proportion of men taking this stance than women (14% versus 10%).

A third (34%) of respondents say that a letter is as good as speaking to somebody in person. 52% say it's a worse form of communication, whilst 13% consider it to be better. The youngest and the oldest respondents in this study were more likely to view letter writing as a worse form of communication than speaking to someone in person, with 57% of 20-24 year-olds, 63% of 55-64 year-olds and 54% of 65-75 year-olds viewing this method as worse than a face-to-face conversation.

LONELINESS

Almost half (47%) of those surveyed say they tend to feel lonely. 6% say they feel lonely all the time; 14% say they often feel lonely, and 27% say they sometimes get lonely. Despite the larger numbers of people they tend to interact with in a typical day, younger respondents are significantly more likely to feel lonely more frequently. 14% of respondents between the ages of 20 and 34 say they always feel lonely, compared to just 3% of respondents over the age of 55. Only 9% of people aged 25-34 say they never get lonely, whereas 28% of respondents over the age of 55 selected this option.

Londoners are most likely to feel lonely, with over a tenth (11%) of respondents in the capital reporting that they feel lonely all the time, and a further 21% saying that they often feel lonely.

Evenings are the time when the most people feel lonely; 41% of people who ever feel lonely said that this feeling descends when they're alone in the evenings. A further 29% of respondents feel lonely during the day, and 10% of those surveyed say they can feel lonely whilst at work. Men are almost twice as likely to feel lonely at work than women, with 13% of male respondents and 7% of female respondents saying they experience loneliness at work. Over a third (36%) of people who experience loneliness say there's no particular time of day where they tend to feel lonely.

A third (33%) of respondents who suffer from loneliness say they've suffered from a lack of motivation as a result of feeling lonely. 30% say it's led to feelings of self-doubt and low self-esteem, and over a quarter say they've suffered from depression (27%) or anxiety (26%) as a result of loneliness. 24% have had trouble sleeping due to feeling lonely, whilst other effects have included irregular eating (16%), lack of appetite (12%), headaches (11%), brain fog, confusion or memory loss (10%), and stomach pains or digestive issues (8%).

Women are more likely to have suffered these adverse effects of loneliness, especially lack of motivation (35% of female respondents versus 31% of male respondents), self-doubt and low self-esteem (35% versus 26%), and anxiety (29% versus 22%).

Two-thirds (62%) of people who say they suffer from loneliness have put the TV on to distract themselves from it. 31% say they put the radio on, as do 31% who have exercised or gone for a walk to distract themselves. Other methods include eating or making food (29%), speaking to pets (27%), and even speaking to technology like Alexa, Siri or Bixby (7%). 17% of respondents between the ages of 20 and 35 have spoken to technology to distract themselves from feeling lonely, whilst those between the ages of 45 and 64 are significantly more likely to have tried any of the other methods listed above.

14% of those surveyed have gone to the shops without needing anything just to have a conversation with someone. 6% have gone to the GP purely for this reason, as have 6% who have ordered post just to chat to the postman, and 6% who have answered or engaged with a spam or cold caller just to have a conversation.

Despite the ubiquity of loneliness among British people, half (47%) wouldn't consider joining a local group or volunteering in order to meet and interact with more people. 16% of those surveyed say they already do this, whilst 38% say this is something they would consider. Of

those who are open to the idea however, over half (51%) wouldn't know where to look to do this.

Respondents between the ages of 25 and 54 are most open to the idea of joining a local group or volunteering to meet and interact with more people. 49% of 25-34 year-olds, 46% of 35-44 year-olds, and 38% of 45-54 year-olds would be open to this idea. Older respondents within this age range are least aware of the opportunities around them to volunteer or join local groups, with half (47%) of considerers between the ages of 35 and 54 saying they wouldn't know where to look to do this.

STATEMENT AGREEMENT

I'm so used to meeting people through technology that meeting people in real life seems strange or nerve-wracking

Over a fifth (22%) of respondents agreed that being used to meeting people using technology has made them more uncomfortable with meeting new people in the flesh. 25% of male respondents and 20% of female respondents agreed with this statement. A quarter (23%) of respondents didn't have a view on the statement, whilst the majority (55%) disagreed.

Agreement with this statement is particularly widespread amongst respondents in their twenties and thirties; over half (54%) of those aged 25 to 34 say that they're so used to meeting people through technology that meeting people in real life seems strange to them, as do 38% of those aged 35 to 44.

Respondents in London are more likely to agree with this side-effect of meeting people online, with 39% of respondents in the city agreeing. Respondents in the other home nations were also likely to agree, and this study found high levels of agreement amongst those living in Scotland (24%), Wales (24%), and Northern Ireland (35%).

Social media only provides a very superficial connection with people

Three-quarters (75%) of respondents agreed that social media only provides a very superficial connection with people. The youngest respondents in this study, those aged 20 to 24, were the most likely to agree with this statement; over four in five (83%) agreed that social media provides only a superficial connection. 18% of respondents didn't have a view on this issue, and only 7% disagreed with the statement.

I often find myself ignoring the people around me and using my phone instead

19% of those surveyed say they often find themselves ignoring the people around them and using their phones instead. Younger people are significantly more likely to agree with this statement, especially those in their twenties and thirties. Almost half (47%) of respondents between the ages of 25 and 34 say this is something that they tend to do, as do a third (36%) of those aged 35 to 44. That's compared to just 4% of respondents between the ages of 55 and 75.

Respondents on higher incomes are more likely to agree that they find themselves ignoring those around them in favour of using their phones. Only 12% of respondents earning less than £25,000 per annum agreed with the statement, compared to 21% of those whose

household income falls between £25,000 and £75,000 a year, and a massive 52% of those whose household income exceeds £100,000 per annum.

Perhaps correlating to their age, parents of younger children are more likely to agree with the statement. Over half (51%) of respondents with children under the age of five say they often find themselves ignoring those around them and using their phones instead, as do 44% of those with children aged 5-10 and those with children aged 11-13. That's compared to just 8% of those with adult children over the age of 18, and 15% of respondents who don't have children.

I feel I am part of a strong community in my local area

30% of people feel that they're part of a strong community in their local area. A third (32%) don't have a view on this matter, whilst almost two in five (38%) say that they don't feel part of a strong local community. Londoners are most likely to feel part of a strong local community, with 41% of those living in the capitol agreeing with the statement, as do 40% of those living in the North East, and 36% of respondents in Northern Ireland.

Respondents living near Oxford (38%), Newcastle (36%), Liverpool (37%) and York (43%) are all significantly more likely to feel part of a local community than those in other parts of the UK. More affluent people are also more likely to feel a strong sense of community spirit in their local area; 61% of respondents whose household income exceeds £100,000 per annum agreed with the statement, compared to 24% of those whose household income is less than £35,000 a year.

Parents are also more likely to feel a sense of community in their local area. Half (49%) of respondents with children under the age of thirteen feel that they're part of a strong community in their local area, compared to 27% of respondents with adult children over 18, and just 19% of respondents who don't have children.

I feel lonely more frequently than I did five years ago

A third (32%) of respondents say they feel lonely more frequently than they did five years ago. This sentiment is most prevalent amongst younger people, and over half (51%) of respondents between the ages of 25 and 34 feel lonely more often than they did five years ago. Respondents over the age of 55 are most likely to disagree with the statement, with 55% of those over the age of 55 refuting this claim.

Respondents who are single (41%), divorced (41%) and widowed (51%) are all more likely to say they feel lonely more frequently than they did five years ago. Parents with children under the age of five are also more likely to agree that they've noticed this change in the last five years, as have 43% of parents of children between the ages of five and thirteen.

I don't tend to meet new people very often at my age

Half (51%) of those surveyed say they don't tend to meet new people very often at their age. Agreement with this statement was relatively uniform amongst different age groups, with 54% agreement amongst under 35s, compared to 47% agreement amongst respondents between the ages of 55 and 75. 59% of parents of children under the age of five agree that

they don't tend to meet as many new people at their age, as do 62% of respondents who don't work or who are homemakers.