

Oldest old at risk from social isolation

July 25 2013

Using new data from the UK's largest ever social survey, Understanding Society, the Personal Finance Research Centre (PRFC) at the University of Bristol and the International Longevity Centre-UK (ILC-UK) have produced preliminary findings about the 'oldest old' (aged over 85) and their levels of participation, wellbeing and health.

This new analysis, funded by the ESRC's Secondary Data Analysis Initiative, is part of a major project exploring the financial dimensions of wellbeing and wider quality of life measures in older age.

The new research reveals:

- Around a third of over 85s said they were at least partly dissatisfied with their health, while over three-quarters (78 per cent) of the oldest old felt that their health limited even moderate activities, and about a half felt that pain had interfered with their activities over the past few weeks.
- While over eight in ten of the oldest old (81 per cent) felt they could rely on family 'a lot', more than one in ten (13 per cent) reported not having any friends.
- A worrying 26 per cent of people aged 85 and over reported being at least somewhat dissatisfied with their life overall. On the flip-side, three-quarters of the oldest old were at least somewhat satisfied with their lives.

David Hayes, Research Associate at the PFRC said: "This research is

extremely important as we know relatively little about the experiences of those aged over 85 yet this group represents the fastest growing sector of the UK population. With around one in four over 85s at least somewhat dissatisfied with their lives, (much higher than in the general population), policymakers need to devote more time to the issues facing this group."

David Sinclair, Assistant Director, Policy and Communications at ILC-UK added: "This research paints a negative picture of life for far too many people aged over 85. The research backs up ILC-UK's analysis of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing last year which found that almost four in ten of those aged 85 or older faced some kind of social exclusion. Similarly, our research on centenarians published in December 2011 found that quality of life among the oldest old decreases with age and that the oldest old (aged 85 and over) are, as a group, at greater risk of poverty than younger older people (aged 65-85).

"Bereavement and loneliness is a feature of later [life](#) for many. Whilst our new research highlights that over eight in ten of the oldest old could rely on family 'a lot', more than one in ten reported not having any friends. Tackling loneliness and isolation in old age has to become a societal priority."

PRFC and ILC-UK plan to extend analysis of Understanding Society to look at the financial wellbeing of the oldest old.

Provided by University of Bristol

Citation: Oldest old at risk from social isolation (2013, July 25) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-07-oldest-social-isolation.html>

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