

Poorest people twice as likely to feel lonely in lockdown, as compared to richest people

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Older people in the poorest sector of the population were more than twice as likely to feel isolated and lonely during the first lockdown than the richest, finds a new study led by researchers from UCL and the University of Manchester.

The researchers analyzed data from 4,709 [older men](#) and women aged over 50 living in England who are part of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) to explore changes in the experiences of social isolation and loneliness during the pandemic.

Researchers collected data on 'subjective social isolation', which referred to how isolated participants felt, as well as 'objective social isolation', which was defined by levels of contact with friends and [family members](#) or engaging in [social events](#) such as video calls.

The research team collected data before the pandemic started, and then during the first COVID-19 [lockdown](#) in June and July 2020, and in the second COVID-19 lockdown in November and December 2020.

The findings show that 19% of all the respondents reported high levels of subjective social isolation and the prevalence was higher during both COVID-19 waves compared with previous years. 9% reported high objective social isolation but this percentage decreased during the pandemic.

The authors noted that increased interaction with family and friends using remote methods, such as video calls, instead of face-to-face meetings during the pandemic appeared to be ineffective in fully combating increased feelings of social isolation and loneliness.

Lead author Dr. Georgia Chatzi (The University of Manchester) noted that they "found that both men and women experienced an increasing prevalence of subjective social isolation and loneliness during the

pandemic but only men experienced higher objective social isolation.

"All age groups had higher subjective social isolation during 2020 compared with previous years, but those aged 50-59 were most affected. Adults older than 70 experienced larger increases in objective social [isolation](#) in the second half of 2020 and those aged 50-59 and older than 80 felt the loneliest during the [pandemic](#)."

The study found that 33% of people in the poorest quintile (bottom 20%) felt isolated in the first lockdown compared to 16% of those in the richest quintile. During the second lockdown 32% of those in the least wealthy quintile reported feeling isolated compared to 19% of those in the wealthiest quintile. Before the lockdown, 27% of those in the poorest quintile felt isolated compare to 13% in the richest.

Report co-author, Professor James Nazroo (The University of Manchester) said that "it is right to be worried about levels of loneliness among older people and how these increased during lockdown, but we should also pay attention to the stark inequalities in this and consider how these inequalities might be addressed."

Professor Andrew Steptoe (UCL Behavioural Science & Health and ELSA lead) explained that "social distancing strategies were very important for [older adults](#), who were particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. However, this may have meant that older adults found it particularly hard to maintain social connections because of lower access to and use of digital technologies, and because of the greater likelihood of needing to socially isolate in addition to social distancing."

More information: ELSA: www.elsa-project.ac.uk/

Provided by University College London

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