



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

STATISTICS, DOCUMENT

Loneliness (National Survey for Wales): April 2022 to March 2023

The report looks at aspects of loneliness in terms of the absence of close personal relationships and a lack of wider social contacts for April 2022 to March 2022.

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Introduction

The National Survey for Wales measures levels of loneliness in the population. People were given a series of six statements, to which they can answer either “yes”, “no” or “more or less”.^[footnote 1]

The six statements are:

- ‘I experience a general sense of emptiness’.
- ‘I miss having people around’.
- ‘I often feel rejected’.
- ‘There are plenty of people I can rely on when I have problems’.
- ‘There are many people I can trust completely’.
- ‘There are enough people I feel close to.’

Responses were combined to produce a scale from 0 to 6, where 0 is least lonely and 6 is most lonely. For reporting purposes, we count people who have a score of 4 to 6 as being lonely.

This report focuses on findings from the telephone section of the National Survey during 2022 to 2023. These results are the most comparable with the previous year, 2021 to 2022; the results for 2019 to 2020 and years previous to that are less straightforward to compare than more recent years due to the switch from face-to-face interviewing to telephone interviewing. Further results from each year are available in the [results viewers](#).

Main findings

- In 2022 to 2023, 13% of people were lonely, consistent with 2021 to 2022 results.

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- People living in material deprivation were more likely to be lonely than people not living in deprivation.
- Individuals with a mental health condition or in poorer general health were also more likely to be lonely.
- Loneliness also showed a strong relationship with well-being. Lonely people reported much lower satisfaction with life than those who were not lonely.
- More people are socially lonely (for example having few people to rely on for help) than emotionally lonely (for example missing having people around).

Loneliness

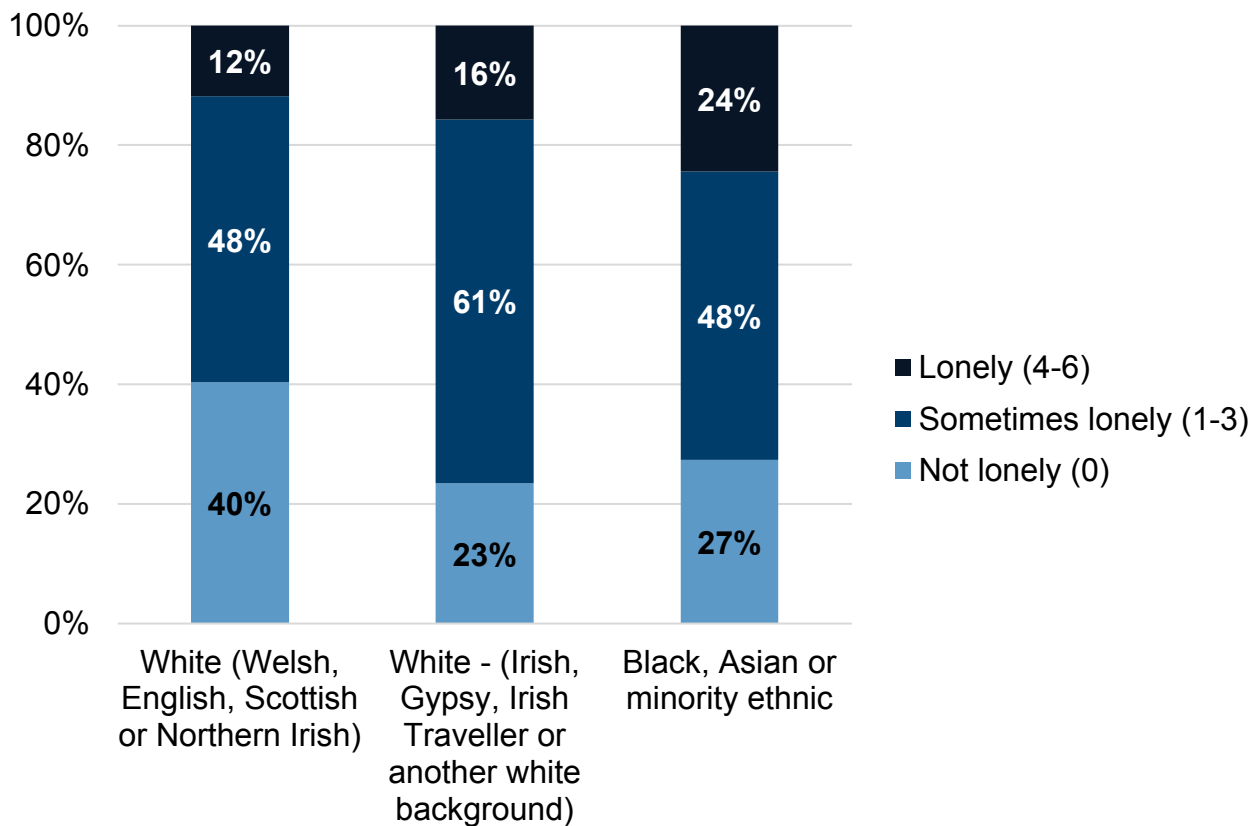
In 2022 to 2023, 13% of people were lonely. This is the same as in 2021 to 2022 and 2020 to 2021. In 2019 to 2020, it was 15%.

In 2022 to 2023, 48% were sometimes lonely (score 1 to 3) and 39% were not lonely (score 0).

In-depth analysis was carried out to investigate the links between loneliness and a variety of demographic, social and health factors. Whilst controlling for links with other factors, the following were independently associated with being lonely:

- Ethnicity: people who identified as 'White – British' were less likely to be lonely than those who identified as Black, Asian, or part of a minority ethnic group, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Loneliness by ethnicity



Description of Figure 1: Stacked column chart showing overall loneliness, broken down by ethnicity. People who identified as 'White (Welsh, English, Scottish or Northern Irish)' had the highest percentage of people not reporting any loneliness. People belonging to black, Asian or minority ethnic groups were more likely to report 4 or more loneliness behaviours than people of other ethnicities were.

Source: National Survey for Wales, 2022 to 2023

General health

People who considered themselves to be in bad health were more likely to be lonely than those in good health. 20% in fair health and 37% in bad or very bad health were lonely, compared with 7% of those in good or very good health.

Having a mental illness

39% of those with a mental illness (including anxiety and depression) were lonely, while just 9% of those without such an illness were lonely.

Having help from social care services

39% of people who had used social care and support services in the last 12 months were lonely, while just 11% of those who had not used such services were lonely.

Material deprivation

Material deprivation was a significant factor in reported loneliness. 34% of people in material deprivation were lonely, compared with 9% of those not in material deprivation.

Household type

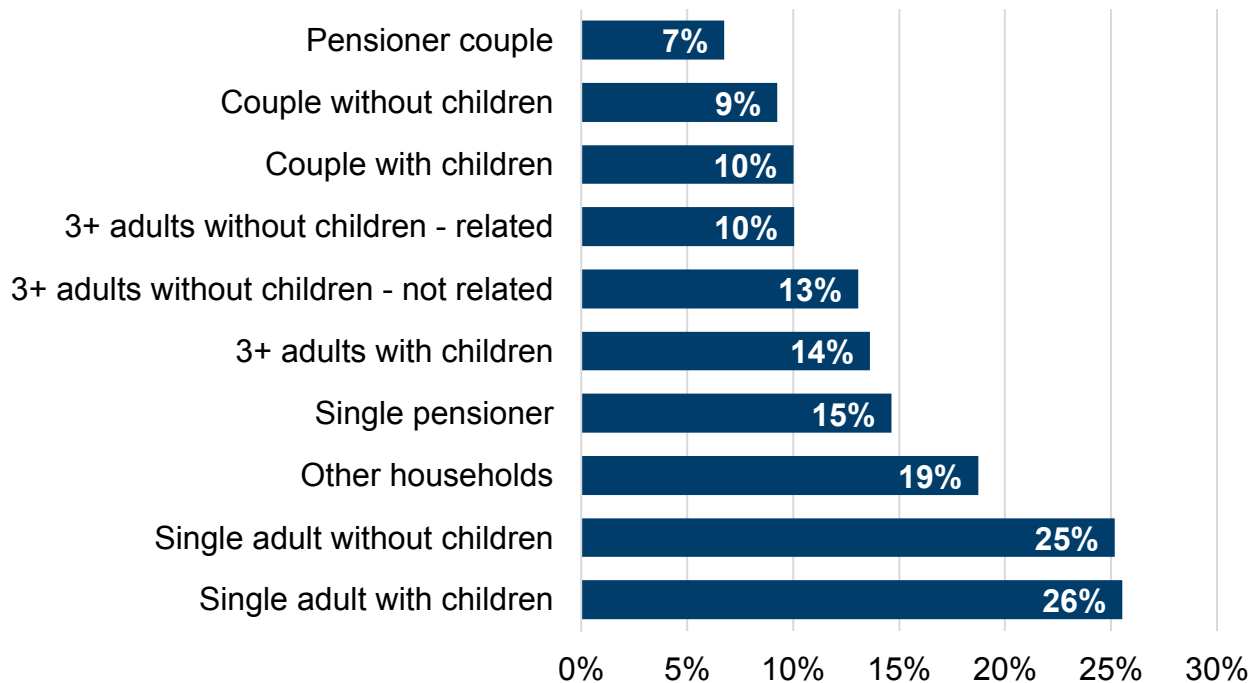
Households consisting of single, non-pensioner adults were the most likely to report loneliness, as shown in Figure 2.

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Figure 2: Loneliness by household type



Description of Figure 2: Bar chart showing overall loneliness, broken down by household type. People in single (non-pensioner) adult households were the most likely to feel lonely. Single pensioners and households featuring multiple adults or pensioners were less likely to feel lonely than people living alone.

Source: National Survey for Wales, 2022 to 2023

Having very high satisfaction with life

People rating their life satisfaction as 9 out of 10 or higher were less likely to report loneliness, as shown in Figure 3.

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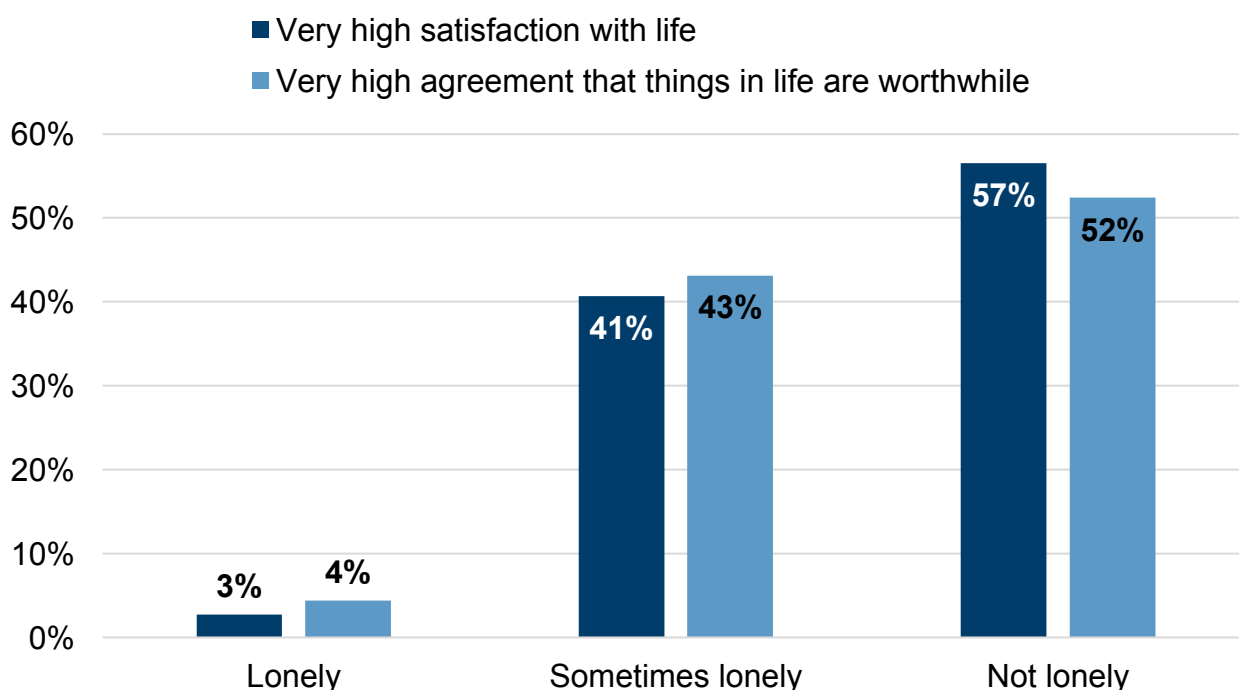
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Having very high agreement that things in life are worthwhile

People rating their agreement that the things they do in their life are worthwhile as 9 out of 10 or higher were less likely to report loneliness. This is also shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Loneliness by well-being measures



Description of Figure 3: Column chart showing overall loneliness of people who reported very high satisfaction with life and very high agreement that things in life are worthwhile. In both cases, over half of the respondents show no indicators of loneliness, and less than 10% of these respondents were indicated to be lonely.

Source: National Survey for Wales, 2022 to 2023

Age, having a limiting long-term illness, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and internet use were not found to be linked to loneliness.

Emotional and social loneliness

There are two dimensions to loneliness: emotional and social loneliness. Of the six statements listed above, the first three statements (general sense of emptiness, miss having people around, often feel rejected) are indicators of emotional loneliness and the final three statements (having few people to rely on, few people to trust completely, and not enough close contacts) are indicators of social loneliness.

Using a 0 to 3 scale, classifying a score of 2 to 3 as lonely and 3 as highly lonely, it was found that social loneliness was more prevalent than emotional loneliness. 23% of people are socially lonely, with 11% being highly socially lonely, compared with 18% being emotionally lonely, and 7% being highly emotionally lonely.

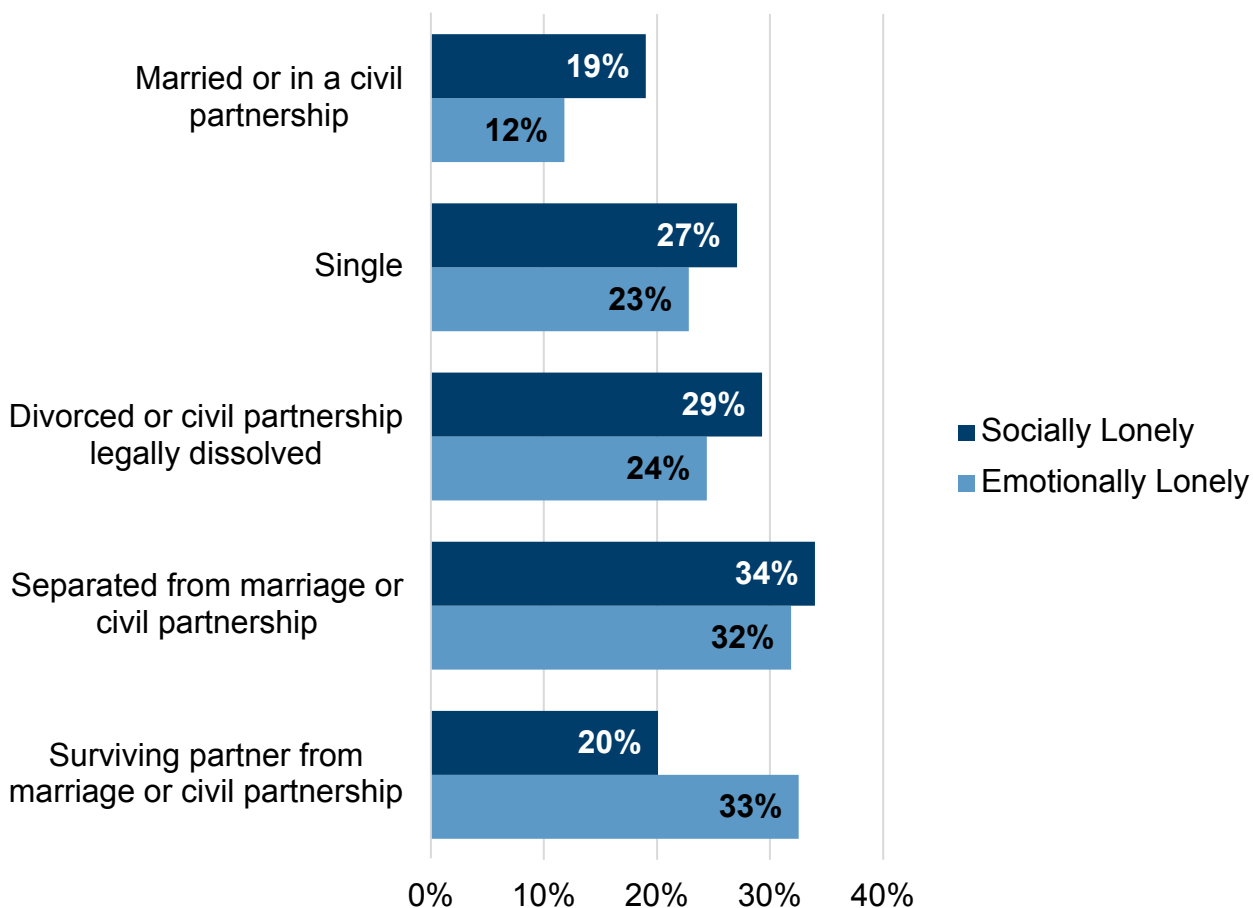
We used the same analysis method as above (i.e. controlling for a range of factors at the same time) to look at links between different factors and emotional and social loneliness. Overall, similar factors were found to be important for both types of loneliness as well as for overall loneliness.

All the previously listed factors were found to be linked with emotional loneliness in the same ways as for overall loneliness. Additionally, sex, participating in sporting activities in the last 4 weeks, tenure, and marital status were all found to be linked to emotional loneliness.

Men were less likely to feel emotionally lonely than women, with 16% of men feeling emotionally lonely compared with 21% of women. People who participated in sports recently were found to be less emotionally lonely, with 11%

of those participating feeling emotionally lonely as opposed to 20% who did not take part. Those who owned their home were less likely for feel emotionally lonely than those living in privately rented accommodation: 14% of those in owner-occupied housing felt emotionally lonely compared with 25% of private renters. Both groups were less likely to feel emotionally lonely than those living in social housing, however, where 35% of people felt emotionally lonely. The effects of marital status on loneliness is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Emotional and social loneliness by marital status



Description of Figure 4: Bar chart showing social and emotional loneliness

broken down by marital status. People who were single, divorced or separated were the most likely to feel socially lonely. People who are separated or are surviving partners from marriages or civil partnerships were the most likely to feel emotionally lonely.

Source: National Survey for Wales, 2022 to 2023

Social loneliness was found to have fewer factors linked with it than emotional loneliness did. Most of the factors found to be linked with overall loneliness were also found to be linked with social loneliness in the same ways as described above. However, no independent links were found between social loneliness and social care use, or household type. Additionally, while marital status and sport participation were also identified to be linked with social loneliness in similar ways to emotional loneliness, tenure was not identified as being linked to social loneliness. Sex was identified as linked to social loneliness, but no significant difference could be found within the data.

Age, having a limiting long-term illness, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and internet use were not found to be linked to either emotional or social loneliness.

Policy context

Loneliness is one of the 50 national indicators used to measure progress against the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**. The Act was designed to improve the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of Wales. It also features in the **Public Health Outcomes Framework for Wales**, which considers the various economic, environmental and social factors that impact the health of the individual, the community and society. Loneliness is an indicator for “living conditions”, supporting the development of cohesive communities. The **Social Services National Outcomes Framework**, which focuses on care givers and care receivers, also uses loneliness as a measure of

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well-being for these individuals.

Quality information

The **National Survey for Wales** is a continuous, large-scale, random sample telephone survey covering people across Wales. Addresses are randomly selected, and invitations sent by post, requesting that a phone number be provided for the address. The phone number can be provided via an online portal, a telephone enquiry line, or direct to the mobile number of the interviewer for that case. If no phone number is provided, an interviewer may call at the address and ask for a phone number.

Detailed charts and tables of results are available in our interactive **results viewer**. For information on data collection and methodology please see our **quality report**, **technical report**, and **Regression report** pages.

Cross-analysis suggests that various factors may be associated with the responses given to each question asked in the National Survey. However, these factors are often linked to each other (for example, people with a limiting long-term condition may also be older). To get a clearer understanding of the effect of each individual factor, we have used statistical methods to separate out the individual effect of each factor. These methods allow us to look at the effect of one factor while keeping other factors constant – sometimes called “controlling for other factors”. Each breakdown described in this report was identified as an individual factor.

National Statistics status

The **United Kingdom Statistics Authority** has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act

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2007 and signifying compliance with the **Code of Practice for Statistics**.

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is Welsh Government's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

The continued designation of these statistics as National Statistics was confirmed in June 2020 following a compliance check by the Office for Statistics Regulation (**letter of confirmation**). These statistics last underwent a full assessment (**full report**) against the Code of Practice in 2013.

Since the latest review by the Office for Statistics Regulation, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made the following improvements:

Since the latest review by the Office for Statistics Regulation, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made the following improvements:

- provided more detailed breakdowns in the **results viewer** and made it easier for users to compare results across years

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- updated the survey topics annually to ensure we continue to meet changing policy need
- made regression analysis a standard part of our outputs to help users understand the contribution of particular factors to outcomes of interest

Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of Wales. The Act puts in place seven wellbeing goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier, and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators (“national indicators”) that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the Well-being goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before the National Assembly. The 50 national indicators were laid in March 2016. The National Survey collects information for **15 of the 50 indicators**.

Further information on the **[Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)**.

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local wellbeing assessments and local wellbeing plans.

Footnotes

[1] This is a standard scale used to measure loneliness, the De Jong Gierveld scale.

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