

Canadian Social Survey: Loneliness in Canada

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More than 1 in 10 people in Canada are always or often lonely

More than 1 in 10 people aged 15 and older said that they always or often felt lonely when asked in the Canadian Social Survey for August and September 2021. In comparison, 3 in 10 said they sometimes felt lonely and 5 in 10 said that they rarely or never felt this way. Furthermore, the survey results revealed that those who were frequently lonely reported poorer mental health and lower levels of overall life satisfaction than those who were lonely less often.

Given the context of the global pandemic, it is a priority to understand loneliness and its impacts on quality of life. In Canada, loneliness is included as an indicator in the recently established [National Quality of Life Framework](#). The Framework will be used to identify future policy priorities and build on previous actions to improve evidence-based decision-making and budgeting at the federal level.

New data from the *Canadian Social Survey – Well-being, Activities and Perception of Time*, collected in August and September 2021, allow for an exploration of loneliness experienced by Canadians more than one year into the COVID-19 pandemic. This survey provides the first direct measure of loneliness for the total population aged 15 and older in Canada and fills a data gap identified by the Quality of Life Framework.

Young women and people who are not in a couple report the highest levels of loneliness

Women were more likely to report feeling lonely than men in August and September 2021. Overall, 15% of women aged 15 and older in Canada's 10 provinces said they felt lonely always or often during that period, compared with 11% of men in the same age group.

Young people in Canada expressed experiencing loneliness more frequently than older people. Among youth aged 15 to 24 years, nearly 1 in 4 (23%) said they always or often felt lonely. This compared with 15% of those who were slightly older, between the ages of 25 and 34. Seniors aged 75 and older (14%) reported feeling lonely more often than did those aged 65 to 74 (9%).

Younger women appeared to be particularly afflicted by loneliness. Nearly twice the share of women aged 15 to 24 (29%) reported always or often being lonely compared with women in the next decade of life (16%). Among men, the differences in loneliness were less dramatic by age group, as 18% of men aged 15 to 24 and 15% of men aged 25 to 34 said that they always or often felt lonely.

The prevalence of loneliness among Canada's largest groups designated as visible minorities was in line with that for the overall population. For example, 13% of South Asians and 11% of Black people reported always or often feeling lonely. These results were not statistically different from the overall estimate of 13% of Canadians experiencing high levels of loneliness.

Perhaps not surprisingly, nearly one-quarter (24%) of people who lived alone stated that they always or often felt lonely, more than double the proportion of those who were living with others in their household (11%).

By marital status, the share of those who said they always or often feel lonely was three times higher among those who were not married or in a common-law relationship (21%) compared with those who were married or living common-law (7%), a disparity that continued when examined among men and women separately. However, of those in a marriage or common-law relationship, a larger share of women (9%) than men (6%) reported always or often feeling lonely.

The findings that women, younger people and those who are not married or living common-law express greater degrees of loneliness has also been documented by the United Kingdom Office for National Statistics (please refer to "[Loneliness - What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?](#)").

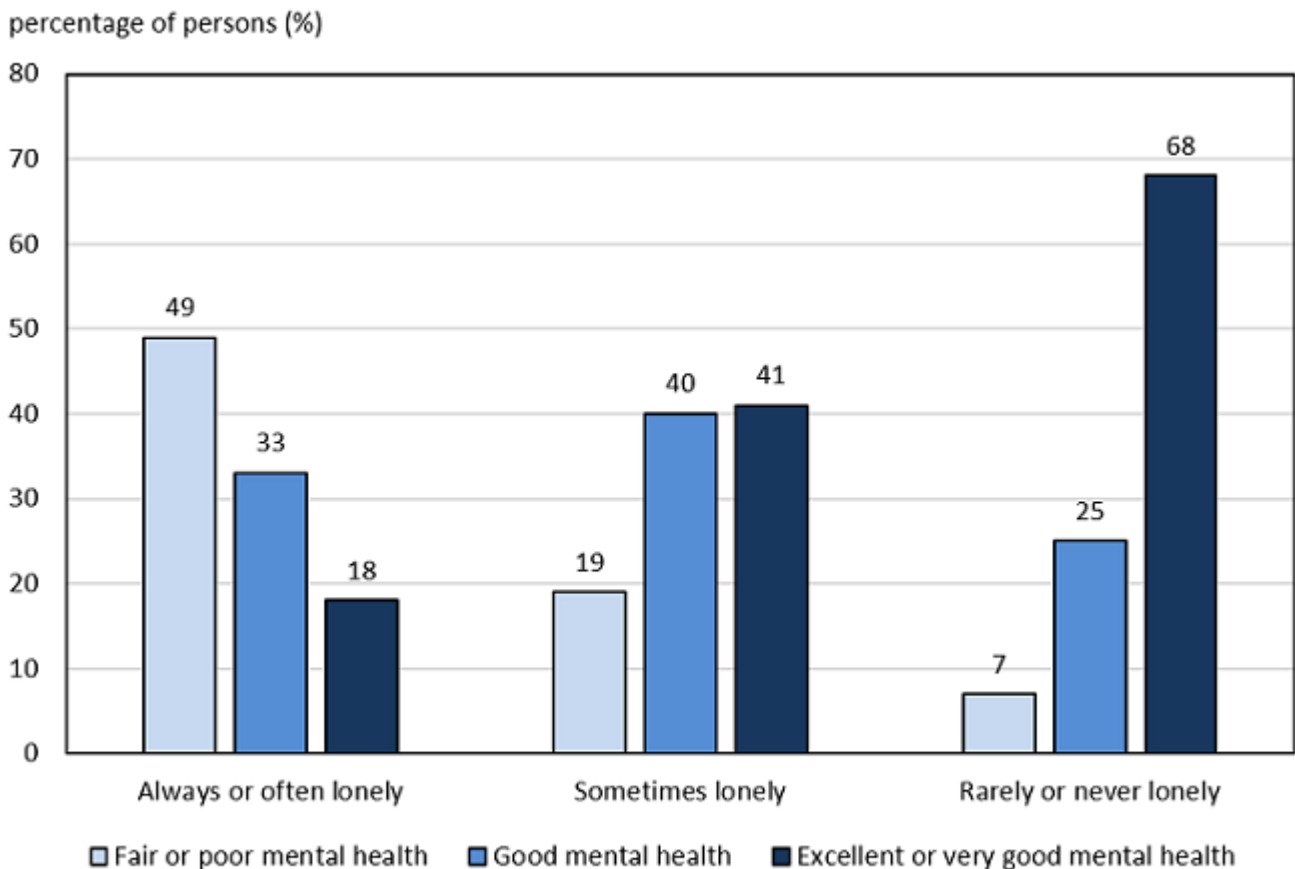


Close to half of Canadians who are lonely report fair or poor mental health

Loneliness is an important issue because without social connections and supports, one's health and overall well-being can suffer.

In August and September 2021, close to half (49%) of those who said that they always or often felt lonely reported that their mental health was either fair or poor. In comparison, among those who said that they rarely or never feel lonely, a much smaller share (7%) reported fair or poor mental health.

Infographic 1 – Self-reported mental health, by frequency of feeling lonely, population aged 15 and older, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Social Survey – Well-being, Activities and Perception of Time, 2021.

In a similar way, people who always or often felt lonely rated their overall life satisfaction lower than those who said they felt lonely less frequently. The average life satisfaction score, based on a scale of 0 to 10—where 0 is "very dissatisfied" and 10 is "very satisfied"—was 5.5 among people who were always or often lonely, compared with 8.1 among those who were rarely or never lonely.

The above results are not intended to suggest causality, as it is beyond the scope of this article to indicate whether or not loneliness might cause lower mental health and lower life satisfaction or whether these outcomes might be attributable to something else.

Infographic 2 – The Quality of Life Framework for Canada



Source: Department of Finance Canada.

Loneliness is an indicator in Canada's Quality of Life Framework in the Society domain. For more information on quality of life in Canada, please refer to "[Measuring What Matters](#)." Stay tuned for further releases focusing on quality of life and well-being in Canada.

Table 1
Percentage of persons reporting always or often feeling lonely by gender, age group and marital status, population aged 15 and older, 2021

	Total population	Male	Female
Total	13.0	11.3	14.7
Age group			
15 to 24 years (ref)	23.4	18.0	29.3
25 to 34 years	15.4 ²	15.0	15.8 ²
35 to 44 years	10.0 ²	8.7 ¹	11.3 ²
45 to 54 years	10.4 ²	8.7	11.9 ²
55 to 64 years	9.6 ²	8.3 ¹	10.8 ²
65 to 74 years	8.9 ²	7.9 ²	9.8 ²
75 years and older	14.1 ²	12.1	15.6 ²
Marital status			
Married or common-law (ref)	7.2	5.8	8.6
Not in a couple	21.4 ²	19.8 ²	22.7 ²

1. Significantly different from column reference group (ref), (p is less than 0.05).

2. Significantly different from column reference group (ref), (p is less than 0.01).

Note(s): Given that the non-binary population is a small population, data aggregation is necessary in order to protect the confidentiality of responses provided by respondents. Most information from the Canadian Social Survey is disseminated using a two-category gender variable. In these cases, people in the category "non-binary person" are distributed in the other two gender categories.

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Canadian Social Survey – Well-being, Activities and Perception of Time, 2021 (5354).

Note to readers

The data in this release are from the second wave of the Canadian Social Survey (CSS), Statistics Canada's newest data collection project. The target population for this voluntary survey is all non-institutionalized persons 15 years of age and older, living off-reserve in Canada's 10 provinces. Statistics Canada collects the statistical information by either inviting a respondent to self-respond to an electronic questionnaire, or by having an interviewer contact a respondent to collect the information using the computer-assisted telephone interviewing method.

The aim of the CSS is to better understand well-being needs across Canada's provinces in order to inform the implementation of suitable support measures during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics Canada would like to thank all Canadians who took the time to answer the questions during this challenging time.

In the second wave of the *Canadian Social Survey – Well-being, Activities and Perception of Time*, participants were asked to respond to the question "How often do you feel lonely?" by choosing one of the following five options: "always", "often", "sometimes", "rarely" or "never". The survey includes important data not only on loneliness, mental health and life satisfaction, but also information on topics like work-life balance and satisfaction with local environment.

The CSS data collection was funded, in part, through a partnership with the Department of Finance Canada.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 5354.

The infographic "[Loneliness in Canada](#)," which is part of *Statistics Canada — Infographics (11-627-M)*, is now available.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).