



LONELINESS IN LATER LIFE: A LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS USING THE ENGLISH LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF AGEING (ELSA)

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Loneliness is key indicator of social exclusion/disengagement and is a significant problem for older people. Approximately 10% of those aged 65+ in England report severe loneliness with a further 32% moderate levels of loneliness which represents 777,690 and 2.2 million individuals respectively. Loneliness has important negative consequences for both older adults and society being associated with a range of negative health, social and service use outcomes. Rates of mortality for older people who are lonely are reported as 50% higher; emergency hospital admissions are a third higher and GP consultation rates 3 times higher compared with their non lonely peers. This policy brief presents newly available data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) examining the pathways into and out of loneliness in later life over a decade (2002-2012).

Key findings:

Underlying the simple prevalence rates there is a complex pattern

- *The majority of older people –around 70%- are not lonely at any point*
- *A minority-around 5%-are consistently lonely*
- *Some 8% became lonely and a similar percentage moved out of loneliness*
- *For 10% of older people there was a complex and fluctuating pattern of moving into and out of loneliness*

THE ENGLISH LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF AGEING (ELSA)

Our analysis is based on 5,265 individuals aged 50 and older who have been followed up since 2002 and have been core members of the study and have been present at each on the bi-annual waves of the survey. ELSA includes a range of different ways of measuring loneliness (table 1).

Table 1: Measures of loneliness included in ELSA

MEASURES OF LONELINESS INCLUDED IN ELSA	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5
Measure	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5
Have you felt lonely much of the time during past week? (Y/N)	+	+	+	+	+
I often feel lonely living in this area (7-point Likert scale)	+		+		
UCLA loneliness scale (3-item form) (3-point Likert scale)		+	+	+	+
How often do you feel lonely? (3-point Likert scale)			+	+	+
I expect to grow lonelier as get older (5 point Likert scale)		+			
Old age is a time of loneliness(5 point Likert scale)		+			

ATTITUDES TOWARDS LONELINESS

A third of respondents perceived that old age was a time of loneliness and expected to experience increased loneliness as they aged (figures 1 and 2)

Figure 1:

% agreeing that old age is a time of loneliness

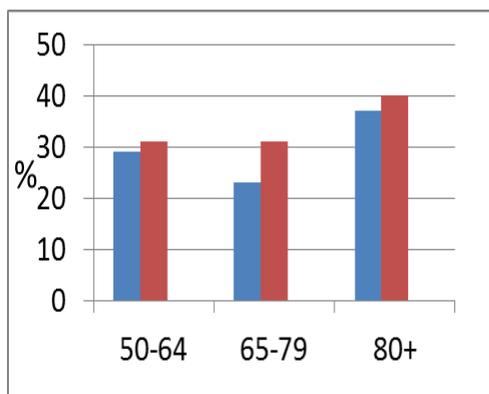
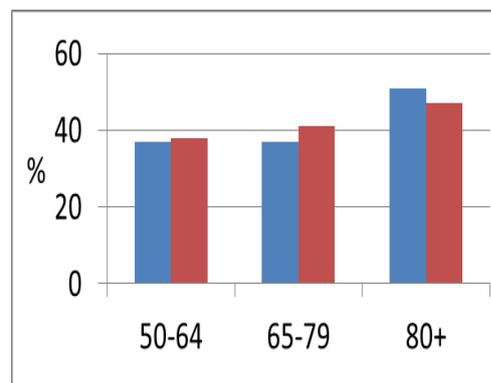


Figure 2

% expecting to experience increased loneliness



CHANGES IN LONELINESS OVER TIME

Regardless of the measure used the majority of older people did not experience loneliness (see table 2). A minority of older people experienced enduring loneliness and there were clear sub-groups experiencing both the onset/increase in loneliness or who experienced a reduction in loneliness. In addition there were a group who experienced fluctuating levels of loneliness.

Table 2: Changes in loneliness over time

Loneliness pathway	UCLA scale- waves 2 to wave 5	Self-rating scale-wave 1 to wave 5
Never lonely	66.2%	71.3%
Always lonely	6.7%	2.0%
Out of loneliness	9.8%	6.8%
Into loneliness	8.7%	4.6%
Fluctuation*	8.7%	15.4%

* 8 pathways for the UCLA measure and 22 for the self-rating scale

CONCLUSIONS

The population who are defined as lonely at a specific time includes a range of different groups:-those who experience enduring loneliness and those moving into or out of loneliness and group of those experiencing fluctuating levels of loneliness. Identifying and characterising these different sub-groups of the lonely population and identifying the factors that are linked with pathways into and out of loneliness will enable us to develop more targeted and appropriate interventions to combat loneliness in later life.

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