

Is the US 'loneliness epidemic' real? Baby boomers are no more isolated than previous generations - there are just more of them, study finds

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- Nearly half of Americans report feeling 'lonely' most or all of the time, sparking public health concerns the US is in the midst of a 'loneliness epidemic'
- But a new study from the University of Chicago calls the 'trend' into question
- People born before baby boomers reported equal levels of loneliness
- Study authors suggest there are simply more older people, and loneliness increases beginning in most people's late 70s

By [NATALIE RAHHAL DEPUTY HEALTH EDITOR FOR DAILYMAL.COM](#)

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Older people are not necessarily lonelier than previous generations - despite talk of a loneliness 'epidemic', suggests new research.

Elderly baby boomers are not any lonelier than similar-aged counterparts through the ages - there are simply more of them, according to the findings of two studies published in the journal Psychology and Ageing.

Using data from two national surveys in the US, University of Chicago researchers examined participants' level of loneliness, educational attainment and overall health, as well as the number of family members and friends they felt close to.

They found that loneliness decreased between the ages of 50 and 74, and increased in people aged 75 and over, but detected no shift in loneliness between baby boomers and their older counterparts.

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Loneliness has always increased with age, and a new study suggests that Americans today aren't any lonelier than prior generations - they are just older (file)

'We found no evidence that older adults have become any lonelier than those of a similar age were a decade before,' study lead author Dr Louise Hawkley, from the University of Chicago, said.

'However, average reported loneliness begins to increase beyond age 75, and therefore, the total number of older adults who are lonely may increase once the baby boomers reach their late 70s and 80s.'

Most demographics analyses divide age brackets at 65, so it's difficult to say exactly how many Americans are in their late 70s. But by 2017, 15.6 percent of people in the US were over age 65.

'Loneliness levels may have decreased for adults between 50 and 74 because they had better educational opportunities, health care and social relationships than previous generations.'

Americans are also working longer than they have in past decades, giving them more opportunities for human contact.

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Adults over 75 were more susceptible to becoming lonely, possibly due to life factors such as declining health or the loss of a spouse or significant other, according to the new study's findings.

'Our research suggests that older adults who remain in good health and maintain social relationships with a spouse, family or friends tend to be less lonely,' added Dr Hawkey.

She and her team distributed a survey on health, education levels, loneliness and social connections three different times, among two samples of adults.

The first survey was sent out between 2005 and 2006, to over 3,000 people who were born between 1920 and 1947.

The same group got the survey again over the course of the period from 2010 to 2011. Researchers also sent the survey to the spouses and partners of those initial respondents, for a total sample of 3,377 people.

A final survey was conducted between 2015 and 2016, among 4,777 people - inclusive of the previous sample plus participants born between 1948 and 1965.

People got lonelier as they got older, as expected. But there was not difference in people's loneliness levels based on their generations.

In a similar study, researchers in Holland found that older adults were less lonely than their counterparts from previous generations.

Older adults born in later generations were found to be less lonely because they felt more in control and thus most likely managed their lives better.

Study leader Dr Bianca Suanet, of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, said: 'In contrast to assuming a loneliness epidemic exists, we found that older adults who felt more in control and therefore managed certain aspects of their lives well, such as maintaining a positive attitude, and set goals, such as going to the gym, were less lonely.

'Additionally, as is well-known in loneliness research, participants who had a significant other and larger and more diverse networks were also less lonely.'

The researchers urge older adults take personal initiative to better nurture their social ties, such as making friends to help them overcome increasing loneliness as they age.

Dr Suanet said: 'People must manage their social lives better today than ever before because traditional communities, which provided social outlets, such as neighborhoods, churches and extended families, have lost strength in recent decades.

'Therefore, older adults today need to develop problem-solving and goal-setting skills to sustain satisfying relationships and to reduce loneliness.'

Dr Hawley says the opportunities offered by modern technology could help older people maintain meaningful social connections.

'Video chatting platforms and the Internet may help preserve their social relationships,' she said.

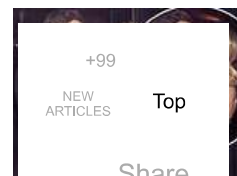
'These tools can help older adults stay mobile and engaged in their communities.'

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wotumean, Brexit, United Kingdom, 3 weeks ago

The millennials are the ones to worry because when they get old not only will they be lonely but they will be in withdrawal as by then there will be power cuts as power stations can not keep up with their demands on electric cars and smartphones and social media will go down.

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beingrealist, Los Angeles, United States, 3 weeks ago

We are forced to work most of our lives, no time to be socialized

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gbn, Jefferson, United States, 3 weeks ago

Yes. It is very true, and very hard to cope alone when you really cannot do what you could before. It is quite the education, to be in such circumstance; if one could understand about old age ahead of time, one might live very differently in the years leading up to it.

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Shooting the breeze, Shoreline Highway CA, United States, 3 weeks ago

Alone and loneliness are two completely different things. Being financially secure, having a comfortable home, a wee pet to chat to and a nice lunch out occasionally and I'd be fine. It is very nice to watch tv and read uninterrupted. Don't knock the single life. I feel for the younger generation who are drugged up on social media, clinging to the belief that they'll always be relevant to their followers. Good luck kiddos. The oldies know how to handle it.

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crazyisthis, Duluth, United States, 3 weeks ago

Older people tend to get stabbed in the back when they open up to younger people coming into their lives. Be super careful who you trust folks. The world isn't a good place anymore, IMHO and I see it getting worse not better anytime soon. Loneliness isn't bad if you know how to use to your own needs.. Losing a life partner is the worst for most older folks but we deal with it on our own terms..

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crazyisthis, Duluth, United States, 3 weeks ago

I have no family left to care about me except a half sister and she has been the worst sister I ever in my opinion. She swears to being good christian yet lies and does things to our mother when she was still alive that would turn many peoples stomach.. I disowned her and I'm happy as heck. I have no one as I am twice divorced and no kids thankfully as I see what a horrible place the world has become. Am I lonely? Everyone is to a certain degree but we all live with it. Older people have a lot to give but most younger folks dont want to listen as they know all the answers already so I let them be.. I'm 62 and loving life, My way!

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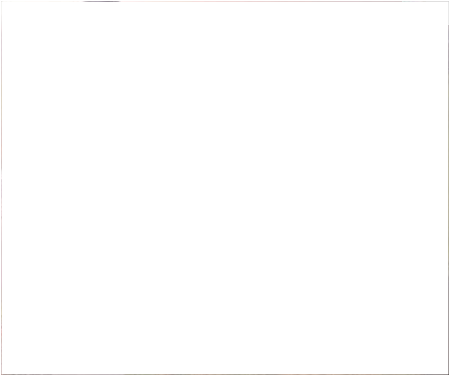
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IbreatheIhavehope, Blue Ridge Mountains, United States, 3 weeks ago

Me too,I'm 63. Thank God for my animals.

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Odynella, New York, United States, 3 weeks ago

Good for you! Enjoy!

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Oxide32, Birmingham, United Kingdom, 3 weeks ago

When my father passed away my mother was left alone and she wasn't coping, was taking all wrong meds and just not doing well , so myself my wife and 2 children gave up our house and moved into her house with her and now she's doing really well for and 83 yo. She loves having the grandkids around and now she's starting smiling and laughing again.

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crazyisthis, Duluth, United States, 3 weeks ago

Wow its rare to see a family member let alone the whole family show such compassion towards an older family member but I commend your whole family for doing the right thing! You will teach your children many valuable lessons by this beautiful act so hopefully they use when they too have kids, TY all.

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mIinFL, USA, United States, 3 weeks ago

Bless you, you are a good man!

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shuthefrontdoor, somewhere over the....., United States, 3 weeks ago

Cycle of life. The young are taken care of by their parents or guardians and or siblings. The old are left to defend for themselves most of the time. Even siblings are too involved in their own problems to care. And when suffering ailments they don't always alert others. It's also sad as we approach the retirement age and don't have enough money in the bank and no one to count on. Elderly folk sometimes think they're a burden.

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Clyde the Glide, Chicago, United States, 3 weeks ago

I'm probably going to be doing quite a bit of solitary wine drinking later in life. Hopefully in a seaside apartment in Nice, France with a plate full of grilled octopus and calamari and olives with good bread and cheese.

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bmb149, London, United Kingdom, 3 weeks ago

Can I come?

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