

Community spirit

Findings from the
NatCen panel Homes
and Communities
Study 2020

February 2021



About us

Centre for Ageing Better

The UK's population is undergoing a massive age shift. In less than 20 years, one in four people will be over 65.

The fact that many of us are living longer is a great achievement. But unless radical action is taken by government, business and others in society, millions of us risk missing out on enjoying those extra years.

At the Centre for Ageing Better we want everyone to enjoy later life. We create change in policy and practice informed by evidence and work with partners across England to improve employment, housing, health and communities.

We are a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, and part of the government's What Works Network.

The NatCen panel

The NatCen panel is a representative sample of people across England. The sample, which comprised 3390 adults, included a boost to attain a greater representation of Ageing Better's cohort of interest, people aged 50 to 69 (giving 2010 in this age group). The study comprised two surveys (July and December 2020) plus 30 in-depth, qualitative interviews. This data briefing pertains to the data obtained from the first survey only.

Ageing Better has a focus on where we can make the biggest difference. We know that what we do before we are old greatly affects our prospects for a good later life. That's why our focus is on those approaching later life, a life stage between mid-life and later life (approx. aged 50-70).

How people feel about their communities

Feelings of connectedness are high and increased over the first lockdown

- 71% of all adults feel trusting of their neighbours. The proportion increases with age, from 62% of people aged 30-39 to 86% of people aged 70 and over.
- Just over half (57%) of people aged 50-59 agree that they have a good level of contact with others in their local area, though this increases to almost three-quarters (73%) of people aged 70 and over.
- More than a third of people aged 50-59 (36%) and 60-69 (39%) agree that if they were ill or unable to leave their home, they know people they could count on to help out.
- Almost half (46%) of people said that they felt a greater sense of belonging to their neighbourhood/local area post-lockdown. This proportion increases with age – from 37% of 18-29 year olds to 60% of people aged 70 and over.
- Two-thirds of people aged 50-59 (66%) said that they knew more people they can now count on to help out. This increases to 72% of people aged 60-69 and 84% of people aged 70 and over.

But it depends on how well off you are

- Of 50-69 year olds who say they're 'living comfortably', 85% feel trusting of their neighbours, compared with just 51% of those who are finding it difficult to get by.
- In all questions about connectedness, there was a marked difference between people aged 50-69 who were finding it difficult to get by and people in this age group who were living comfortably. People finding it difficult to get by were less likely to:
 - Have a good level of contact with others in the local area;
 - Know people to say hello to in the local area;
 - Feel a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood;
 - Be aware of local voluntary groups that offer help and support

- More people who are better off feel more connected as a result of the experience of lockdown than those less well off:
 - More than three quarters (76%) of 50-69 year olds who feel that they're living comfortably say that they now know more people they could count on to help out if they were ill or unable to leave their home, compared with 46% of those finding it difficult to get by.

And it also varies by the presence and severity of long-term health conditions

- A higher proportion of 50-69 year olds who have no long-term conditions or illnesses feel trusting of their neighbours than people in this age group who have long-term conditions or illnesses that affect their day-to-day activities a lot (79% vs 64%).
- Almost three quarters (71%) of 50-69 year olds with no long-term conditions or illnesses now know more people they could count on to help out if they were ill or unable to leave their home. This compares with just over half of people in this age group for whom long-term conditions or illnesses affect day-to-day activities a lot.
- Half of people aged 50-69 with no long-term conditions or illnesses feel a greater sense of belonging to their neighbourhood or local area. This compares to a third (34%) of people in this age group for whom long-term conditions or illnesses affect day-to-day activities a lot.

There is a geographic variation in connectedness

On most measures of connectedness, London comes out worst:

- The proportion of people aged 50-69 who feel trusting of their neighbours is lowest in London (61%) and highest in the East of England (79%).
- There is considerable variation in the proportion of people who are aware of local voluntary groups that offer help and support. Among people aged 70 and over, this varies from 58% of people in London to 86% of people in the South West.

Many people received help during lockdown

- Almost half of 50-59 year olds and a third of 60-69 year olds did not receive any help during lockdown. But this was the case for just 6% of people aged 70 and over.

- People aged 50-69 who live in social housing were much more likely than home owners or private renters to have received help with shopping, obtaining medicines and telephone calls from family and friends to check that they're OK. They were also more likely to have received things from a food bank than either home owners or private renters, likely reflecting the greater need in this group.
- There is a clear pattern by occupational status with those in the highest occupational class most likely to have received no help at all.

And many volunteered to help others

- In every age group, at least 60% of people made telephone calls to check that friends or family were OK.
- More than half of adults aged 59 and under provided help with shopping for friends or family.
- Around a quarter of people across all age groups didn't volunteer to help others at all.
- Almost a third of those who are living comfortably provided help with shopping for neighbours. This was the case for just 16% of those who are finding it quite difficult to get by.
- Those who have a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood are much more likely than those who don't to have helped others in various ways during lockdown:
 - While almost a third (30%) of 50-69 year olds who have a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood provided help with shopping for neighbours during lockdown, this was the case for fewer than one in ten (7%) of those in this age group without that sense of belonging.
 - Two-thirds of 50-69 year olds with a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood made telephone calls to check on friends and family. This was the case for just half of those who didn't feel a sense of belonging.

We regularly used parks and green spaces

- Almost all adults (94%) in England have a local park or green space within walking distance of their home.
- Three in five people aged 50-59 go to their local park or green space twice a week or more.
- Two-thirds (66%) of people aged 50-69 with the highest level of formal education go to a local park or green space twice a week or more, compared with less than half (43%) of this age group with no qualifications.

Digital connectivity was important during lockdown

The internet was important to a majority of people in all age groups for a variety of functions during lockdown, though the proportion of people for whom it was important decreased with age:

- More than a third of 50-59 year olds don't use the internet more than they do because their IT skills are not good enough. This almost doubles to three in five (61%) people aged 70 and over.
- More than a quarter of 50-59 year olds don't use the internet more than they do because of concerns about fraud and sharing personal data. Almost one in five don't have access to good enough broadband.

Conclusion

- Most people report feeling connected to their communities and this sentiment increases with age. People's feelings of connectedness have been boosted by helping each other out during the first lockdown.
- However, those who are less well off and people with long-term health conditions were less likely to report feelings of connectedness before and after lockdown, compared with their better-off peers.
- People in their 50s and 60s potentially most in need of help from voluntary groups during the pandemic were least likely to be aware of and to access this help.
- Almost everyone in their 50s and 60s has access to a local park or green space but they don't seem to be used equally, with the better-off most likely to use their local parks regularly.
- Many people helped others during lockdown but this was socioeconomically dependent. It was also more likely among those with a sense of belonging to their community who in turn are more likely to be better off.
- Many people in their 50s limited their internet use for a variety of reasons - because they considered their skills weren't good enough, because of concerns around fraud and because their broadband wasn't good enough.

Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
Let's make ageing better.



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