

Social Connection in Canada

Preliminary Results from the 2021 Canadian Social Connection Survey

About this Report

This report provides an overview of results from the *2021 Canadian Social Connection Survey (CSCS)*. The overall purpose of this report was to examine the social health and wellbeing of Canadians in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope that our findings will support post-pandemic recovery efforts by promoting investments in community and social supports. To this end, we identified the following four aims for this report:

- 1) To provide an overview of how Canadians are connecting with each other during the late pandemic period;
- 2) To compare social health indicators across key populations in Canada;
- 3) To describe the impact of social disconnection on Canadians; and
- 4) To identify patterns of social connection associated with better health and wellness.

Results from these analyses demonstrate a sizeable proportion of Canadians are experiencing loneliness in the wake of COVID-19 and that between 6% and 12% are experiencing long term chronic loneliness. We also demonstrate significant dose response effects of loneliness on mental health, physical health, happiness, life satisfaction, burnout, and self-esteem – which underscores frequent social connections with friends, family, and coworkers as a fundamental social determinant of health and happiness for all Canadians.

About the Canadian Social Connection Survey (CSCS)

The CSCS is a serial cross-sectional survey with a longitudinal sub-cohort that aims to study the social health and wellbeing of Canadians in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The CSCS is administered by Dr. Kiffer Card at the School of Public Health and Social Policy at the University of Victoria and [The Social Bubble Project](#) team. The CSCS was supported with generous contributions from [The GenWell Project](#), a Global Human Connection Movement that wants to help Canadians and people around the world build healthier connection habits.

Data from wave 1 of the CSCS was collected between April 21st, 2021 and June 1st, 2021, during the third wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Canada. Throughout this period, participants were recruited using paid advertising in French and English on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Google. Advertisements were targeted to people aged 16 years of age or older across Canada. Participants were eligible to participate if they were 16 years of age or older, lived in Canada, were able to complete the survey in English or French, and provided informed consent. Upon completion of the survey, participants were eligible to enter a prize draw for a \$200 VISA gift card. Ethics review for the CSCS was conducted by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria (Ethics Protocol Number 21-0115).

Chapter 1

Sample Characteristics

Chapter Overview

This chapter aims to provide a description of participants in the Canadian Social Connection Survey. In doing so, the sample size and demographic characteristics are reviewed and potential sources of bias are identified. Overall, the most notable sampling biases were the under-representation of people without advanced education or training, the under-representation of residents in Quebec and Ontario, and the over-representation of individuals aged 25 to 34. To adjust for these biases, iterative proportional fitting was used to create statistical weights. Caution should be taken when interpreting results as all data was collected within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and most participants were recruited using social media.

How many people participated in the Survey?

A total of 4,228 participants initiated the Canadian Social Connection Survey. Of these, 3,925 provided informed consent. Only 3,827 of those who gave consent lived in Canada and 80 participants were younger than 16 years of age. This resulted in a total sample size of 3,443 participants. For the purposes of this report, 995 participants with missing responses across any of our 7 weighting variables were excluded from analyses. This resulted in a final analytic sample size of 2,448.

How representative is the survey of the Canadian Population?

As is typical with online opt-in surveys, the CSCS 2021 survey under-sampled and over-sampled several key populations. The most notable sampling biases were the under-representation of people without advanced education or training, the under-representation of residents in Quebec and Ontario, and the over-representation of individuals aged 25 to 34. To adjust for these potential sources of bias, statistical weights were created using iterative proportional fitting. These weights adjusted for the self-reported age, gender, province of residence, educational attainment, ethnicity, income, and social media usage of participants in an attempt to make them more representative of the Canadian population. Population estimates for these characteristics were defined based on the 2016 Canadian Census profile, the 2019 Census Test, and with consideration of various social media usage estimates. The tables below provide the unweighted prevalence, target prevalence, and weighted prevalence of characteristics adjusted for using statistical weights. Comments on each table reflect groups under- or over-sampled by more than 5%.

Table 1. Geographic Distribution of Participants

Participants living in Quebec and Ontario were under-sampled.

	Unweighted (%)	Target (%)	Weighted (%)
Alberta	12.4	11.6	11.6
British Columbia	20.2	13.2	13.4
Manitoba	5.4	3.6	3.6
New Brunswick	4.5	2.1	2.1
Newfoundland and Labrador	4.1	1.5	1.5
Northwest Territories	4.7	0.1	0.2
Nova Scotia	5.6	2.6	2.6
Nunavut	2.0	0.1	0.1
Ontario	24.3	38.3	38.3
Prince Edward Island	2.5	0.4	0.4
Quebec	11.8	23.2	23
Saskatchewan	2.2	3.1	3.1
Yukon	0.3	0.1	0.2

Table 2. Age Distribution of Participants

Participants aged 16 to 19 were under-sampled and participants aged 25 to 29 were over-sampled.

	Unweighted (%)	Target (%)	Weighted (%)
16 to 19 years	1.2	7.0	6.6
20 to 24 years	9.7	7.7	7.8
25 to 29 years	24.6	7.9	8.2
30 to 34 years	18.0	8.0	8.2
35 to 39 years	12.8	7.9	8.1
40 to 44 years	5.6	7.8	7.8
45 to 49 years	3.8	8.1	8.1
50 to 54 years	4.2	9.2	9.1
55 to 59 years	5.3	9.0	9.0
60 to 64 years	4.9	7.9	8.0
65 to 69 years	4.2	6.8	6.8
70 to 74 years	3.6	4.9	4.9
75 to 79 years	1.4	3.5	3.4
80 to 84 years	0.4	2.6	2.5
85 to 89 years	0.3	1.7	1.6

Table 3. Ethnic and Racial Distribution of Participants

African, Caribbean, and black participants were over-sampled and White participants were under-sampled.

	Unweighted (%)	Target (%)	Weighted (%)
African, Caribbean, or Black	9.1	3.5	3.6
Arab	2.5	1.5	1.5
Chinese	2.7	4.6	4.6
Filipino	0.9	2.3	2.3
Indigenous	7.2	4.9	4.9
Japanese	0.7	0.3	0.3
Korean	0.8	0.5	0.5
Latin American	3.9	1.3	1.3
South Asian	2.1	5.6	5.5
Southeast Asian	1.3	0.9	0.9
West Asian	0.7	0.8	0.8
White	64.7	72.9	72.5
None of the above	3.4	1.1	1.1

Table 4. Gender Distribution of Participants

The sample was approximately half male and half female.

	Unweighted (%)	Target (%)	Weighted (%)
Men	47.3	49.3	49.4
Non-binary people	2.4	0.1	0.1
Women	50.3	50.6	50.5

Table 5. Educational Attainment Among Participants

Participants with a high school diploma or less were under-sampled and those with a university certificate below a bachelor’s level or with a university certificate above a bachelor’s level (not inclusive of those with Bachelor’s degrees) were over-sampled.

	Unweighted (%)	Target (%)	Weighted (%)
High school diploma or Lower	12.7	43.6	44.8
Apprenticeship or trades certificate	6.9	9.9	9.8
College or other non-university certificate	21.2	19.6	19.4
University certificate below bachelor level	13.7	2.9	2.8
Bachelor's degree	20.8	16	15.5
University certificate above bachelor level	12.2	1.7	1.6
Master's degree	7.6	4.7	4.6
Professional degree	2.4	0.7	0.7
Doctorate	2.4	0.8	0.8

Table 6. Household Income Distribution of Participants

Participants with household incomes between \$100,000 and \$149,000 were over-sampled.

	Unweighted (%)	Target (%)	Weighted (%)
Under \$5,000	2.5	1.6	1.7
\$5,000 to \$9,999	4.2	1.4	1.4
\$10,000 to \$14,999	5.7	2.7	2.7
\$15,000 to \$19,999	5.2	4.0	4.0
\$20,000 to \$24,999	6.1	4.3	4.4
\$25,000 to \$29,999	5.3	3.8	3.8
\$30,000 to \$34,999	6.1	4.3	4.3
\$35,000 to \$39,999	5.4	4.3	4.4
\$40,000 to \$44,999	5.8	4.2	4.3
\$45,000 to \$49,999	4.6	4.1	4.1
\$50,000 to \$59,999	7.1	7.8	7.8
\$60,000 to \$69,999	6.0	7.2	7.1
\$70,000 to \$79,999	6.8	6.6	6.6
\$80,000 to \$89,999	4.7	5.9	5.9
\$90,000 to \$99,999	5.6	5.3	5.3
\$100,000 to \$149,999	11.2	17.7	17.6
\$150,000 to \$199,999	5.8	7.9	7.9
\$200,000 or more	2.0	6.8	6.8

Table 7. Social Media Usage Among Participants

Participants were asked how much time they spent on social media per day. Responses were categorized as either “30 minutes or less” or “Greater than 30 minutes.” Given that participants were recruited using social media, we assumed that those who spent less than 30 minutes per day on social media would be less likely to see our paid advertisements and consequently be under-sampled relative to those who spent more than 30 minutes per day on social Media. According to the 2019 Canadian Internet Use Survey, approximately 68% of Canadian’s actively

used social media accounts. Given this information we set our recruitment targets such that half the sample would be individuals who used social media for 30 minutes or less per day. Notably, statistics Canada reports that approximately one-third of Canadians are using the internet and social media more frequently during the COVID-19 pandemic.

	Unweighted Prevalence (%)	Target Prevalence (%)	Weighted Prevalence %
30 minutes or less per day	30.8	50.0	50.1
More than 30 minutes per day	69.1	50.0	49.9

What other communities were engaged?

In addition to the characteristics above, we also sought to include individuals from nine key populations: 11% identified as Indigenous peoples (e.g., First Nations, Métis, Inuit); 5% identified as Newcomers (e.g., Recent immigrants and refugees, i.e. being in Canada for less than 10 years); 14% identified as People of colour (e.g., Black, Indigenous, Asian or other racialized minority); 3% identified as People who are experiencing homelessness or have in the past; 4% identified as People who have substance abuse problems; 19% identified as People with chronic health problems or disabilities (e.g., Living with any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairments—or a functional limitation—whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature); 15% identified as People with mental health challenges; 9% identified as Sexual or gender minorities (e.g., LGBTQ2+); 16% identified as Students; and 8% identified as Veterans.

Chapter 2

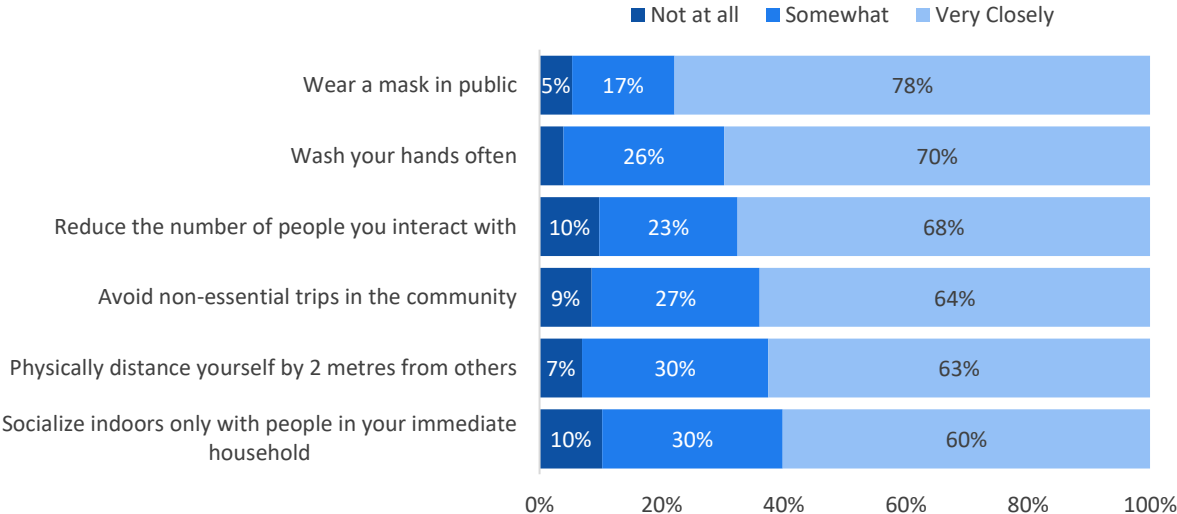
Patterns of Social Connection

Chapter Overview

This chapter aims to examine patterns of social connection among participants. In summary, our results highlighted a significant degree of social disruption as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, depending on how loneliness is measured, between 6 and 12% of Canadians have experienced long-term chronic loneliness that pre-dated the COVID-19 pandemic. These results highlight the need for ongoing interventions in the late and post-pandemic period to address chronic loneliness and social isolation.

How has COVID-19 impacted how we're connecting?

Given the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health recommendations around physical distancing, participants were asked to what extent they were following commonly recommended COVID-19 prevention practices. Approximately two-thirds of respondents adhered closely with each of the six recommended COVID-19 prevention practices. The most commonly adhered to prevention practice was the use of masks in public places. The least commonly adhered to prevention practice was to limit indoor social interactions to members of one's household. Notably, three-quarters (78%) of participants had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine – though only 14% had received both doses.



When asked directly about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, 61% reported feeling somewhat or much lonelier, 26% reported feeling about the same level of loneliness, and 13% reported feeling less lonely. Disrupted patterns of social connection may be related to changes in work and schooling. Within our sample, 17% were laid off temporarily due to COVID-19, 25% had their work hours reduced, 13% had their work hours increased, and 49% of workers worked from home "all" or "most" of the time. When directly examining the impact of working from home on loneliness, 35% of people who reported working at home "all of the time" reported being "much more lonely" compared to only 11% of those who reported working from home "some of the time." However, those who reported never working from home were also greatly impacted by COVID-19 with 39% reporting feeling "much more lonely." Similarly, 56% of students reported all or most of their learning took place online during the COVID-19 pandemic and among those who took schooling mostly or entirely online, 27% were much more lonely (compared to 7% of those who reported receiving "some" online schooling). However, again an Inverted-U relationship was observed with high reported loneliness impacts (25%) on those who received their education entirely in person. Further research into these nuanced relationships is needed.

Who are Canadians connecting with?

More than half of participants (57%) were in a romantic relationship; 14% were single and dating and 29.0% were single, but not dating. Among those in a relationship, 58% were in a relationship that was more than 10 years in duration, 17% had been with their partner for between 3 and 10 years, 9% had been with the partner for 1 to 3 years, and 16% were in relationships started in the past year. Most (85%) participants in a relationship were satisfied with their romantic relationships.

Among those in a relationship, approximately nine-in-ten were living together in the same house. Participants also commonly reported living with children (45%), parents (41%), roommates (14%), and grandchildren (8%). Two-fifths also reported living with a dog (41%) or cat (45%).

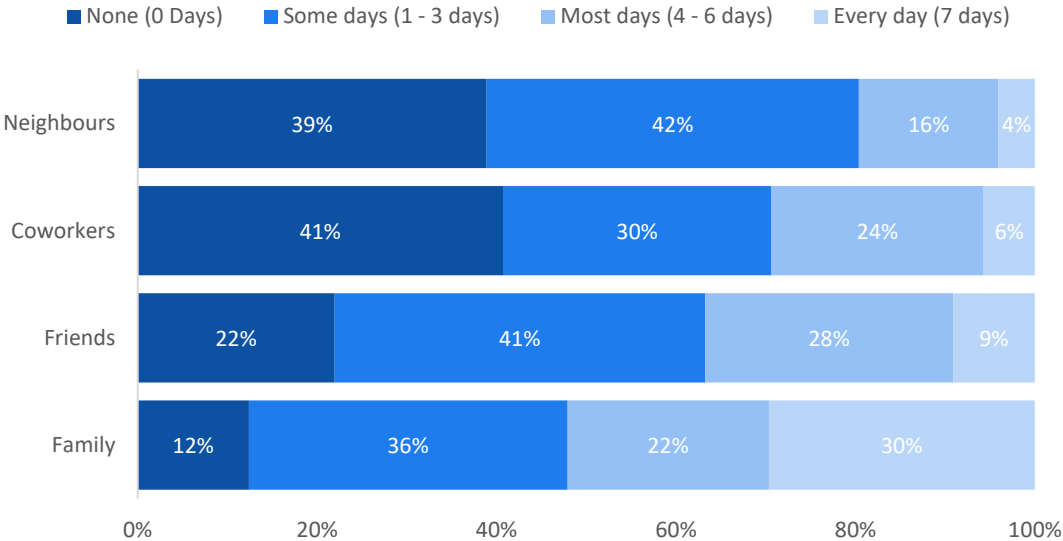
When asked about how many close friends participants had, 5% reported having no friends, 38% reported having 1-2 friend, 37% reported having 3-4 friends, and 20% reported having 5 or more friends. Participants were generally satisfied with the number of friends they have (59%), though 37% wanted to have more friends and 4% wanted to have fewer friends. Of note, 13% of participants reported not having any friends that they see, talk to, text, email, or write to at least once a month.

When asked about their connection with neighbours, 12% said they did not know the name of any neighbours; 31% knew the names of 1-2 neighbours, 27% new the names of 3-4 neighbours, and 30% knew the names of 5 or more neighbours.

How frequently are Canadians connecting with others?

To further understand patterns of social connection, we asked participants to quantify the amount and frequency of social interactions with their neighbours, coworkers, friends, and family member. When asked about how many days they interacted with family, friends, coworkers, and neighbours, a significant proportion of individuals did not socialize with neighbours (39%), coworkers (41%), or friends (22%).

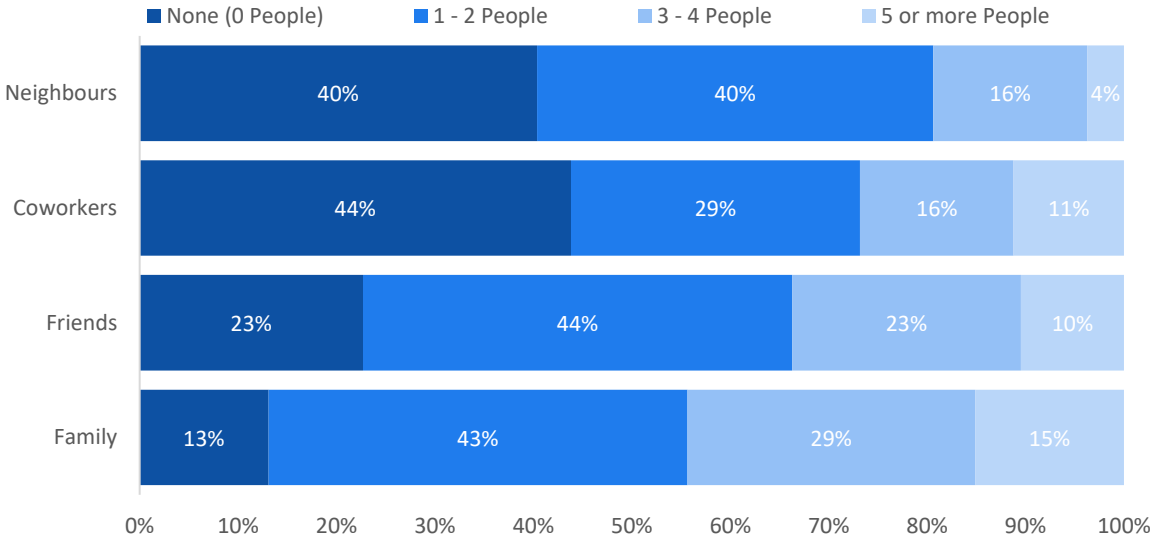
In the past week, **how many days** did you spend at least 5 minutes socializing with people from the following groups?



How many people are Canadians connecting with?

Patterns of connection are made clearer when looking at the number of people that participants reported socializing with for at least five minutes: Most participants only socialized with one or two other people in the past week.

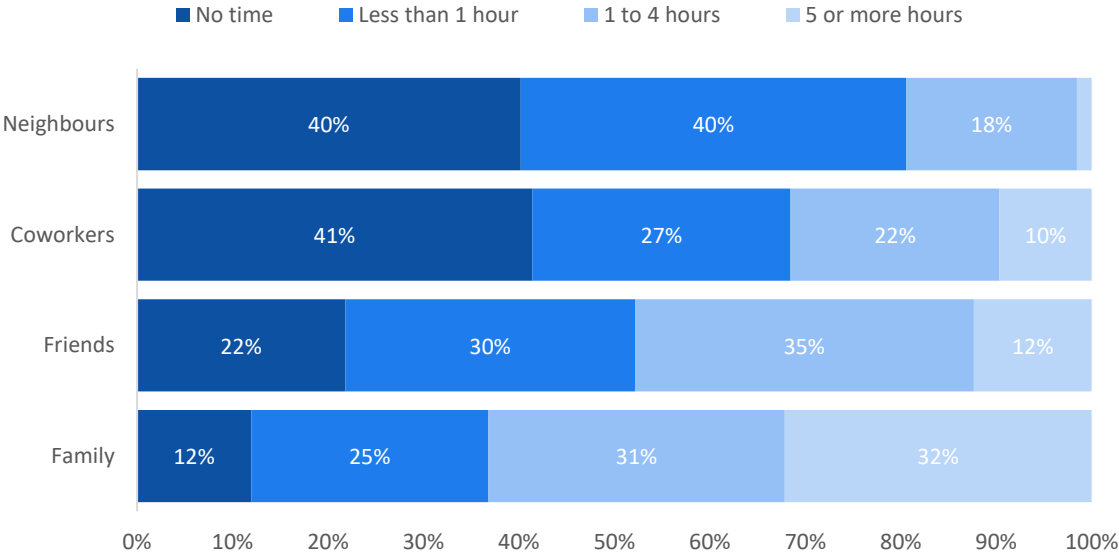
In the PAST WEEK, **how many people** from each of the following groups did you spend at least 5 minutes socializing with?



How long are Canadians spending with others?

Similar patterns were observed when asking participants how many hours they spent socializing with family, friends, coworkers, and neighbours. Overall, less than half of participants reported being satisfied with the amount of time they spent with others (46%), while 50% wanted to spend more time with others, and 4% wanted to spend less time with others.

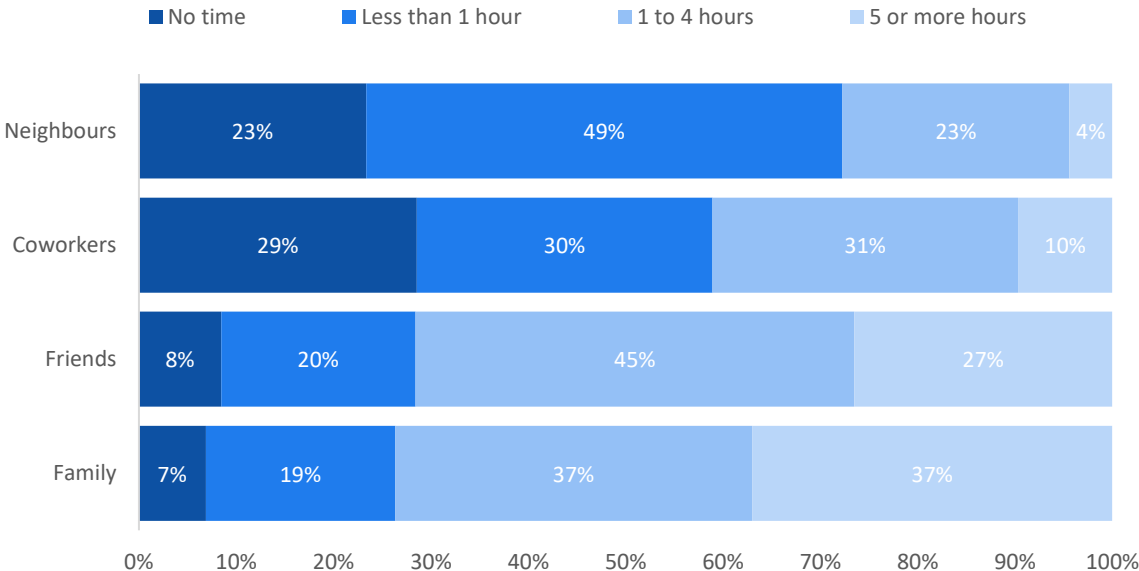
In the past week, **how many hours** in total did you spend socializing with others from the following groups?



How much time do Canadians want to be spend with others?

We also asked participants about how much time they preferred to spend with their neighbours, coworkers, friends. Results showed that participants wanted to spend the most time socializing with family and friends. However, more than one-in four participants wanted to spend at least one hour per week socializing with neighbours (27%) and co-workers (41%).

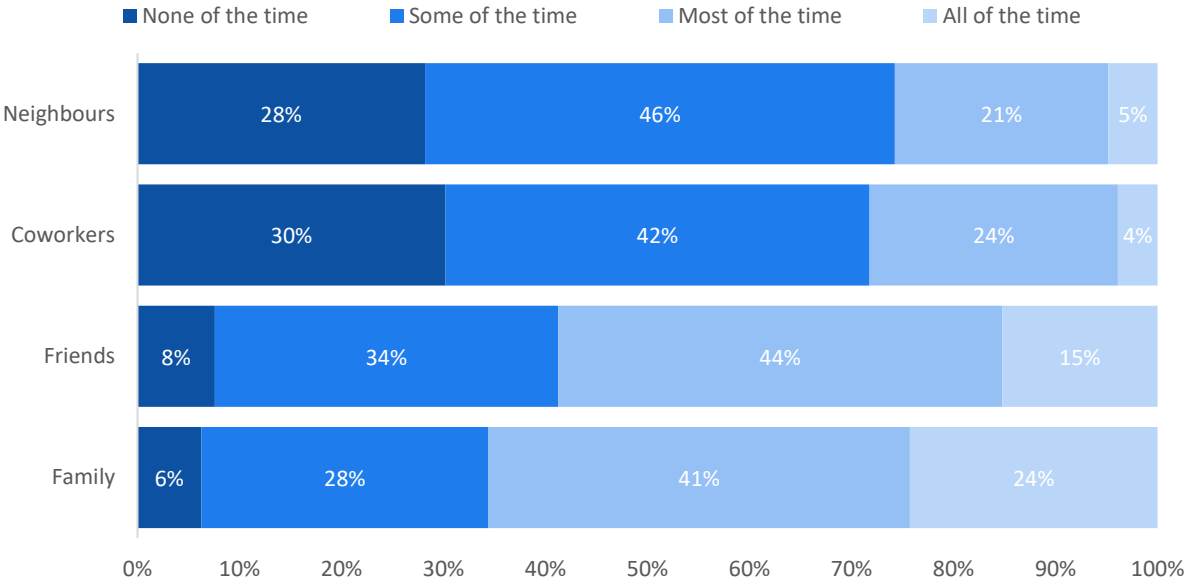
How much time per week **would you like to spend** socializing with others from the following groups?



How much of time spent with others is meaningful?

Similar patterns are observed when examining the proportion of time that participants felt was meaningful when socializing with people from each of these groups. Generally speaking, time with family and friends was meaningful most of the time, while time spent with coworkers and neighbors was only meaningful some of the time.

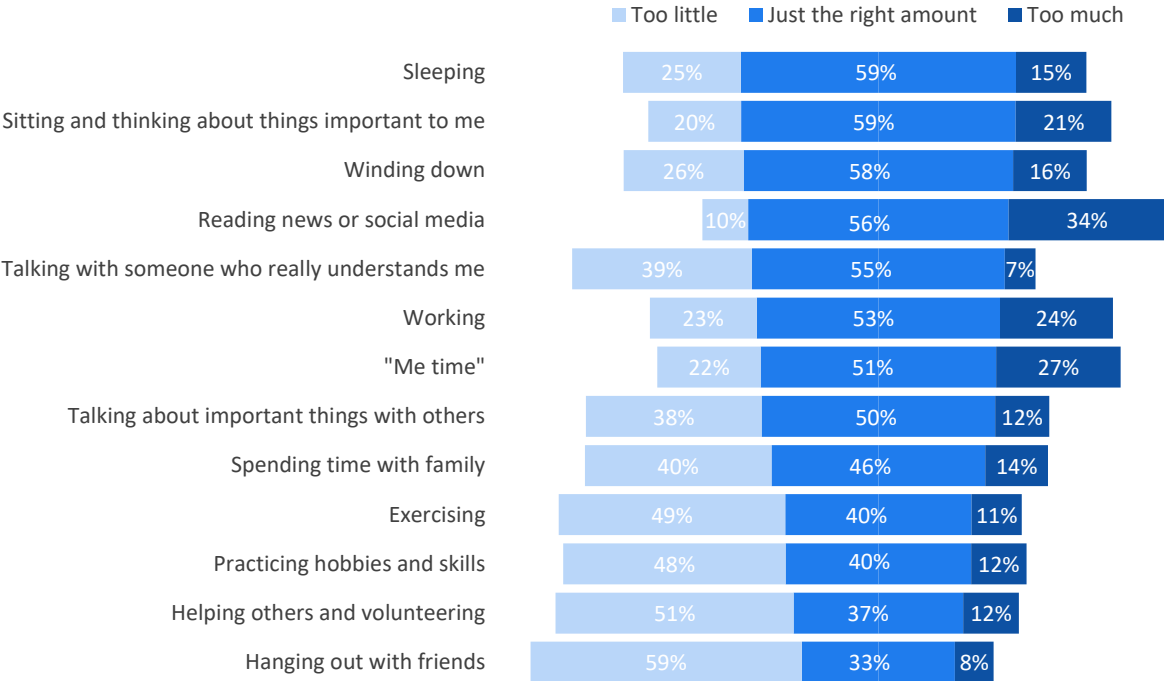
Generally speaking, how much of your time spent with each of the following groups is meaningful and fulfilling?



When speaking overall, approximately three-quarters of participants reported having meaningful social interactions at least once or twice a week: 11.1% selected "Many times a day," 22.0% selected "Every day," 20.6% selected "Many times a week," 20.8% selected "Once or twice a week," 18.0% selected "Once or twice a month," 5.6% selected "Once or twice a year," and "1.8% selected "Never."

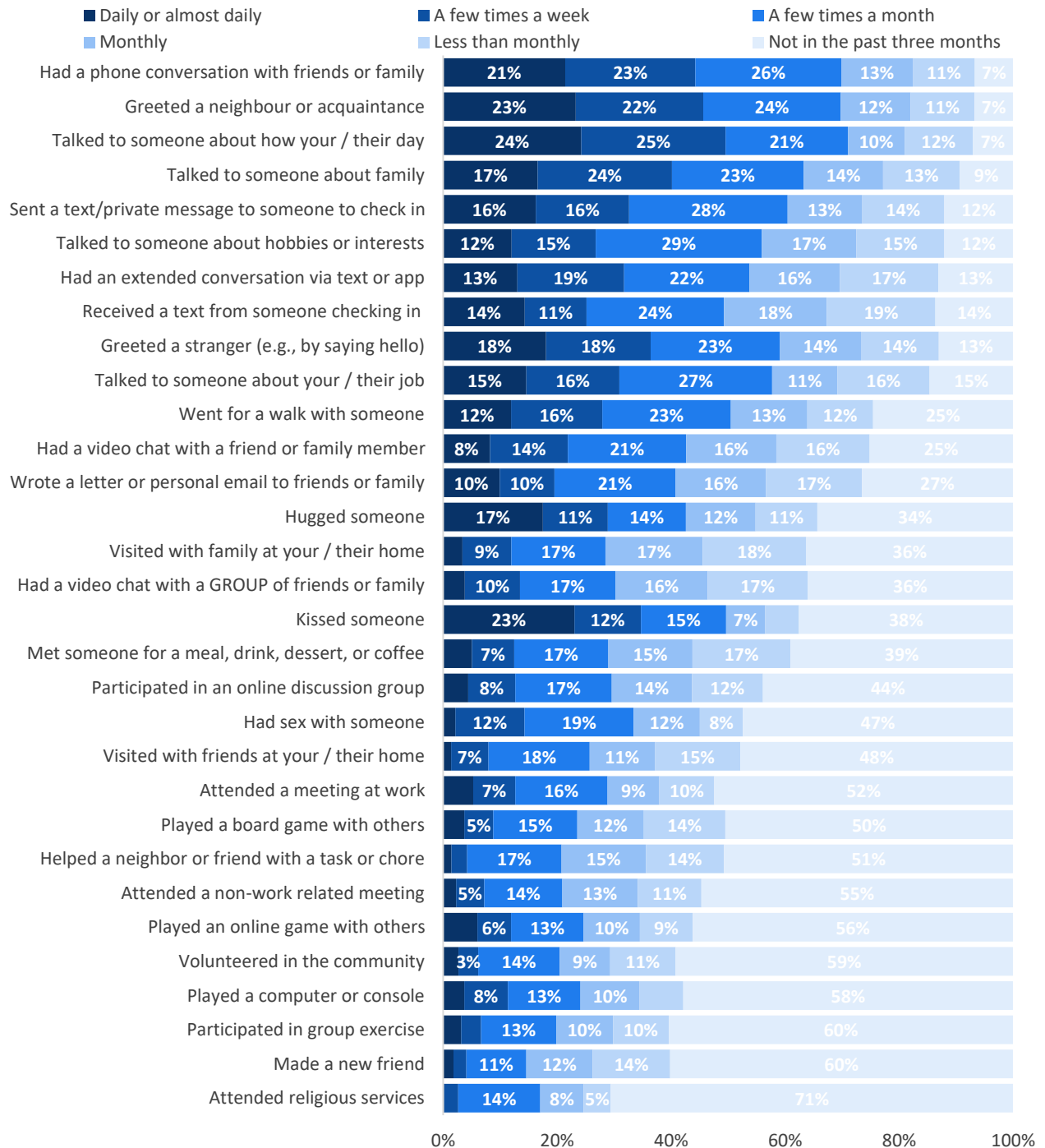
Are Canadians spending their time how they want to?

Participants were asked whether they spent too much time, too little time, or just the right amount of time doing a variety of activities. Most participants were satisfied with the amount of time they spent sleeping (59%), thinking about things important to them (59%), and winding down (58%). Participants reported that they spent too much time on social media (34%) and too little time talking with someone who really understood them (39%), talking about important things with others (38%), spending time with family (40%), exercising (49%), practicing hobbies and skills (48%), helping others and volunteering (51%), and hanging out with friends (59%).



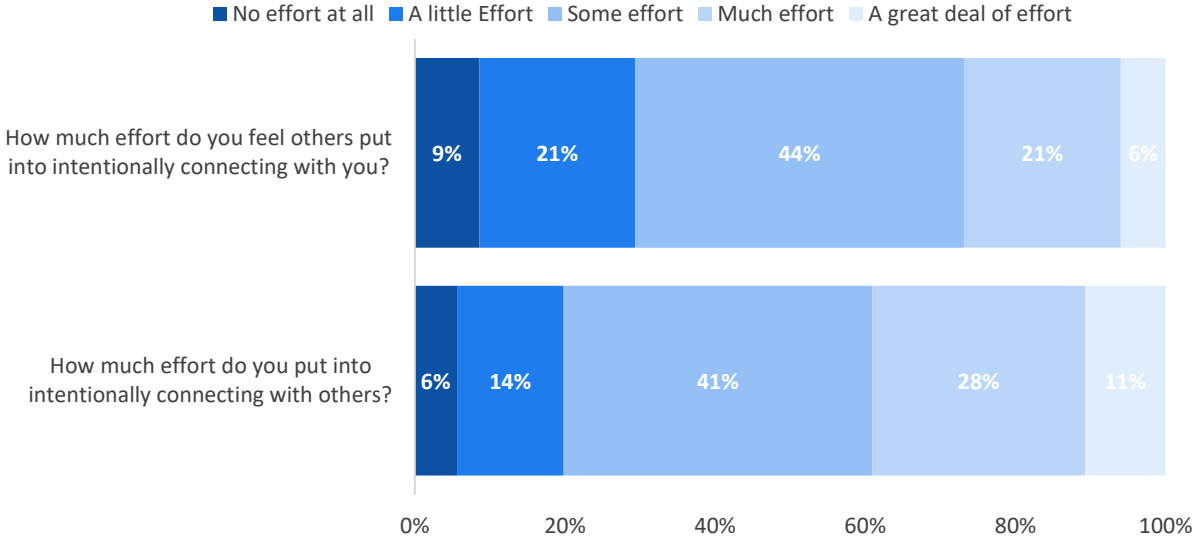
How are Canadians connecting with others?

Participants were asked how often they engaged in a variety of social interactions over the past three months. Results suggested technology-mediated interactions and less engaged forms of social connection were most common. Activities surrounding special interests and hobbies were least common.



How much effort are we putting into connecting with others?

Participants also answered two questions about the effort put into connecting with others. Their responses indicate that most people only felt they put "some" effort into connecting with others and likewise believed others only put in "some" effort to connect with them. However, more than one-in-four reported putting "much" or "a great deal" of effort to connect with others.



How many Canadians are lonely or socially isolated?

When asked directly about how often they felt lonely in the past week, 6.1% of respondents reported feeling lonely “all of the time” (e.g., 5-7 days), 18% reported feeling lonely “a moderate amount of time” (e.g., 3-4 days), 29% reported feeling lonely “some of the time” (1-2 days), 27% reported “rarely” feeling lonely (e.g., less than 1 day), and 20% reported feeling lonely “none of the time” (e.g., 0 days). Of note, when asked whether they thought others were aware of how lonely they felt, two-thirds (68%) of participants said “probably” or “definitely no”. For comparison, the median UCLA loneliness score for the overall sample was 5.56 (SD = 1.72). Using the standard cut off score for loneliness (i.e., >6), 53% of participants were classified as experiencing loneliness (approximately the same percentage as those who reported feeling loneliness at least “some of the time”).

Among participants who reported feeling lonely “all of the time” or “a moderate amount of time,” 46% reported feeling lonely for less than 12 months, 27% reported feeling lonely for between 1 to 2 years, and 27% reported feeling lonely for 3 years or longer. Similarly, among those classified as being lonely using the UCLA 3-item loneliness scale, 55% reported feeling lonely for less than 12 months, 22% reported feeling lonely for between 1 and 2 years, and 24% reported feeling lonely for 3 years or longer.

Taken together, these data suggest that a significant proportion of the loneliness reported by participants is attributable to short term loneliness (potentially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic),

Meanwhile between 6% (as defined by self-reported loneliness at least a moderate amount of time) and 12% (as defined by the UCLA loneliness scores) of Canadians are experiencing long-term chronic loneliness that has lasted at least 3 years or more.

Chapter 3

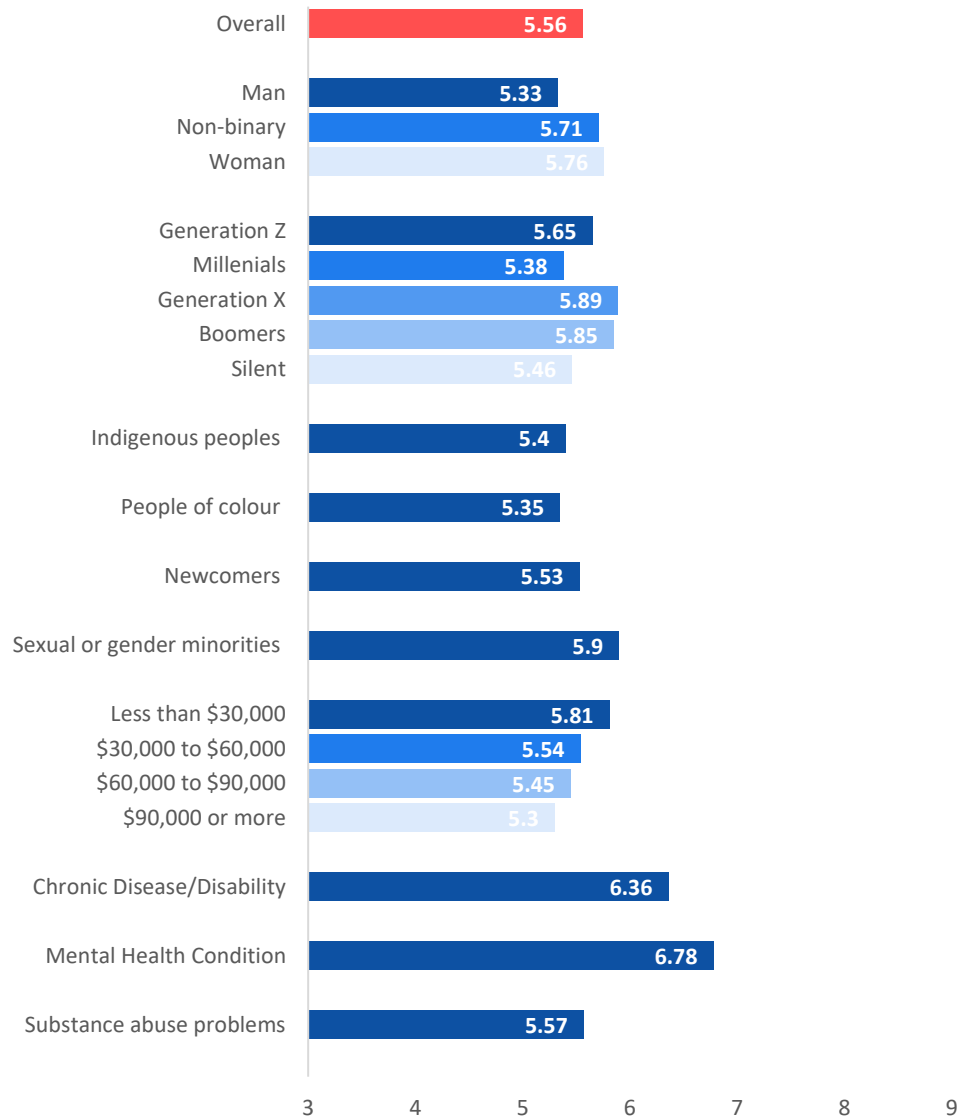
Social Health Indicators Across Key Populations in Canada

Chapter Overview

This chapter aims to compare key social health indicators across key populations in Canada. In doing so, we compare levels of loneliness, existential loneliness, satisfaction with social connections, neighbourhood satisfaction, perceived social support, perceived experiences of discrimination, social anxiety, and social phobia across key populations: men, non-binary persons, women, younger, middle aged, and older adults, Indigenous people, people of colour, newcomers, sexual and gender minorities, income groups, people living with chronic disease or disability, people living with mental health conditions, and people with substance use problems.

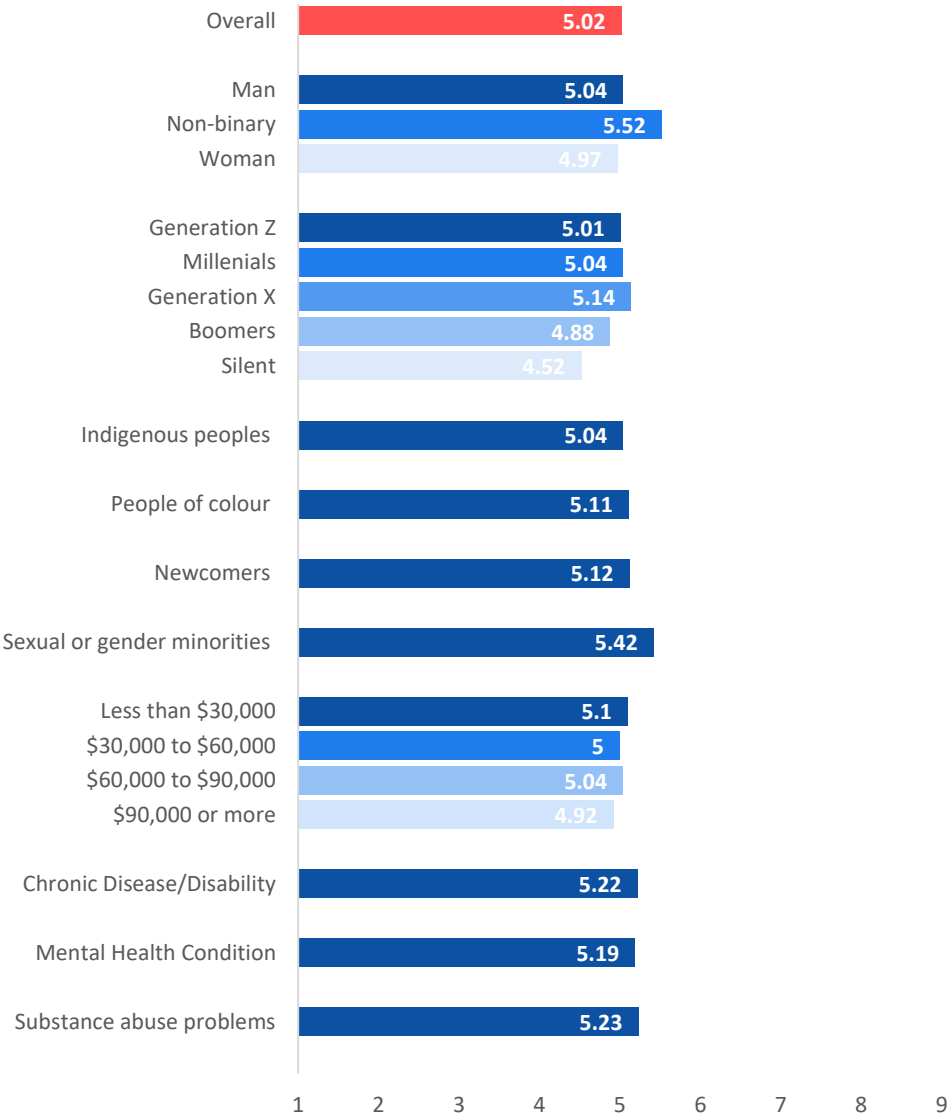
Differences in Loneliness Scores

We used the 3-item UCLA loneliness scale to assess loneliness among participants. Scores ranged between 3 and 9. The median score for the overall sample was 5.56 (SD = 1.72). Men had slightly lower scores than non-binary people and women. Millennials and people in the Silent generation had slightly lower scores compared to Gen Z, Gen X, and Boomers. Lower incomes were associated with greater levels of loneliness. The highest loneliness scores were among people with mental health challenges and people with chronic health problems and disabilities.



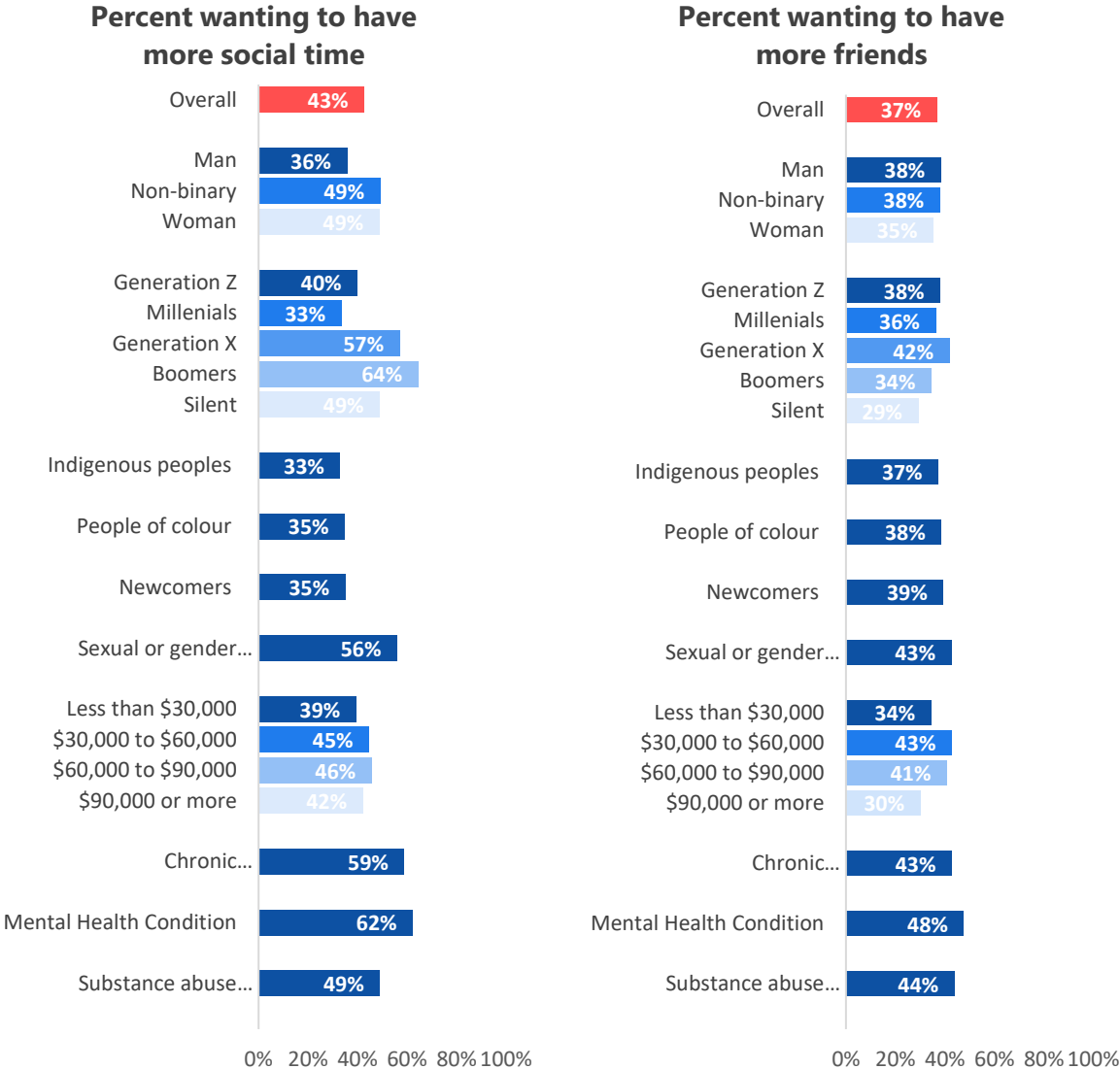
Differences in Existential Isolation

We measured existential isolation using the Existential Isolation Scale. Scores ranged from 1 to 9. The mean score for the overall sample was 5.02 (SD = 1.13). Non-binary individuals had higher scores compared to men and women and sexual and gender minorities had higher scores compared to the general population. Older individuals and people with higher incomes tended to report lower existential loneliness.



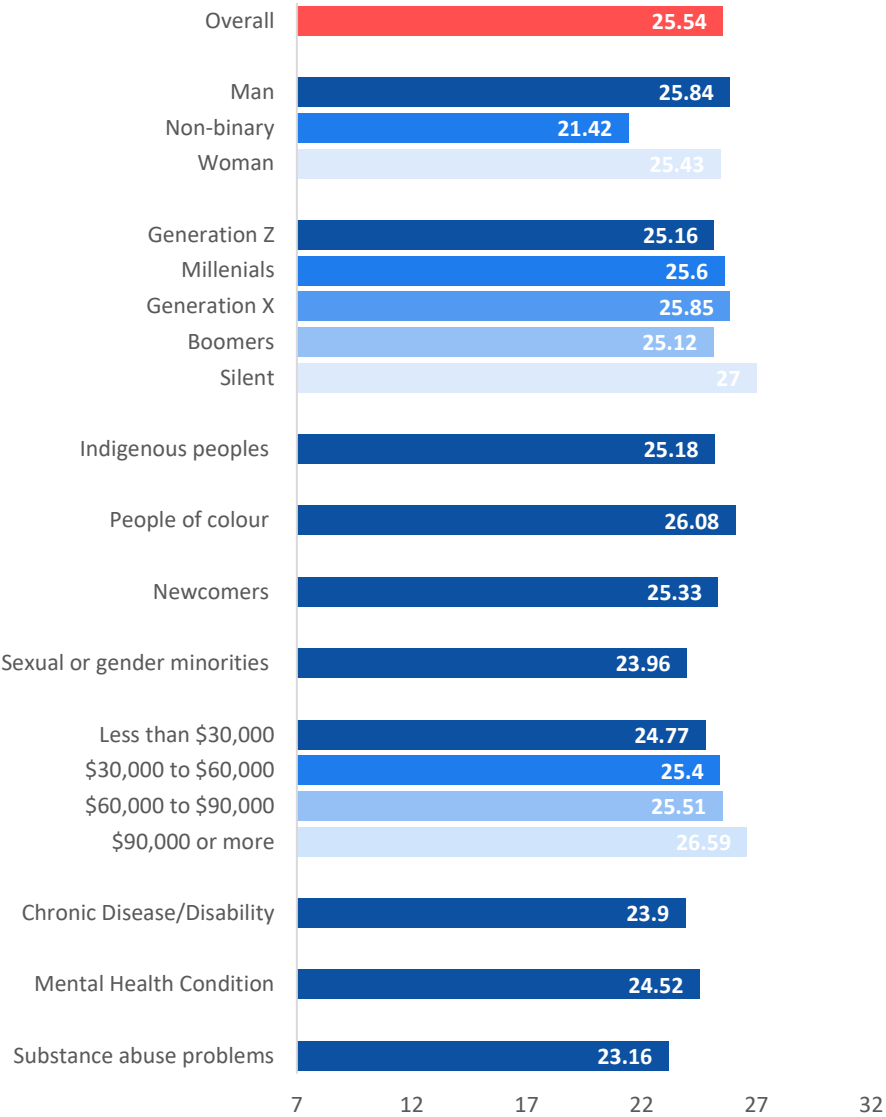
Differences in Satisfaction with Social Life

To understand differences in satisfaction with social life, we assessed the proportion of people who wanted to spend more time socializing and who wanted to have more friends. Overall, 43% of people wanted to spend more time socializing with others and 37% wanted to have more friends. Boomers and Gen X-ers were especially more likely to want to have more social time. Sexual and gender minorities and people with a chronic disease, disability, or mental health condition were more likely to want to spend time socializing and to want more friends. A U-shaped relationship was observed for income, with a higher proportion of middle income individuals wanting to spend more time socializing and wanting more friends.



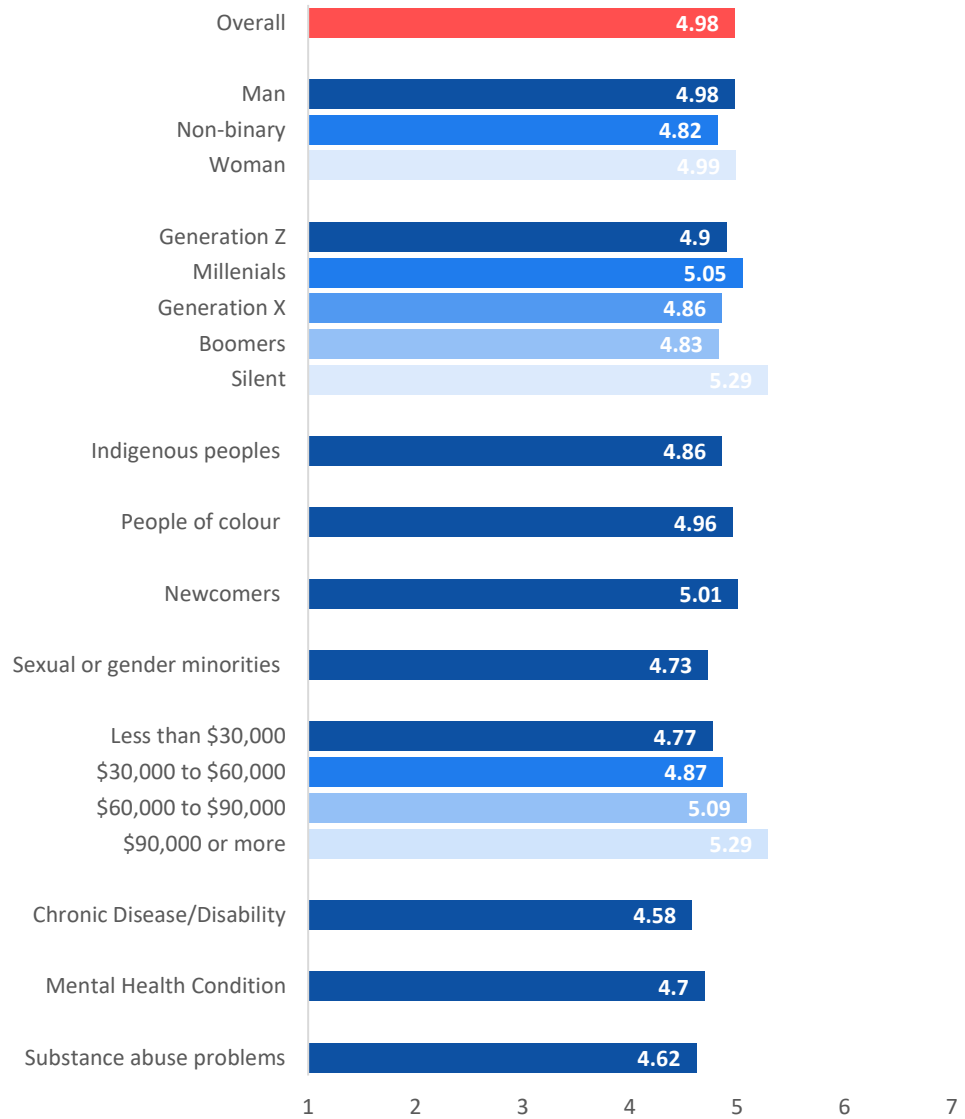
Differences in Neighborhood Satisfaction

The Neighbourhood Cohesion Scale was used to measure neighbourhood satisfaction. Scores ranged from 7 to 32. The men score was 25.54 (SD = 5.25). Non-binary individuals had lower neighbourhood cohesion scores. Sexual and gender minorities, people with chronic health conditions, disabilities, or substance use problems also had lower scores. People belonging to the silent generation had high neighbourhood cohesion scores.



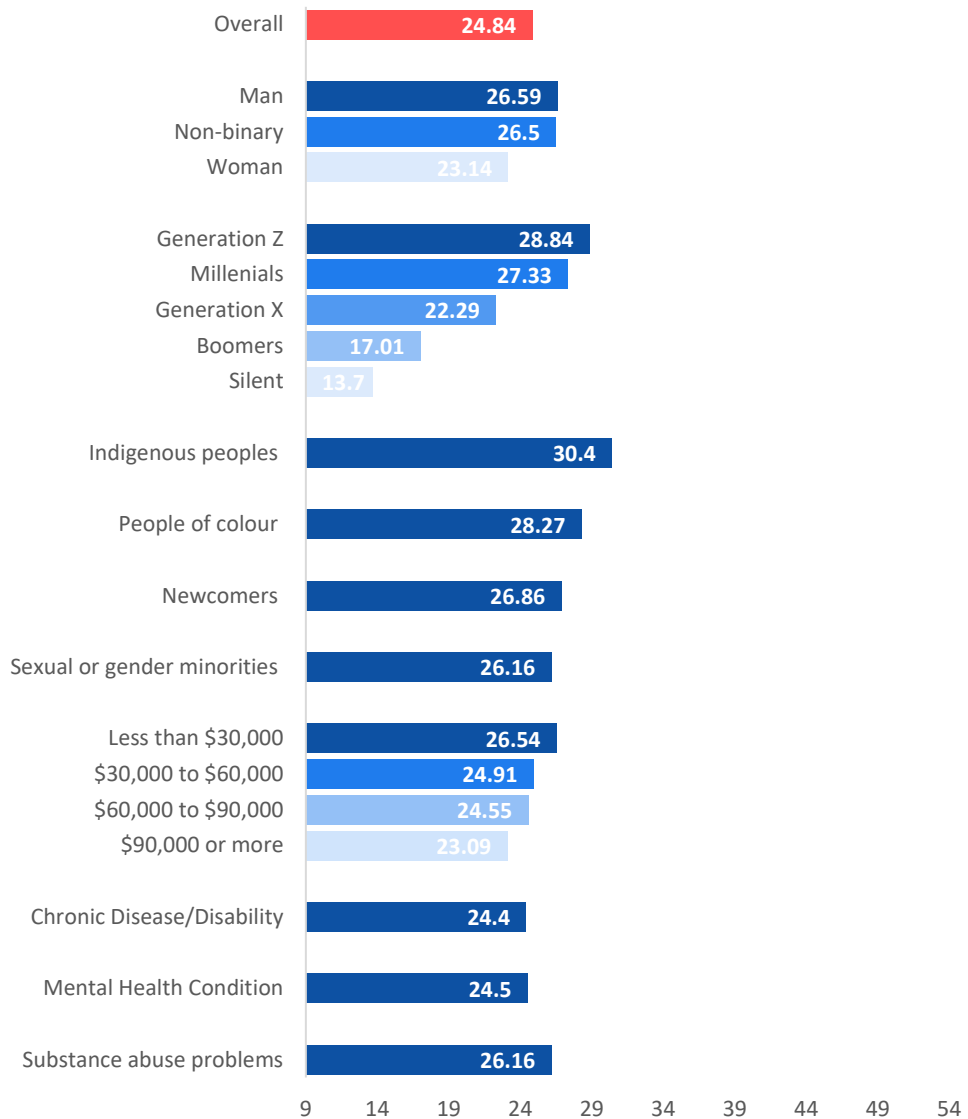
Differences in Perceived Social Support

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support was used to measure perceived social support. Scale scores ranged from 1 to 7. Overall, the average score was 4.98 (SD = 1.11). People belonging to the silent generation and those with higher incomes had higher social support scores.



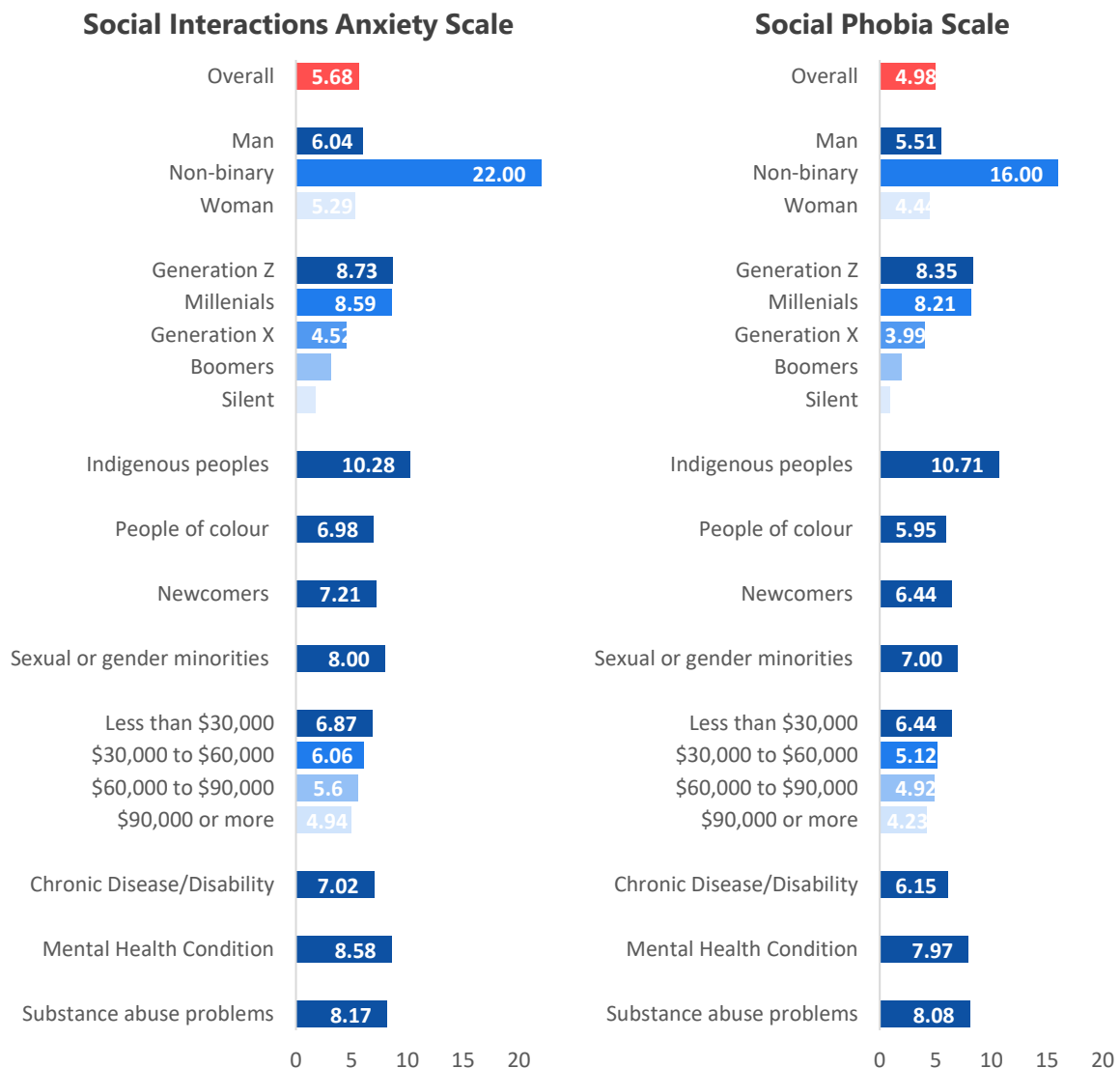
Differences in Perceived Discrimination

Experiences of discrimination were measured using the Everyday Discrimination Scale. Scores ranged from 9 to 54. The mean overall score was 24.84 (SD = 11.37). Scores were lower among older participants and women. Indigenous people and people of colour reported higher scores or average. Higher income was associated with lower scores.



Differences in Social Anxiety & Social Phobia

The Social Interactions Anxiety Scale (SIAS-6) was used to measure social anxiety and the Social Phobia Scale (SPS) was used to measure social phobia. Scores on each scale ranged from 0 to 24. The average score on the SIAS was 5.68 (SD = 5.06) and the average score on the SPS was 4.98 (SD = 5.43). Non-binary people, younger age cohorts, Indigenous people, and people with mental health conditions and substance use disorders were at greatly increased risk for higher social anxiety and social phobia scores. Increasing age and increasing income were associated with lower social anxiety and phobia.



Chapter 4

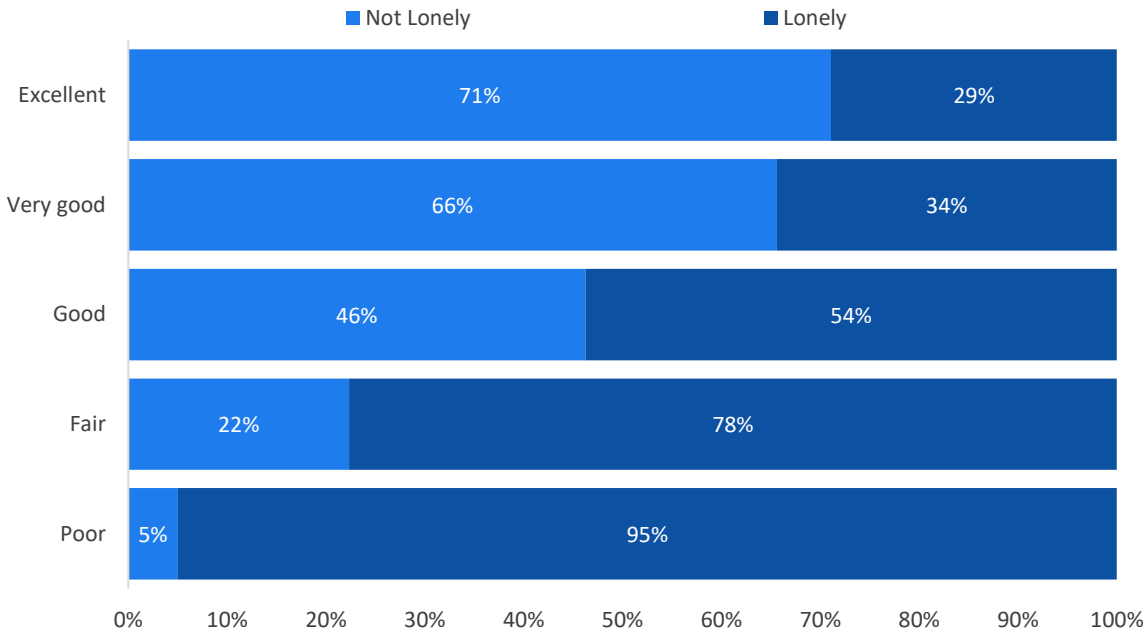
The Impact of Social Disconnection

Chapter Overview

This chapter examines the relationship between UCLA Loneliness scores and participant's mental and physical health, happiness and life satisfaction, burnout, and self-esteem. Results showed that greater loneliness was associated with poorer mental and physical health, lesser happiness and life satisfaction, higher burnout, and poorer self-esteem.

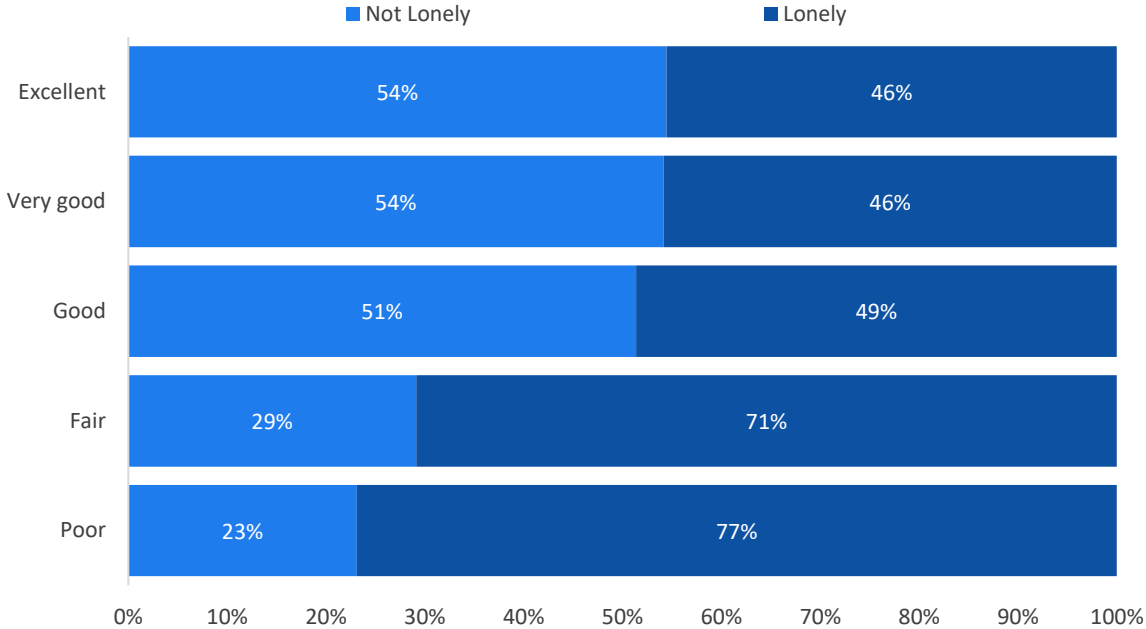
How does loneliness relate to mental health?

Using UCLA 3 loneliness scores, we sought to assess the relationship between loneliness and self-rated mental health, adjusting for age, gender, household income, immigration status, and ethnicity. Results showed that for each 1-point increase in loneliness scores, participants were 2.88 (1.70, 4.88) times more likely to say their mental health was good (vs. excellent), 7.71 (4.32, 13.78) times more likely to say their mental health was fair (vs. excellent), and 23.85 (13.80, 41.22) times more likely to say their mental health was poor. In other words, only 29% of those who said they had excellent physical health were classified as being lonely based on their UCLA 3 loneliness scores compared to 95% of those who said they had poor physical health. As shown in the chart below, there is a strong dose-response relationship between participant’s mental health and experiences of loneliness.



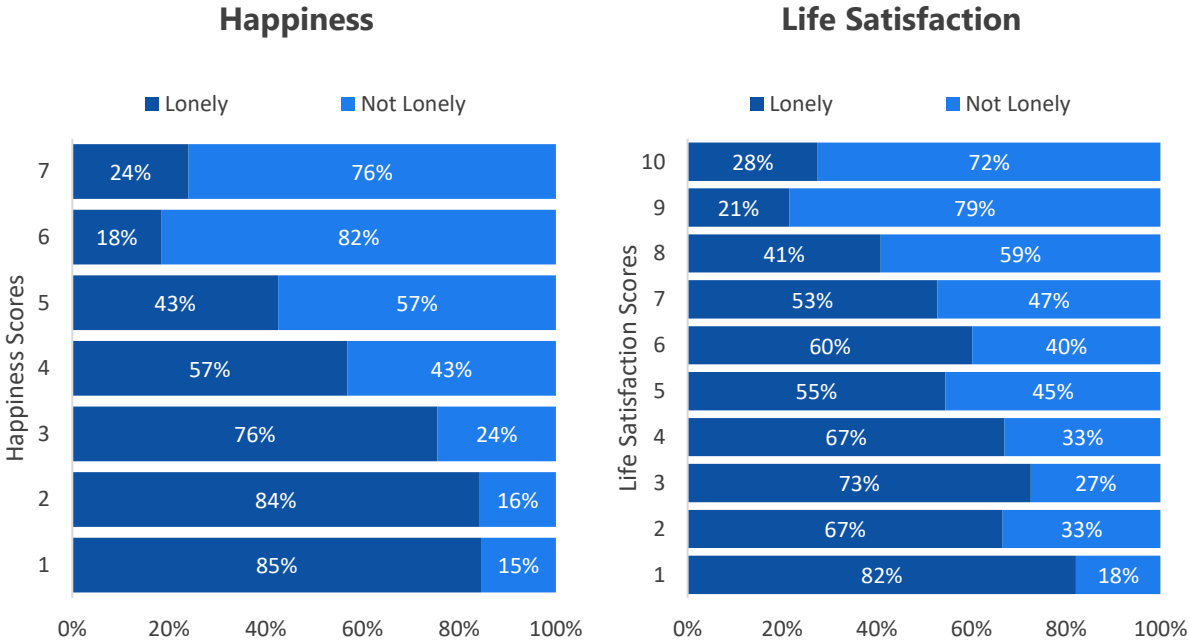
How does loneliness relate to physical health?

We also looked at the relationship between UCLA loneliness scores and self-rated physical health. For each 1-point increase in loneliness scores, participants had 2.52 (1.28, 4.99) times more likely to say their physical health was fair and 5.88 (2.44, 14.20) times more likely to say their physical health was poor. In other word, only 46% of those who said they had excellent physical health were classified by the UCLA score as being lonely, while 77% of those with poor physical health were lonely. As shown in the chart below, there is a significant increase in loneliness among those with fair or poor physical health.



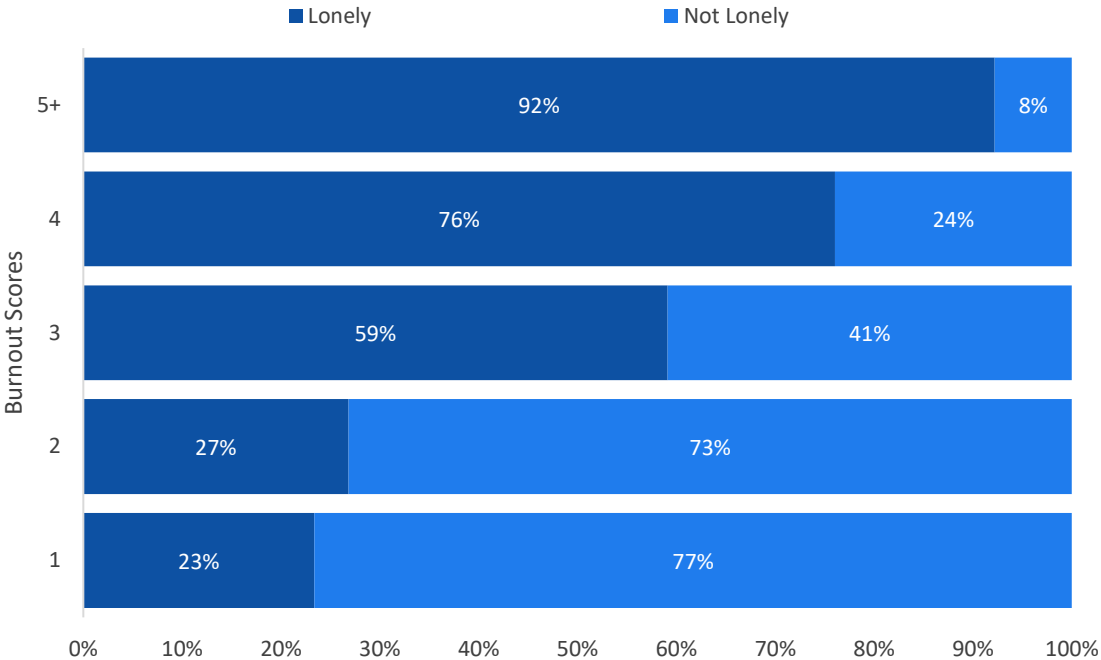
How does loneliness relate to happiness and life satisfaction?

In addition to looking at the impact of loneliness on mental and physical health, we also sought to understand the impact of loneliness on happiness and life satisfaction. Happiness scores ranged from 1 (Low Happiness) to 7 (High Happiness) and life satisfaction scores ranged from 1 (Low Satisfaction) to 10 (High Satisfaction). Results of these analyses showed that for each 1-point increase in loneliness, there was a 0.68-point (0.55, 0.81) decrease in participant's happiness scores and a 0.30-point decrease (-0.23, 0.37) decrease in life satisfaction scores. In other words, among those with happiness scores of 7 only 24% were lonely. Meanwhile, 85% of those with a happiness scores of 1 were lonely. Similarly, only 28% of those with high life satisfaction scores were lonely, compared to 82% of those with low life satisfaction.



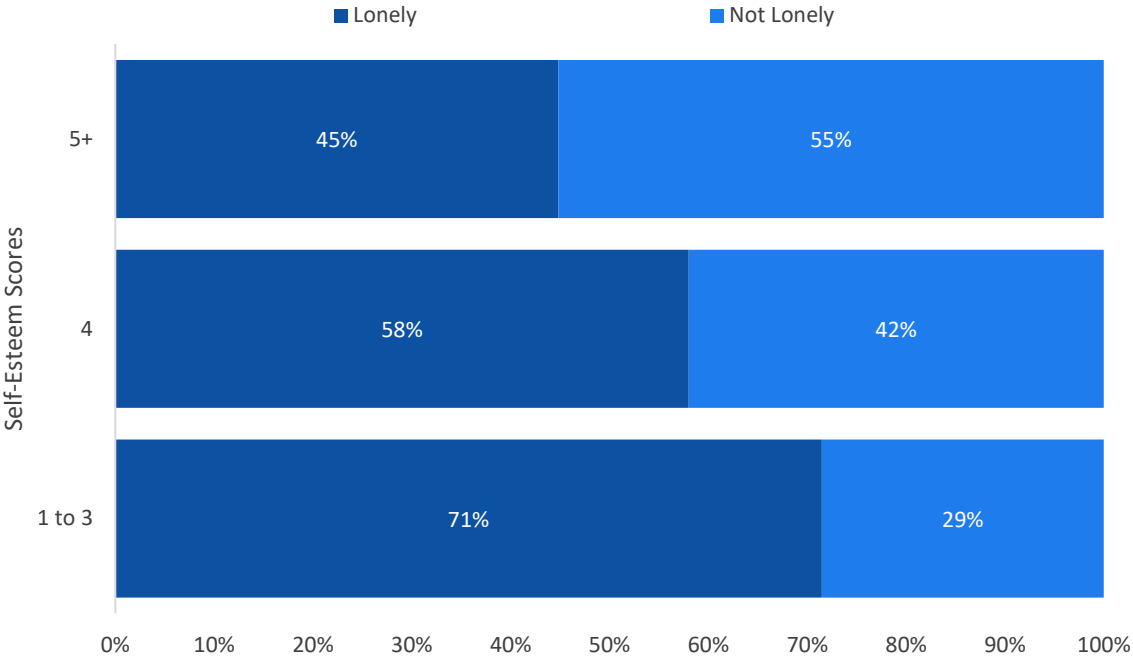
How does loneliness relate to “burnout”?

Burnout was measured using the Malach-Pines Short Burnout Measure. Scores ranged from 1 to 7, with scores of 4 or more indicating that participants were experiencing burn out. Results showed that for each 1-point increase in UCLA Loneliness scores, odds of being “burn out” increased 5.34 times (3.68, 7.76). In other words, only 23% of participants with burnout scores of 1 were lonely compared to 92% of those with burnout scores of 5 or more.



How does loneliness relate to self-esteem?

Self-esteem was measured using a 9-item self-esteem scale. Total scores ranged from 1 (Low Self Esteem) to 7 (High Self Esteem). For each 1-point increase in UCLA loneliness scale scores there was a 0.56-point (0.33, 0.79) decrease in self-esteem scores. In other words, 45% of those with self-esteem scores of 5 or more were lonely compared to 71% of those with self-esteem scores of three or lower.



Chapter 5

Patterns of Social Connection Associated with Greater Happiness

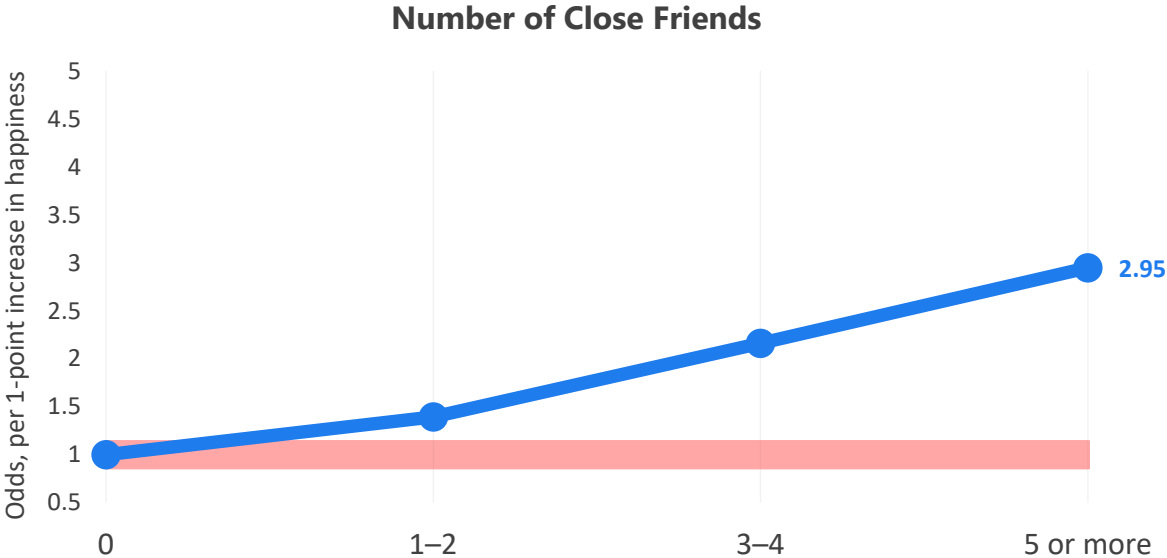
Chapter Overview

This chapter provides an overview of statistical analyses aiming to identify the factors associated with greater happiness. Happiness was measured using the Subjective Happiness Scale. Weighted linear regression models were used to test the association between happiness scores and various social behaviours. All regression models controlled for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental and physical health status.

Based on our analyses, we find that the top social strategies for happiness are (1) Having at least 3 or more friends that you consider yourself to be close with; (2) Connecting with 5 or more family members, friends, coworkers, and neighbors each week; (3) Ensuring that you're finding meaning at least "some" of your time that you spend with friends and family; (4) Spending at least one day a week connecting with your loved ones for at least 5 minutes; (5) Getting and giving hugs at least once per week; (6) Phoning, writing, and video chatting with friends and family at least once per week; and (7) Making sure that every week you're taking time to chat with others about things important to you, such as your family, interests, and hobbies.

How many friends do we need to be happier?

The number of friends was among the strongest predictors of happiness we examined, but the strength of the association varied based on the number of friends. Participants who had between 1-2 more friends were not statistically happier compared to those with 0 friends ($p = 0.249$). However, those with either 3-4 more close friends ($p = 0.005$) or 5 or more close friends had statistically higher happiness scores. ($p < 0.001$). The importance of this factor in shaping happiness relative to other factors is likely due to the reality that most other forms of social connection are predicated on one's opportunities to spend times with friends and family members.

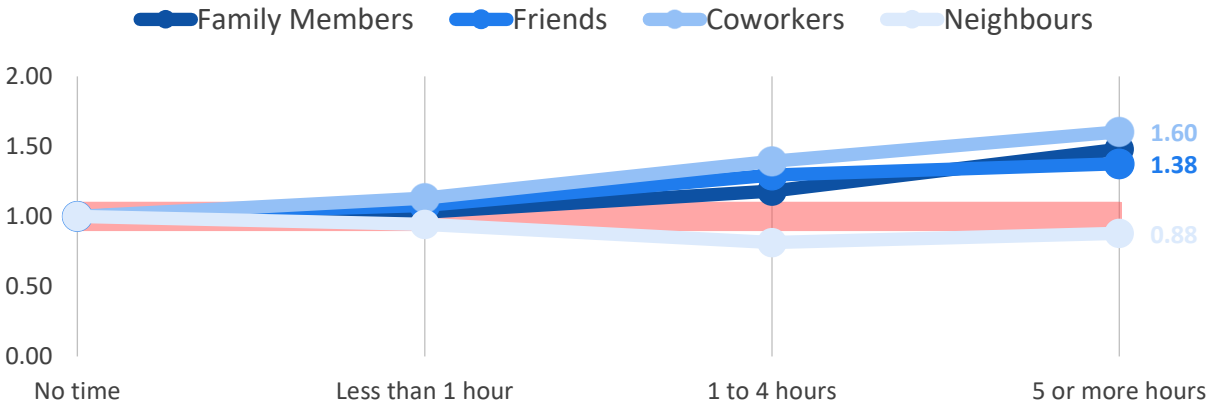


Note: Models test number of friends with "0" set as the referent level and adjust for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental & physical health status. Red line indicates NeutralOdds (1.00).

Who should we spend time with to be happier?

While friendships are clearly important for happiness. Individuals, especially during COVID-19, have had to rely on their families and others for social connection. Happier participants were more likely to report spending at least 1 hour per week with family members ($p = 0.031$), friends ($p = 0.041$), and coworkers ($p = 0.009$) throughout the week, and were less likely to report spending at least 1 hour per week with neighbors (though this difference was not statistically significant, $p = 0.588$).

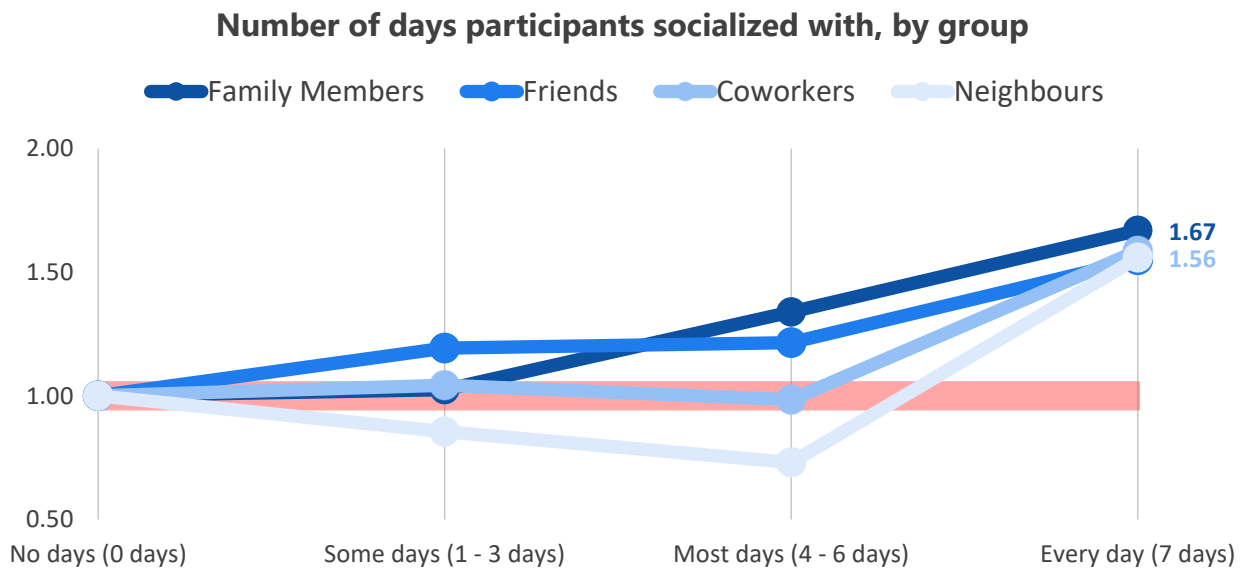
Hours participants spent socializing with others, by group



Note: Models adjust for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental & physical health status. Red line indicates NeutralOdds (1.00).

How many people should we socialize with to be happier?

The number of individuals spent time with from these groups was also associated with happiness scores. In fact, participants who spent time with 5 or more family members, (vs. 0, $p = 0.037$), 5 or more friends (vs. 0, $p = 0.039$), and 5 or more coworkers (vs. 0, $p = 0.20$) were more likely to have higher happiness scores. However, those spending time with between 1 and 4 family members ($p = 0.468$), friends ($p = 0.256$), or coworkers ($p = 0.870$) were no more likely to have higher happiness scores compared to those spending time with 0 others from these groups.

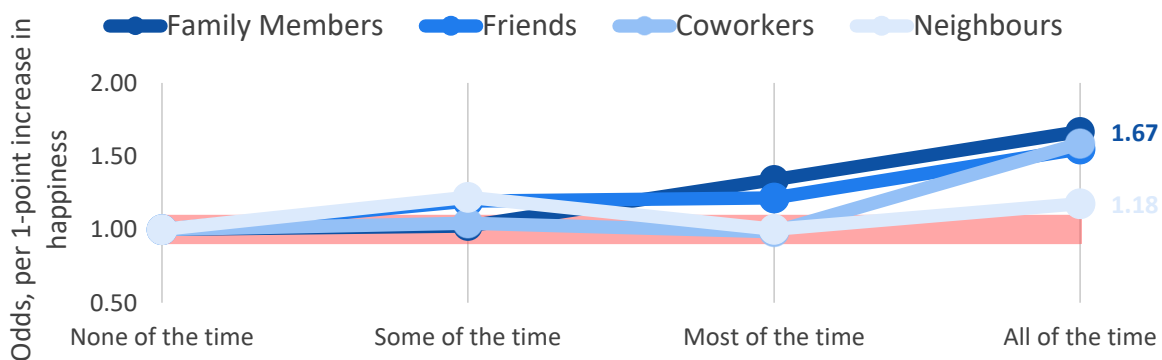


Note: Models adjust for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental & physical health status. Red line indicates NeutralOdds (1.00).

How important is it that the time we spend with others is meaningful and fulfilling?

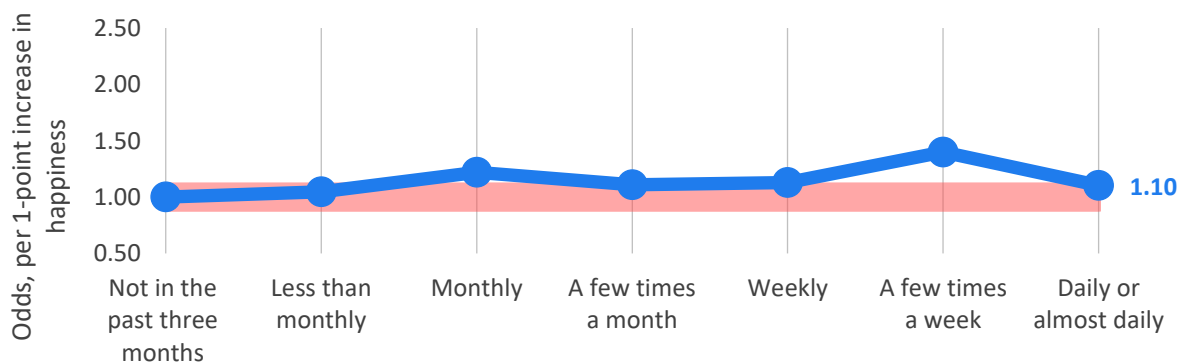
We also examined whether time spent with others had to be meaningful. To do this, we compared the happiness scores of individuals who reported at least some of their time with others from each group was meaningful to those who reported that none of the time was meaningful. Results of these analyses showed that individuals who thought at least some of their time with friends was meaningful were happier ($p = 0.036$). However, these differences were not statistically significant for the amount of meaningful time with family ($p = 0.066$), coworkers ($p = 0.529$), or neighbours ($p = 0.322$). The reported frequency of “meaningful” interactions was also not statistically significant ($p = 0.466$). This may suggest that social connections, regardless of how meaningful they are, provide significant benefits for happiness.

Proportion of time that is meaningful, by group



Note: Models adjust for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental & physical health status. Red line indicates NeutralOdds (1.00).

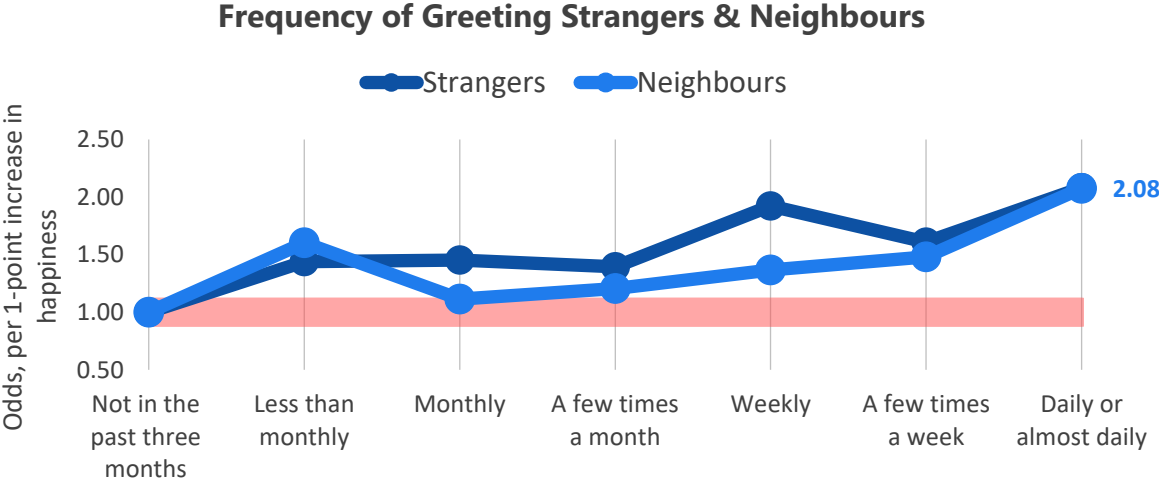
Frequency of Meaningful Social Interactions



Note: Models test weekly or more engagement vs. less than weekly adjusting for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental & physical health status. Red line indicates NeutralOdds (1.00).

Does talking to strangers and neighbours make us happier?

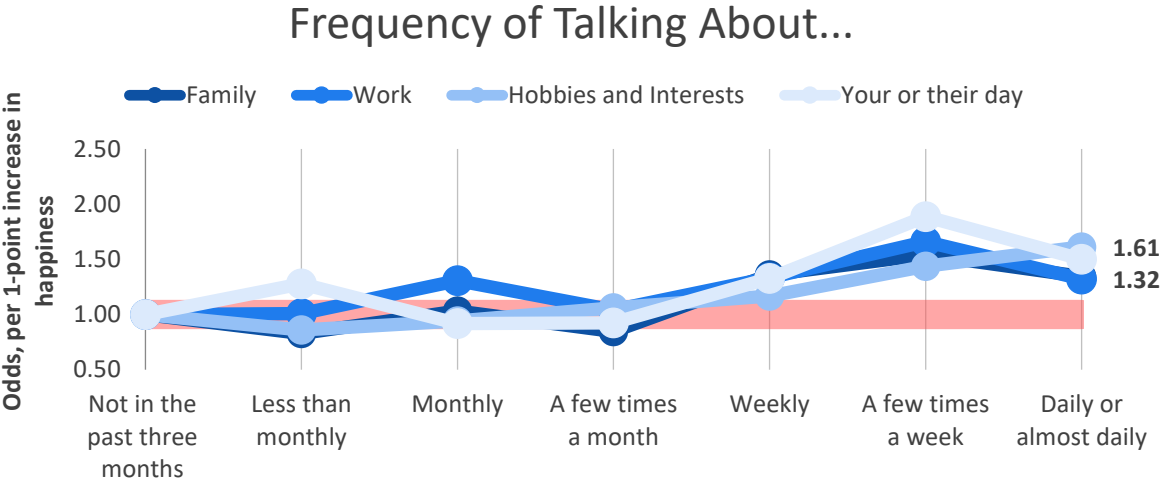
In addition to exploring the role that meaningful social interactions have in shaping happiness. We also looked at a variety of types of social connection. For example, we asked participants how frequently they greeted neighbours and strangers. Our results showed that happier participants were more likely to report greeting neighbours ($p = 0.021$) and strangers ($p = 0.005$) at least weekly. As shown in the graph below, the greatest association with happiness was observed among those who reported greeting strangers and neighbours on a daily or almost daily basis.



Note: Models test weekly or more engagement vs. less than weekly adjusting for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental & physical health status. Red line indicates NeutralOdds (1.00).

Does talking about different topics make you happier?

Greetings are not the only aspect of social interactions that make us happier. We also found that it was important that participants talked about important things with others. Happier participants were more likely to talk to others at least weekly about life (e.g., how their day is going, $p < 0.001$), family ($p < 0.001$), work ($p = 0.011$), and their hobbies and interests ($p = 0.003$). As shown in the graph below, happiest individuals talked about these topics at least a few times a week.

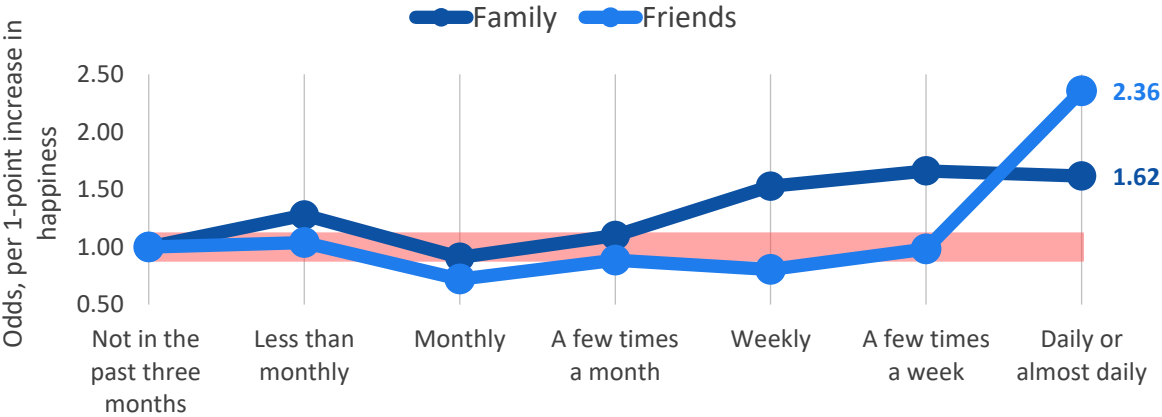


Note: Models test weekly or more engagement vs. less than weekly adjusting for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental & physical health status. Red line indicates NeutralOdds (1.00).

Does hanging out and going out make you happier?

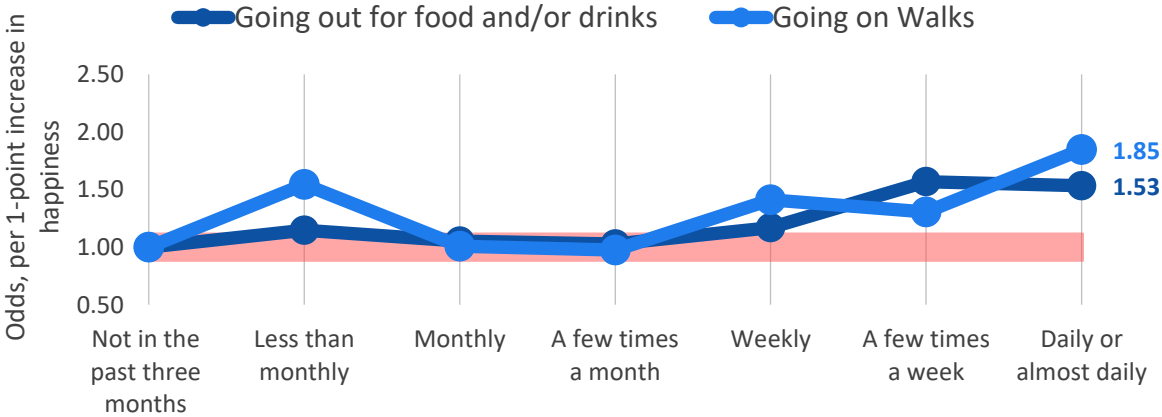
Of course, the conversations we have with others has to take place somewhere. That’s why we looked at the association between happiness and how frequently participants went out and hung out with others. Happier participants were not statistically more likely to report having friends ($p = 0.930$) and family ($p = 0.277$) over at least weekly. The chart below, however, shows a strong tendency for daily visits with friends and at least weekly visits with family.

Frequency of having friends and family over



Happier participants were more likely to go out to eat or get drinks with others ($p = 0.041$) and to go for walks with others ($p = 0.006$) on at least a weekly basis. The happiest individuals went for walks a few times a week or daily/almost daily.

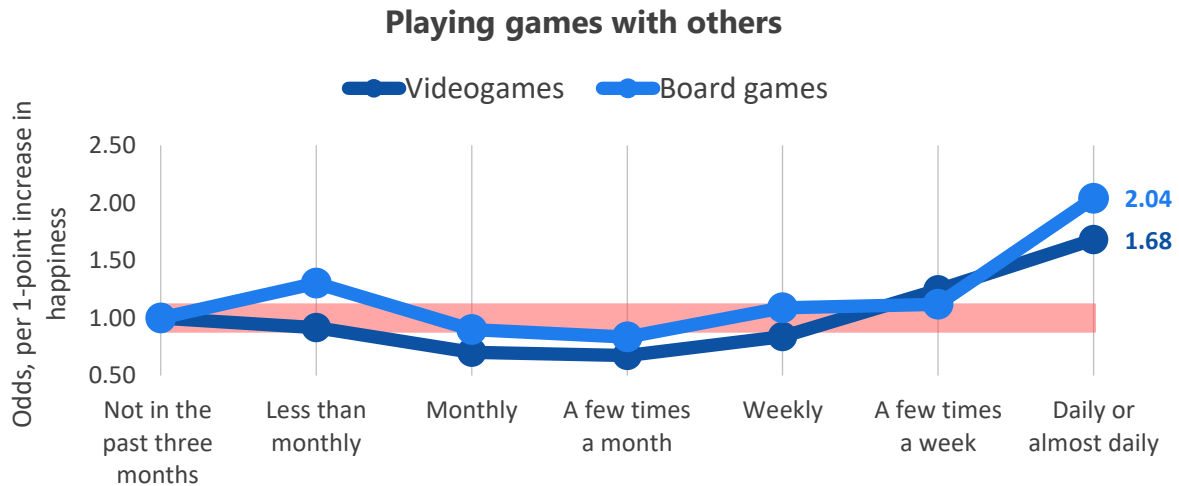
Frequency of meeting up for food and/or drinks



Note: Models test weekly or more engagement vs. less than weekly adjusting for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental & physical health status. Red line indicates NeutralOdds (1.00).

Does playing games make us happier?

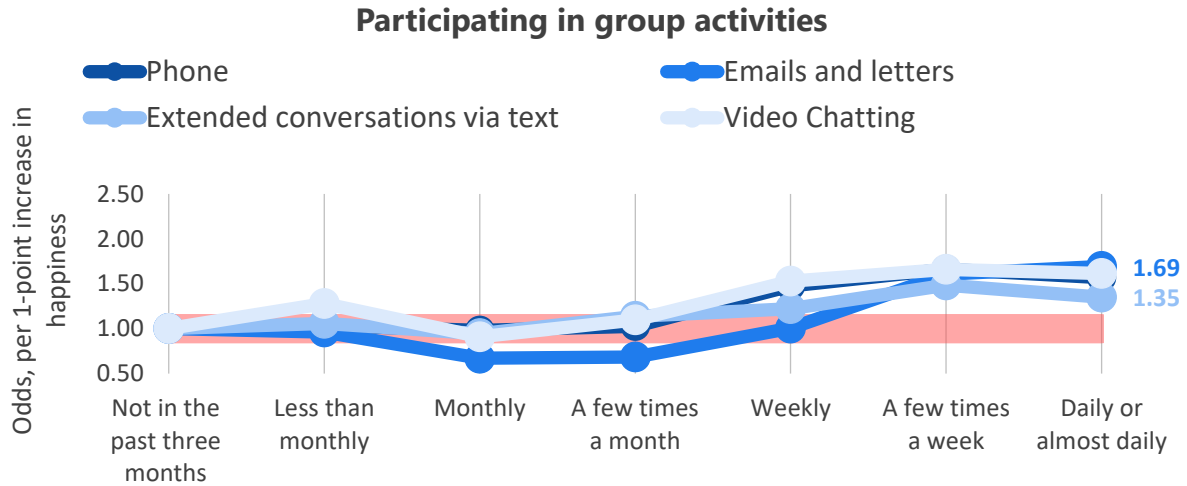
One common activity when hanging out with others is playing video games and board games. We found that happier participants were no more likely to play board games with others ($p = 0.084$) on a weekly basis or more, but they were more likely to report playing video games with others ($p = 0.012$) on at least a weekly basis. In both models, participants playing games on a daily or almost daily basis were the happiest.



Note: Models test weekly or more engagement vs. less than weekly adjusting for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental & physical health status. Red line indicates NeutralOdds (1.00).

What modes of communication make us happier?

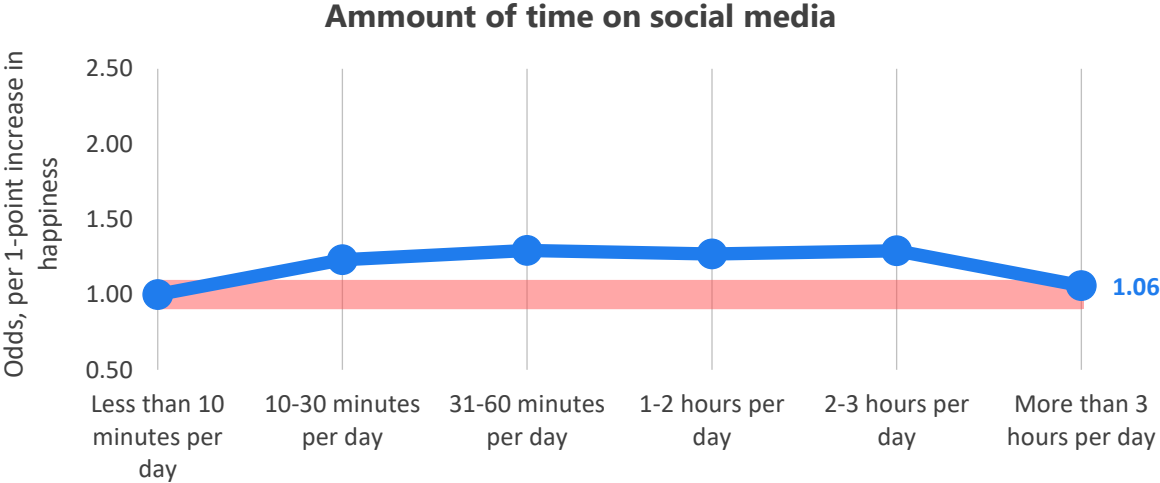
Of course, due to COVID-19, going out and hanging out wasn't necessarily possible for everyone. Therefore, we examined what modes of communication were associated with being happier by comparing frequency of use. Happier participants were more likely to report communicating to others at least weekly on the phone ($p < 0.001$), via letters or emails ($p < 0.001$), via video chat ($p < 0.001$), and through extended chat messages ($p = 0.016$).



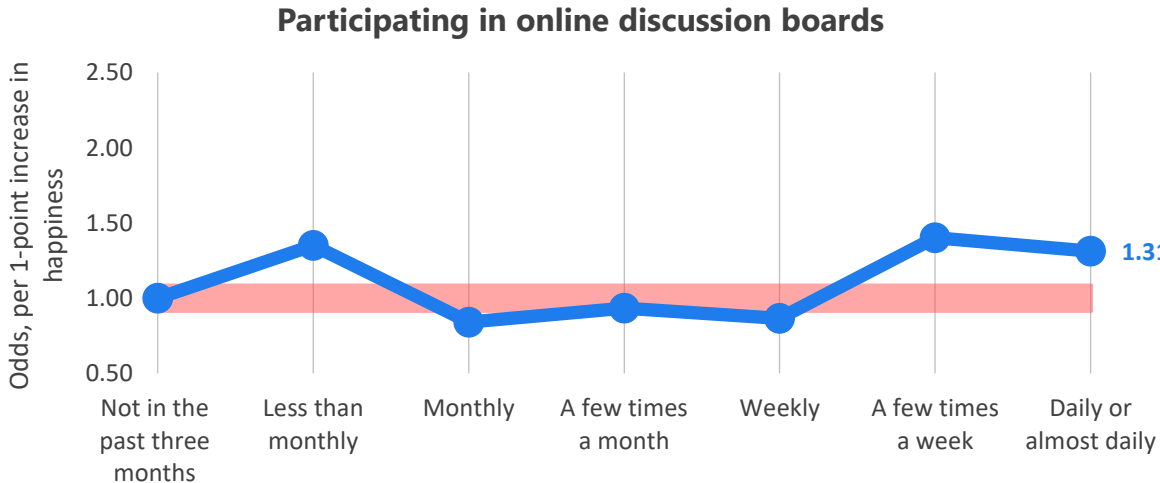
Note: Models test weekly or more engagement vs. less than weekly adjusting for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental & physical health status. Red line indicates NeutralOdds (1.00).

Does social media make us happier?

In addition to one-on-one forms of technology-mediated social interactions, many people also rely on social media and online discussion boards to connect with others. In looking at the impact that these forms of connection have on happiness, we found that participants were no more or less likely to use social media for either 10 to 90 minutes ($p = 0.145$) or for more than 3 hours ($p = 0.797$) per day. They were also not more or less likely to use discussion boards online on a weekly or more frequent basis ($p = 0.355$). As shown in the figures, any benefits to happiness of these activities are likely maximized with only limited use.



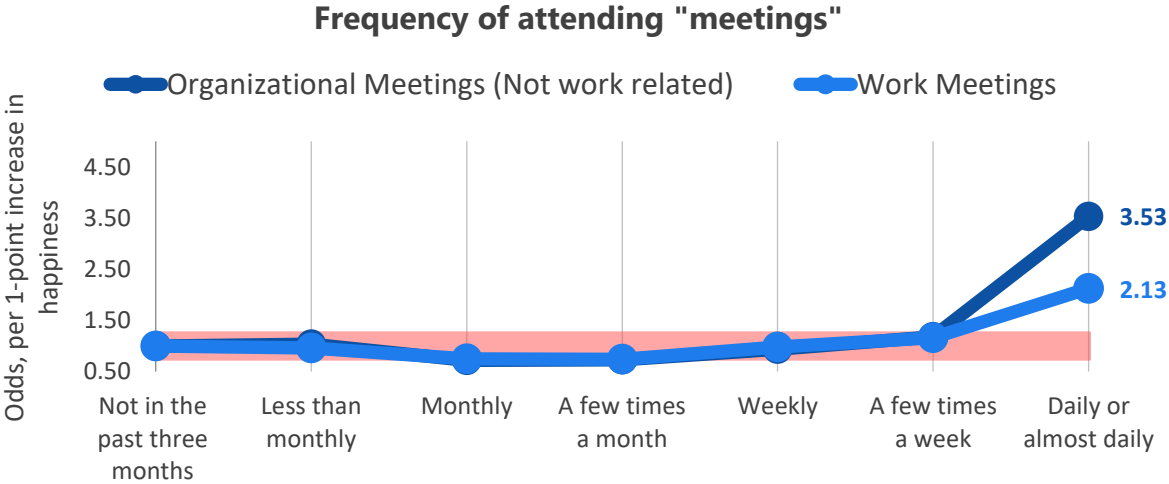
Note: Models compare 10 to 90 minutes of social media use and more than 3 hours of social media use compared to less than 10 minutes per day and adjusted for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental & physical health status. Red line indicates NeutralOdds (1.00).



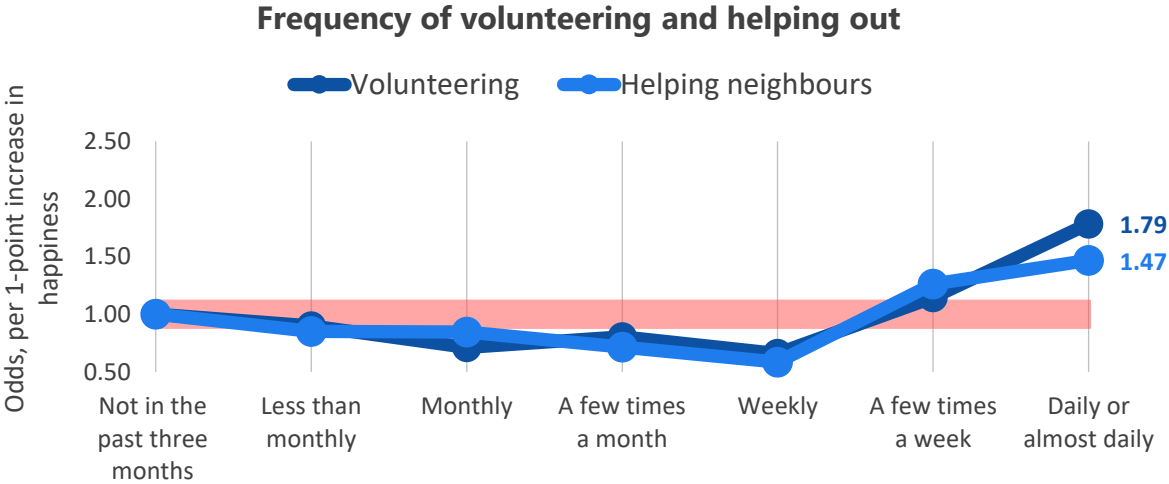
Note: Models test weekly or more engagement vs. less than weekly adjusting for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental & physical health status. Red line indicates NeutralOdds (1.00).

Do group activities make us happier?

Outside of purely social arrangements, we also looked at other forms of connectedness, such as attending meetings, volunteering, and participating in group activities. Happier participants were more likely to attend work ($p = 0.024$) and organizational meetings ($p = 0.029$) on a weekly basis, with the greatest association with happiness being among those who attended meetings on a daily or almost daily basis.

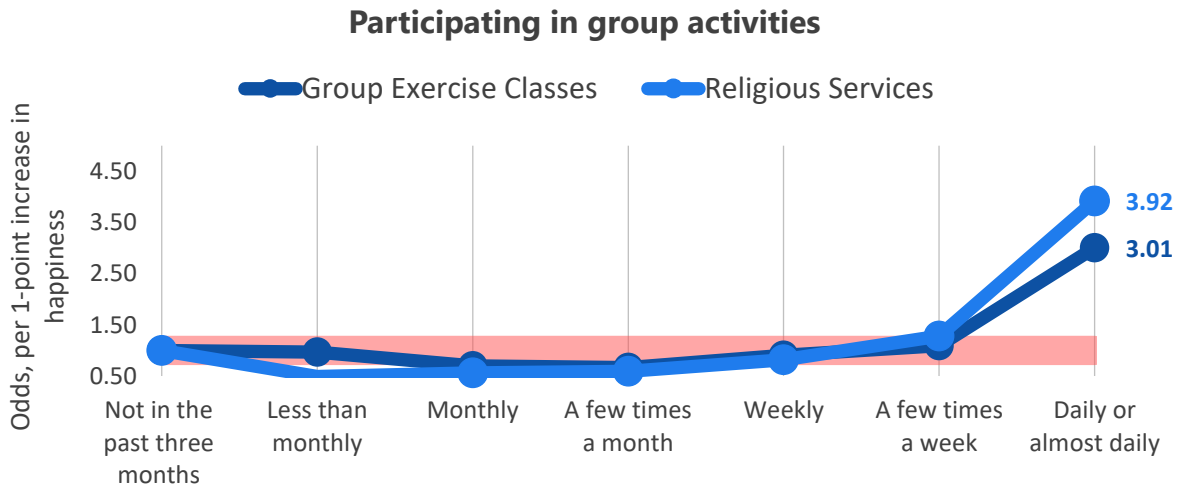


Notably, happier participants were not statistically more likely to volunteer ($p = 0.742$) or help neighbours out ($p = 0.893$) on a weekly basis. However, it appears that those who volunteer on a daily or almost daily basis did have a tendency to be happier (perhaps due to the strong relationships formed while volunteering).



Note: Models test weekly or more engagement vs. less than weekly adjusting for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental & physical health status. Red line indicates NeutralOdds (1.00).

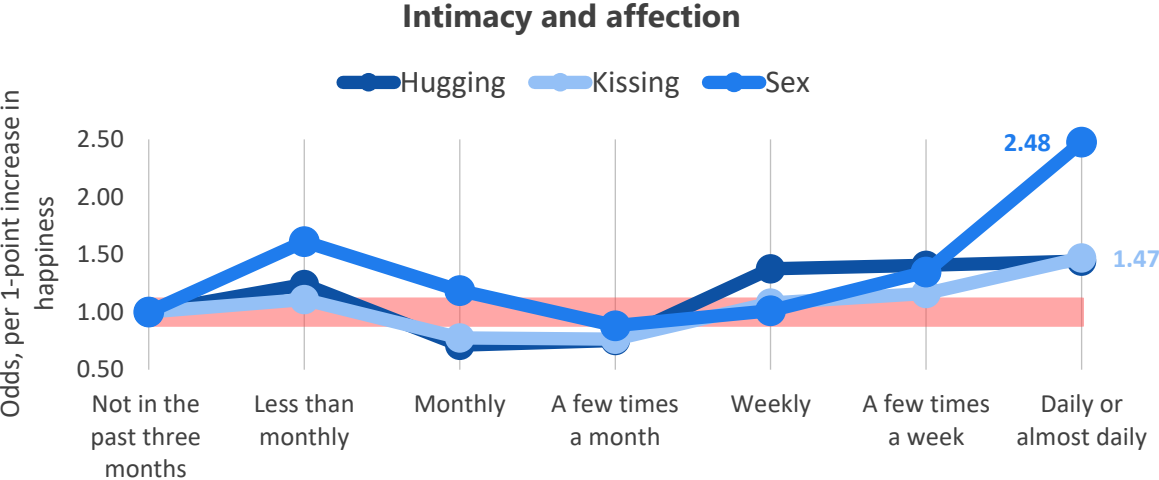
Similar to the findings related to volunteering, participants of group activities appeared to benefit most from daily or almost daily participation. Those who were happier were more likely to report participating in group exercise classes on at least a weekly basis ($p = 0.014$). While a similar pattern was seen for daily or almost daily religious services attendance ($p < 0.001$), but not weekly or more frequent attendance ($p = 0.296$).



Note: Models test weekly or more engagement vs. less than weekly adjusting for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental & physical health status. Red line indicates NeutralOdds (1.00).

Does intimacy and affection make us happier?

Social connections can take on many qualities and involve many activities. Some activities are more intimate than others. As such, we looked at the impact of intimacy and affection on happiness. These results showed that happier people were more likely to hug ($p < 0.001$) and kiss ($p = 0.005$) on at least a weekly basis, but they were no more or less likely to report having sex on a weekly basis ($p = 0.309$). Notably, sex daily or almost daily was strongly associated with happiness.



Note: Models test weekly or more engagement vs. less than weekly adjusting for age, sex, ethnicity, income, and self-reported mental & physical health status. Red line indicates NeutralOdds (1.00).

Acknowledgements

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