



Summary of Findings

1. BACKGROUND TO STUDY

The Big Survey was prepared by Scotinform and Age Scotland and aimed to explore a wide range of areas of life for people aged 50+ living in Scotland including health and wellbeing, housing, ageism, representation of older people and the impact of Covid-19.

- Of **3,562** responses, **1,766** were submitted online and **1,796** were completed on paper. The findings highlight the need for both online and paper versions of the Big Survey in order that it is inclusive to older people across Scotland.

2. PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

- Two thirds of respondents (**66%**) were female and the sample included respondents across all age groups but primarily in the 65-69, 70-74 and 75-79 age ranges.
- All **32** local authorities were represented in the sample of respondents although they were most likely from the City of Edinburgh Council area, Highland, Fife and Glasgow.
- **71%** of respondents were retired, **19%** of respondents were in employment (full-time, part-time and self-employed) and **5%** were unable to work due to disability/illness.
- **42%** of respondents lived alone and **44%** with one other person. The majority of respondents owned their home outright.



3. COVID-19

The Big Survey started being distributed in early February, soon after Scotland entered another phase of lockdown. The survey sought to establish the impact lockdown and national restrictions had had on respondents and on their interactions with family, friends and health professionals.

- **15%** of respondents were advised to shield by health professionals, thereby minimising their interaction with others during lockdown. **19%** of respondents living on their own were advised to shield.
- **46%** of respondents, although not advised to shield, made the decision to significantly limit their interactions with others during lockdown.
- Respondents were asked, from a prompted list, what had caused difficulty during the pandemic. This ranged from access to friends and family to access to cash and other banking services. The main issue affecting respondents during the pandemic has been access to friends and family – over two thirds of respondents (**68%**) cited this as an issue.

- Respondents had primarily kept in touch with others during the pandemic via the phone (**90%**) and **64%** had used text messaging. **56%** of respondents had enjoyed seeing people but at a distance when restrictions permitted them to do so.
- **46%** of respondents had received offers of help from neighbours during the pandemic and **19%** had received offers from others in their local community. Clearly neighbours had looked out for older people, with **66%** and **74%** of respondents in their 70s and 80s citing neighbours offering help.
- During the course of the week, Covid-19 restrictions permitting, **21%** of respondents had contact with others every day and **26%** more than once a week and once a week. **24%** of respondents did not usually see someone else during the course of the week and this included **28%** of respondents who lived alone and respondents across all age groups.



67%

said lockdown resulted in higher home energy bills

- Two thirds of respondents (**67%**) said that the requirement to stay at home over the last year (ie due to lockdown restrictions, shielding, working from home) resulted in higher home energy bills than previous years. Over half the respondents (**57%**) who had increased energy bills were able to pay them but **38%** had taken measures to use less energy and **11%** had switched energy supplier.

38%

had to take measures
to use less energy as
a result of higher
energy bills

**11%**

switched energy supplier

13%

struggled with the increase

4%

are now in arrears

- The Big Survey featured a series of statements and respondents were asked to what extent they agreed/disagreed with each. The following percentages indicate those who strongly agreed and agreed with each statement:
 - **44%** agreed that they were more mentally prepared for the lockdown starting in 2021
 - **38%** agreed that they were more physically prepared
 - **48%** agreed that they now had the right technology/software/expertise to be able to use online communications
 - **39%** agreed they felt more anxious
 - **24%** agreed they were not concerned
 - **74%** agreed that they had a better understanding of what lockdown would be like
 - **25%** agreed that they felt more confident about asking for help and assistance
 - **46%** agreed that they had a better idea of where to find up-to-date information and guidance
 - **51%** agreed that they felt more anxious about the future

4. HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- Watching television and reading (**81%** and **73%**) were the activities respondents most liked to undertake for fun/relaxation.
- Two thirds of respondents (**68%**) preferred to spend their time with people of a mix of ages, with **14%** enjoying their own company and preferring to spend time alone.
- The majority of respondents (**60%**) considered their general health to be 'very good' and 'good'. Rating of general health as 'very good' and 'good' decreased with age.
- **16%** of respondents were able to get a GP appointment on the day on which they called, with **20%** seeing their doctor 1-2 days from making a telephone call. **31%** of respondents had not contacted their doctor for an appointment for some time. Since March 2020, **61%** of respondents had taken part in a telephone consultation with a GP or health professional and **15%** in an online consultation.
- **48%** of respondents were exercising regularly. **42%** didn't get out as much as they used to but were still mobile. Approximately two thirds of respondents (**64%**) were less active due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

- **95%** of respondents were aware of the effects that sitting too much can have on their health. **12%** of respondents were very satisfied with their balance and muscle strength and **38%** were quite satisfied.
- A fifth of respondents (**21%**) considered their current mental health to be very good and **39%** described it as good. **52%** of respondents considered that their mental health had stayed the same in the past five years and **11%** felt that it had improved. A third of respondents (**34%**), however, considered that their mental health had deteriorated in that time period.

64%

were less active due
to Covid-19 restrictions

13%

had poor mental health

34%

considered that their
mental health had gotten
worse over the last 5 years



- A third of respondents (**33%**) never felt lonely but **55%** sometimes felt lonely. The **8%** of respondents who felt lonely most of the time were across all age groups. Interestingly, males were more likely than females to say they never felt lonely (**41%** of males never felt lonely in comparison with **29%** of females).
- Covid-19 had impacted on respondents' feeling of loneliness. **53%** of respondents stated that the pandemic had made them feel lonelier – **65%** of respondents who lived on their own said this was the case in comparison with **44%** of people who lived with one other person.

55%sometimes
feel lonely**8%**felt lonely most
of the time**53%**stated the pandemic had
made them feel lonelier

5. OLDER PEOPLE AND THE WORKPLACE

- The majority of respondents (**70%**) were retired. These respondents were most likely male than female (**75%** of males were retired and **67%** of females). **12%** of respondents stated that they had been discriminated against at work because of their age and **6%** had seen older colleagues discriminated against.

12%

stated that they had
experienced age
discrimination, and 6%
had seen older colleagues
discriminated against



6. USING THE INTERNET

- **89%** of respondents had access to the internet at home – this was across all age groups although access tended to decrease with age.
- Respondents accessed the internet on their smartphones, tablet/iPads and laptops (**66%**, **64%** and **58%** of respondents). Many respondents had multiple platforms on which they accessed the internet.
- Respondents were most likely using the internet to email friends/family (**77%**), to find out information (**76%**) and online shopping (**71%**).



7. PUBLIC TRANSPORT

- **75%** of respondents lived in a household which had a car owned by them or someone else within the home. **44%** of respondents did not use public transport at all and **26%** used it once a month or less. **83%** of respondents who used public transport (1,976 respondents) were more cautious about travelling on public transport since lockdown.
- Over a third of respondents (**35%**) who used public transport 5+ days per week were very satisfied with public transport in their area and **38%** were quite satisfied.

83%

who used public transport were more cautious about travelling on public transport since lockdown

10%

didn't have a bus stop near their home



8. SOCIAL CARE

- **24%** of respondents had a caring role for someone in their family. Of those with a caring role (857 respondents), **54%** lived with the person for whom they cared for.
- The majority of respondents (**75%**) did not need support and services to help stay well and independent such as help with washing and dressing, cooking and cleaning. **10%** of respondents in their 80s and **24%** in their 90s were in receipt of a formal support package.

24%

had a caring role
for someone in
their family



9. SCAMMING AND FRAUD

- **87%** of respondents said that they or someone they know has been the target of a scam, most likely by telephone (**71%**). Impersonating an organisation, trying to extort money, and personal information were the most likely scams (**53%**, **51%** and **49%** of respondents selected these options).
- A third of respondents (**32%**) did not see the point in reporting the scam but **23%** had recorded it to a friend/family member. Of note, is just **19%** reported it to the Police.

32%

did not see the point
in reporting the scam

23%

told a family
member or friend

19%

reported it
to the police



10. FINANCES

- **26%** of respondents said they felt financially squeezed by bills. Energy bills and Council Tax were of most concern to respondents (mentioned by **82%** and **46%** of respondents).
- Approximately a quarter of respondents (**28%**) did not claim any social security benefits. The remainder of respondents were most likely in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment (**47%**) and Council Tax reduction.

26%

felt financially squeezed
by their bills



Energy bills and Council Tax were of most concern to respondents (mentioned by 82% and 46% of respondents)

11. PLANNING AHEAD

- **60%** of respondents had a Will which stated their current wishes – this increased with age. Respondents were less likely to have a Power of Attorney than a Will. **43%** of respondents had a Power of Attorney which states their current wishes and **23%** intended to organise one soon.
- Over a third of respondents (**36%**) had made arrangements for their funeral which stated their current wishes and **22%** intended to organise one soon.

60%

had a Will which stated
their current wishes



43%

had a Power of
Attorney which stated
their current wishes

36%

had made funeral
arrangements

12. OLDER PEOPLE IN SOCIETY

- Approximately a fifth of respondents (**21%**) considered that older people were valued for their contribution to society.
- **26%** and **29%** of respondents felt that older people were represented appropriately in TV advertising and TV programmes but **38%** of respondents selected none of the options when they were prompted. Open-ended feedback highlighted that advertising was the medium in which they felt older people were not appropriately represented.
- A third of respondents (**36%**) felt that older people are made to feel a burden to society and **34%** felt that life is getting worse for older people in Scotland. Overall, **21%** of respondents felt optimistic about their future.
- **9%** of respondents were very positive about the future and **36%** were quite positive. **30%** of respondents held no view either way.
- The survey also had several open ended questions allowing respondents to express their views. The responses included are unedited comments which we felt were important to share as they represent what older people are telling us, even if the language doesn't necessarily reflect the views of Age Scotland.

- Key themes to emerge from analysis of comments regarding concerns for the future were:
 - Health/deteriorating health
 - Lack of independence
 - Financial concerns
 - Losing mobility
 - Loneliness and isolation
 - Dementia
 - Going into a care home/residential care
 - Future of healthcare/access to healthcare
 - Being a burden to family/society
- The Big Survey featured a series of words/phrases commonly used to describe older people. Respondents were asked which of these they preferred. Preferred options were senior citizens (**36%**), older adults (**21%**) and older people (**20%**). Elders and elderly people were less popular (selected by **7%** of respondents).

51%

did not feel that older people were valued for their contribution to society.



13. CONCLUSIONS

13.1 Methodology

The study has highlighted the importance of a mixed methodological approach to engaging with older people across Scotland. Despite **87%** of respondents having access to the internet, the number of responses were almost equal in terms of completion online and on paper. Accompanying each paper version of the survey with a freepost envelope will also have boosted the response rate given that respondents did not incur postage costs in returning their completed surveys.

The sample included representation across all of Scotland's 32 local authorities and a mix of gender and age. In terms of ethnicity, however, there was a low response from older people from diverse ethnic communities. Prior to the survey being distributed Age Scotland acknowledged that there were challenges in engaging with ethnic communities and, going forward, will seek to undertake much more proactive engagement with people from a diverse range of backgrounds and communities. There were significant challenges reaching people as a result of lockdowns and face to face opportunities for engagement was not a methodology which was available at that time.

13.2 Impact of Covid-19

The pandemic has clearly impacted the majority of respondents' lives and, of note, is that **46%** chose to shield themselves and limit their interaction with others during lockdown. This is despite the fact they were not advised to do so by health professionals. This suggests that at the beginning of the lockdown period respondents were sufficiently concerned about their health and safety that they made this decision. A further **15%** of respondents shielded during lockdown following advice to do so. As the country starts to open up following the 2021 lockdown, it will be important to note how confident older people feel in regaining contact with others and any longer-term impact on mental health and well-being as a result of a sustained period of time without interaction with others.

Access to health professions was a difficulty which emerged during the pandemic but, of note, is that **61%** of respondents took part in a telephone consultation with their GP during lockdown and **15%** had an online consultation. The findings suggest that although access was perceived as being more difficult due to the pandemic, GPs had made themselves available for consultation with older people, however, evidence captured by Age Scotland throughout the pandemic highlighted that some patients had concerns that a phone or video consultation wasn't ideal for their needs, indeed **30%** of people struggled to get a GP appointment, and **24%** struggled to access other healthcare professionals.

Two thirds of respondents had experienced higher energy bills as a result of staying at home more during the lockdown period with **38%** of these stating they had struggled to pay increased bills and **4%** now in arrears. Energy bills were also identified (along with Council Tax) when respondents were asked if they felt financially squeezed by their bills. Energy bills are a consistent concern raised by respondents in all Age Scotland consultation managed by Scotinform and the Big Survey highlights that this has been an added concern during the pandemic.

13.3 Respondents in their 50s and 60s

The findings have highlighted different experiences across the different age bands. Of particular note is that respondents in their 50s and 60s were more likely to **disagree** that they felt more mentally and physically prepared as they entered lockdown in January 2021 compared to those aged 70+. They were also more likely to **agree** that they felt more anxious entering another lockdown. Respondents in their 50s and 60s were less likely to describe their mental health as good and more likely to state that it had got worse over the past five years. This particular demographic is more likely to be part of the 'sandwich generation' juggling children, caring for older family members and still in employment. The Big Survey has highlighted the different concerns at different life-stages and further research with people in their 50s and 60s would be valuable.

13.4 Scamming and fraud

Scamming and fraud is clearly a big issue for older people with **87%** having been targeted. **71%** of these were targeted by phone. Of note is that a third of respondents did not see the point in reporting the scam. The opportunity exists for Age Scotland to raise awareness of the value of reporting scams, the right channels to which scams should be reported and reassurance that any reporting will be taken seriously. It is likely that of those who said they had not been a target of a scam, many may not have been able to identify they had in fact been targeted by a scam. This highlights that there is still a need for better information about the different types of scams and what to look out for.

13.5 Future planning

Overall, **45%** of respondents were very positive and quite positive about their future. Open-ended feedback, however, identified concerns about getting older as including a deterioration in health, lack of independence, finance, dementia, care homes/residential care (quality, cost, perceived as a last resort), access to health care and being a burden to their families. These issues are all inter-linked with deteriorating health raising concerns about access to health care and leading to a lack of independence. With dementia and poor health comes concerns about potentially leaving the family home, access to housing and concerns about moving into a care home (quality, lack of independence and cost). Clearly respondents need more advice and guidance on how best to plan for their future earlier in their lives.

13.6 Role of older people in society

36% of respondents agreed that older people are made to feel a burden to society. Whilst 34% agreed that life is getting worse for older people in Scotland, 25% felt life was getting better and 21% felt optimistic about their future. Just 7% agreed that older people are represented positively in the media and open-ended feedback on media representation highlighted advertising as portraying people in later life as not intelligent and focused on funeral arrangements. At a time when the media is trying to be more inclusive, it should also reflect older people (i.e. aged 50+) in a way that doesn't stereotype but instead emphasizes their lives and contribution i.e. still working, volunteering, providing care for children and older family members, with interests in a range of hobbies/subjects, and keen travellers.

13.7 The Big Survey

The Big Survey has provided a voice for older people across Scotland and identified the concerns that they have about getting older. Given that this survey was conducted during a global pandemic it will be interesting to note how findings compare with those from future surveys and to what extent the longer-term impact may be on people aged 50+.





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