

Survey on Loneliness Among Older Adults

Client: AARP

Project Overview

The purpose of this study was to provide a better understanding of loneliness among adults age 45 and older. In addition to examining prevalence rates across and within groups of older Americans, the study provided a descriptive profile of lonely older adults and examined the relationships between loneliness and health, health behaviors, involvement in a social network, and use of technology for social communications and networking.



The objectives of the study included addressing the following 5 research questions:

1. How many adults 45+ suffer from loneliness? How long have they been lonely? How aware are they of it? Where and when are they most lonely?
2. What are correlates of loneliness? Which groups are more likely than others to suffer from loneliness? Were there environmental factors that correlate with loneliness?
3. How does health—both physical and mental—affect loneliness, and how is it affected by loneliness? What kinds of physical or mental health problems do lonely individuals suffer from?
4. What is the connection between loneliness and social communication technology? What kind of social communication do they use?
5. What are older adults' strategies to mitigate and/or prevent loneliness? What steps, if any, do they take to deal with their loneliness?

Data for this study were collected by Knowledge Networks using a randomly recruited online research panel that was representative of the entire U.S. population. The survey included questions about health and health behaviors; current relationships; size of social network; frequency and methods of communication with people in that network; participation in religious services, hobbies, and community organizations; feelings of loneliness and coping strategies; and use of social communication technology. The analysis used a multivariate model used to predict loneliness among older adults and found that significant predictors of loneliness included younger age, poor health, fewer social connections and supportive persons in their lives, and lack of sleep.

Core Activities

Survey Development and Implementation; Complex Survey Data Analysis and Modeling; Report Development and Presentation

Products

The final report is entitled “Findings From the 2010 Survey on Loneliness Among Older Adults.” (June 2010)

“AARP: The Magazine” published the results of the study in its September 2010 report entitled “Loneliness Among Older Adults: A National Survey of Adults 45+,” available at http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/general/loneliness_2010.pdf.

