

NIVEA CONNECT REPORT 2025

Loneliness Unmasked:
A Global Crisis of Isolation



NIVEA
CONNECT



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FOREWORD

GRITA LOEBSACK

President NIVEA



At NIVEA, we believe in a simple but powerful truth: No one should feel alone in a world full of people.

Last year, we took an important step in shedding light on the growing issue of social isolation and loneliness. We published our first NIVEA CONNECT report. The findings showed that millions of people around the world feel disconnected, with profound consequences for their health and well-being.

This year, we are not only building on that foundation but also deepening our exploration of this topic – with an even more comprehensive study spanning more countries and voices than before.

Our commitment remains steadfast: to help fight social isolation by raising awareness, reducing stigma and encouraging meaningful connections.

Through our social mission NIVEA CONNECT, we are partnering with experts, organisations and communities to make a real impact. By 2026, we will have launched initiatives in 40 countries, providing support to those who need it most.

This report not only advances our understanding of loneliness and social isolation, but also offers evidence-based insights into how individuals can foster stronger connections. It underscores the urgency of collective action, and we invite you to join us on this important journey.

The numbers speak for themselves, but behind every statistic is a person who longs to feel seen and heard. Someone you know may be feeling alone right now. A simple gesture could make all the difference. Let's reach out – together, we can create a more connected world.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS PASCAL

Vice President Sustainability

At the heart of what we do at Beiersdorf is our purpose: we care beyond skin. With NIVEA CONNECT, we're turning that purpose into action – working to champion a more inclusive society and tackle something that affects far too many people: loneliness and social isolation.

To bring this mission to life, we are partnering with local non-profit organisations that make a tangible difference in their communities. While every local partnership is unique, they all share a commitment to reducing social isolation through providing information, strengthening resilience and enabling meaningful connections. Every initiative is assessed through a robust accreditation process by external experts to ensure that the actions we take meet high standards and our own benchmarks for excellence. To date, we have already set up projects in over 30 countries, with more to come.

Our first NIVEA CONNECT COMPASS deepens our understanding of loneliness and social isolation with fresh insights from a broad set of countries and communities. This report reflects our dedication to both action and understanding. Inside, you will find new research, expert perspectives and stories from the ground that illustrate how connection can change lives.

Through these initiatives, we aim to create real and lasting impact.

Thank you to our colleagues and partners worldwide for driving NIVEA CONNECT forward. Together, we're making strides toward a more inclusive society, one meaningful connection at a time.



LONELINESS UNMASKED: A GLOBAL CRISIS OF ISOLATION

New research offers a deep dive into the loneliness that persists despite a digitally connected world.

Loneliness often hides in plain sight. It can be found echoing in crowded rooms and behind bright screens, or beneath a friendly nod to a passing neighbour and a cheerful social media post. It lingers in the spaces between conversations, in the pause before a message goes unanswered, and in the quiet resignation of someone who no longer expects an invitation. Loneliness is about feeling unseen and disconnected, maybe even forgotten.

When we think of loneliness, we often picture an elderly person spending Christmas alone, or a person recovering from an illness, cut off from social life. But our understanding of loneliness needs to expand. Despite the explosion of technologies designed to connect us, loneliness appears to be pervasive to modern life. Research shows that more than half the people around the world experience loneliness, and one in five feels lonely often. For many, it's not an occasional pang but a persistent ache, most intensely felt in the quiet of evenings.

Feelings of loneliness can be painful, but the consequences of loneliness extend beyond emotional distress. Experts now recognise social isolation as a public health crisis with serious implications. Psychologist and researcher Dr Julianne Holt-Lunstad has warned that loneliness is as detrimental to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day: "It is comparable to the risk of alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, obesity and air pollution."ⁱ Dr Holt-Lunstad and other researchers have emphasised that the problem must be addressed with the same urgency as other major public health concerns.

Yet, despite its widespread impact, loneliness remains shrouded in stigma. Many who experience it hesitate to speak about their struggles, fearing judgment or rejection. The result is a vicious cycle in which those who need help the most find it hardest to ask for it. Last year's NIVEA pre-study found that many people want to support their friends and family members who may be struggling with loneliness, but they don't know how.ⁱⁱ Without greater awareness of the issue and open conversations, loneliness will continue to thrive in silence.

In order to shed light on the reality of loneliness in today's world, NIVEA has conducted a new global study of more than 30,000 people across five continents. This new report explores who is most affected by loneliness, the psychological and social factors that fuel it and the profound consequences of prolonged feelings of loneliness. Most importantly, it highlights potential solutions that can help individuals, families, and communities build deeper, more meaningful connections.

Methodology

The NIVEA CONNECT COMPASS was carried out by DVJ insights, an independent international market and social research agency. It was conducted with 30,912 people in the following 13 countries (with more than 2,000 interviews per country): Brazil, China, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States. Survey respondents were a representative sample of people aged 16+. The study was conducted from September to December 2024.



Loneliness is a universal human experience, but it does not have to be inevitable. By understanding its causes and impacts, and by taking proactive steps towards connection, we can begin to bridge the gaps that separate us. This is the mission of NIVEA CONNECT – to fight social isolation and foster meaningful connection by raising awareness, breaking down barriers, and helping to create a world where no one has to feel alone.

You're Not Alone if You're Lonely

In today's era of unprecedented digital connectivity, millions still find themselves struggling with a growing sense of isolation. The data reflects a stark truth: every fifth person reports feeling lonely often, a sobering reality that transcends geographical, economic and social boundaries. While another one in seven people say they never experience loneliness, for the vast majority, loneliness is either a deeply personal challenge or something they witness in the lives of those around them. More than half of respondents (56%) admit to experiencing loneliness at least sometimes, 57% acknowledge moments of feeling alone and 54% struggle with feelings of being isolated from others. Nearly half (47%) report feeling left out at least sometimes.

For many people, loneliness is a constant companion, often weighing most heavily during the quiet moments of daily life, such as in the evenings (37%), on weekends (31%) and during holidays (33%). A young woman from South Africa shared this observation:

"I recall my grandmother who lived alone after my grandfather passed away. She would often call us, her children and grandchildren, just to chat and feel connected. Despite being surrounded by family, she would sometimes express feelings of loneliness, especially during holidays and special occasions."

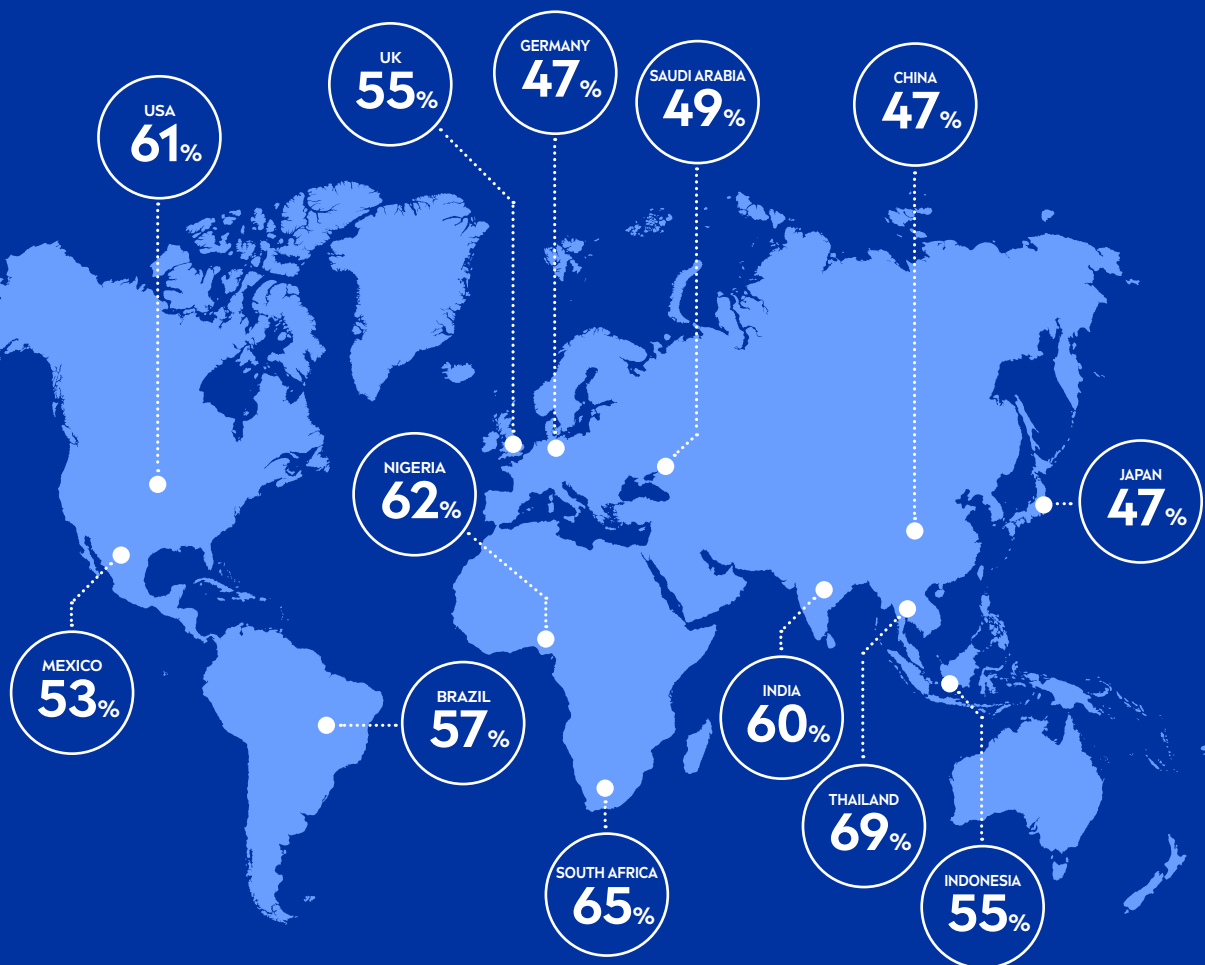
While loneliness appears to be widespread across the globe, the data reveals some regional variations. Germany, China, Japan and Saudi Arabia experience the lowest levels of loneliness. On the other hand, Thailand, South Africa, Nigeria and the US form the top four loneliest countries. These differences aren't easily explained by objective measures such as GDP and other macro-level factors, suggesting that while loneliness may be shaped by the broader socio-economic and cultural context, it is also a product of individual experience.

In addition to regional variations in loneliness, there are other demographic differences to note. Certain groups experience loneliness at higher rates, including singles, individuals facing financial hardship, people living in non-urban areas, those with lower education levels, excessive social media users and young people. Each of these groups encounters unique challenges that increase their risk of loneliness.

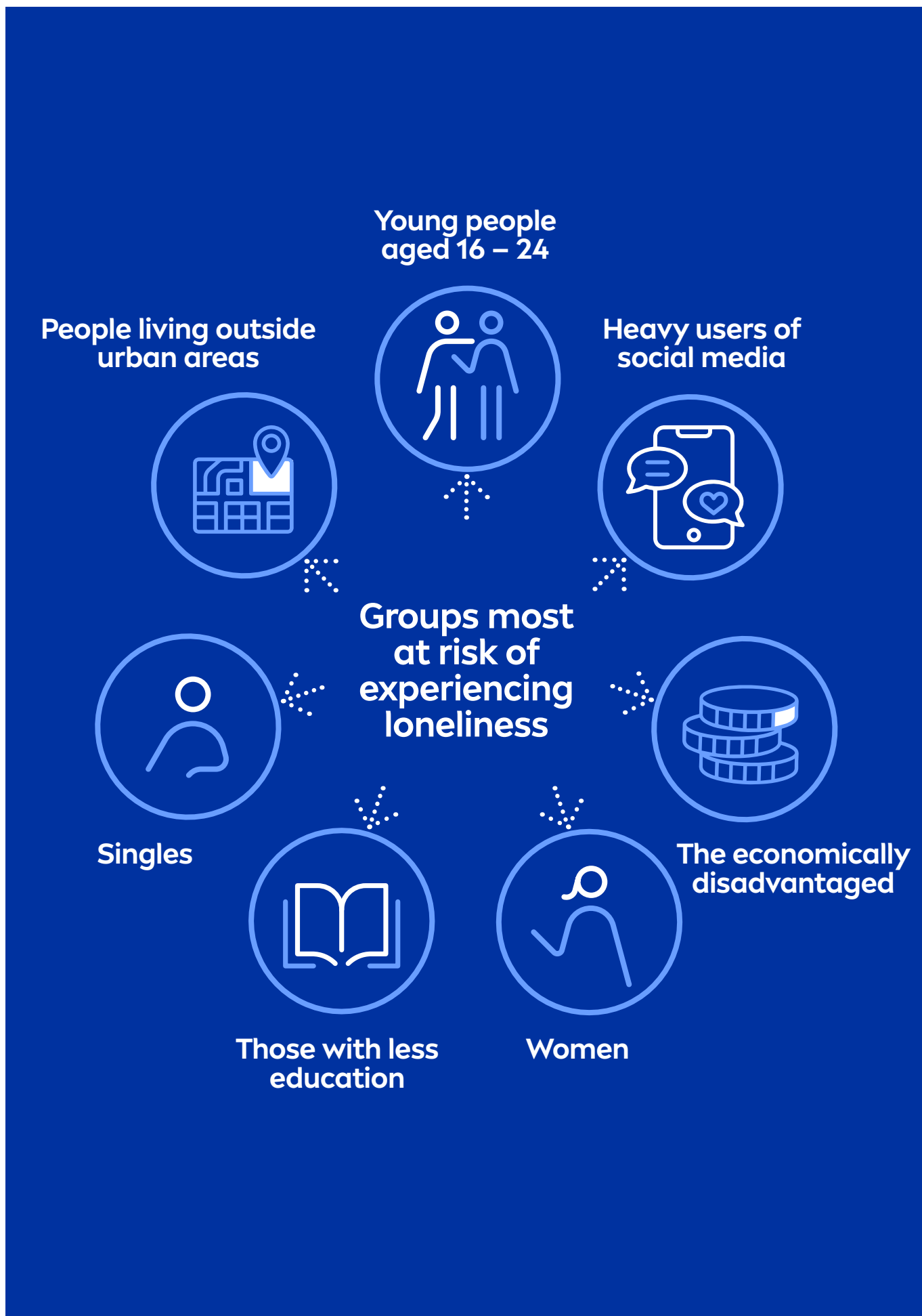
Singles, especially those living alone, may struggle with fewer built-in social interactions, while financial hardship can create additional barriers, such as limited access to social activities or the stress of economic instability, making it harder to maintain relationships. People in non-urban areas may have fewer opportunities for social engagement, especially if transportation is limited or community resources are scarce. Similarly, those with lower education levels may experience social isolation due to workplace constraints or economic pressures that leave little room for leisure and socialising. Meanwhile, excessive social media use – particularly among those who check it multiple times per hour – can paradoxically heighten feelings of loneliness by encouraging superficial connections while reducing meaningful, in-person interactions.

Young people, in particular, are uniquely vulnerable. Despite being highly connected online, many people aged 16 – 24 struggle with loneliness, making it crucial to understand how loneliness affects this cohort and what can be done to address it.

Some countries are lonelier than others: The percentage of those who sometimes or often feel lonely



Total average: 56%



Young and Lonely: Gen Z's Silent Struggle

One of the most striking findings from the report is that the feeling of loneliness is higher among those aged 16 – 24 than all other age groups. More than half (54%) of young people report feeling left out at least sometimes – higher than the average of 47%. Nearly one in four young people (22%) frequently experiences this feeling, compared to 16% of the overall population. This heightened sense of loneliness may partly be due to the transitional nature of their lives – moving away from home, starting new jobs, or navigating the complexities of education and relationships. This stage in life can be marked by a sense of instability and uncertainty, leaving many without the emotional anchor they might have had earlier in life, such as close-knit family ties or lifelong friendships.

Young people also report higher-than-average feelings of isolation, with 24% saying they often feel isolated from others, compared to 19% of the total population. This may be exacerbated by the digital landscape in which young people are immersed. Although they are highly connected through social media, these digital interactions often lack the depth of face-to-face connections, leaving many feeling more isolated even as they are constantly online. The pressure to maintain a curated online persona, coupled with the tendency to compare themselves to others, can further fuel feelings of inadequacy and loneliness. Additionally, respondents shared that their loneliness peaks in the evenings (41%), on birthdays (33%) and during moments when their friends are celebrating without them (26%). It is possible that these moments can serve as painful reminders of social exclusion at a time when they are navigating the challenges of forming lasting, meaningful relationships.

For many young people, their loneliness is also tied to the absence of familiar social structures. A 21-year-old male from Indonesia shared:

“Sometimes I feel lonely in my boarding house where I live, because on Saturdays and Sundays most of my friends go back to their villages, so I am alone.”

This experience highlights the transient nature of youth, where living arrangements and friend groups can shift frequently, creating gaps in social support and making it harder for young people to establish stable connections. The rise of digital interactions, coupled with periods of physical separation from friends and family, may compound their vulnerability to feelings of loneliness.

Complicating matters further, young people who struggle with loneliness are even less likely than older generations to seek help: 62% say they find it difficult to reach out, compared to 56% of the general population. Their reluctance stems from factors such as fear of being a burden (59%), fear of rejection (45%), embarrassment (44%), fear of appearing weak (40%) and not knowing how to ask for support (41%).

That said, while young people may be particularly vulnerable to loneliness, they are not alone in facing these struggles. Many people surveyed, regardless of age, encounter similar barriers to seeking help. These challenges create an invisible divide, leaving people feeling lonely, even when others around them may be experiencing the same thing.

Why Loneliness Remains Hidden and Hard to Address

Despite its prevalence, loneliness remains a deeply stigmatised issue, often accompanied by feelings of shame and reluctance to seek support. More than half (56%) of those experiencing loneliness across all age groups find it difficult to ask for help, with the fear of being a burden emerging as a significant deterrent – cited by nearly six in ten respondents. Others hesitate due to embarrassment (45%) or concerns about rejection (43%). For some, loneliness is tied to a fear of appearing weak (37%), while others simply don't know who to turn to (35%). More than one in three struggle with knowing how to initiate a conversation about their feelings in the first place.

This stigma creates a self-perpetuating cycle of silence, making loneliness even harder to address. Unlike physical health challenges, which are openly discussed and widely acknowledged, loneliness is often hidden beneath the surface. Many people suffer in isolation, believing they are alone in their struggles – when, in reality, they are far from it. A young woman from Nigeria confessed:

“I always isolate myself from people in fear of deceit and betrayal. But this is killing my self-esteem, making it difficult to ask for help.”

Awareness of loneliness does not always align with reality. Almost 30% of people report that they do not know anyone who feels lonely. Yet, in a world where more than half of people experience loneliness at some point, this suggests a significant lack of awareness. The reality is that loneliness can be difficult to detect, particularly when those affected feel compelled to hide their struggles. It is not necessarily that loneliness is rare, but rather that it is invisible, even among friends, colleagues and family members.

Of course, if nearly 30% of people don't know anyone who feels lonely, that means more than 70% of people do. This finding aligns with the data showing that loneliness is widespread. However, previous NIVEA research has shown that even when loneliness is recognised, uncertainty about how to help remains a major barrier. Many people feel ill-equipped to offer support, fearing that a well-intentioned message may seem superficial or that they might say the wrong thing. This hesitation can leave them feeling powerless.

The result is a mutual disconnect, where one side is reluctant to ask for help and the other is unsure how to provide it. This uncertainty and discomfort deepens the sense of isolation on both ends. To break the cycle, fostering open dialogue about loneliness is crucial. When loneliness is recognised as a common human experience rather than a personal failing, more people may feel empowered to seek and offer support, which can help bridge the gap between silent suffering and meaningful connection.

**Why is it
difficult
to ask for
help?**

58%

Fear of being a burden
(ages 16 – 24, 59%)

45%

Feeling embarrassed
(ages 16 – 24, 44%)

43%

Fear of rejection
(ages 16 – 24, 45%)

37%

Fear of appearing weak
(ages 16 – 24, 40%)

34%

Don't know how to ask
(ages 16 – 24, 41%)

Loneliness is complex.
The top 5 reasons for
feeling lonely include:

1
Feeling
misunderstood
by others

2
Little self-
confidence

3
Struggling
with money

4
Difficulty
approaching
people

5
Lack of
contact with
friends and
family



Psychological Barriers: A Major Cause of Loneliness

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines loneliness as “the social pain of not feeling connected.”ⁱⁱⁱ In other words, loneliness is not necessarily about physical isolation; it is entirely possible to feel lonely even while surrounded by others. While external challenges such as financial hardship or lack of interaction contribute to loneliness, some of the most significant triggers are psychological. Feeling misunderstood by others (40%), struggling with self-confidence (38%) and finding it difficult to approach people (35%) rank among the top reasons people experience loneliness. Financial struggles (38%) and a lack of contact with family and friends (29%) further highlight how personal and external factors contribute to people’s sense of loneliness.

The data also reveals some interesting geographic and cultural differences when it comes to loneliness triggers. In Nigeria, South Africa and the US, economic stress is a significant driver. In major industrialised economies such as Germany, Japan, the UK and the US, a prominent factor is mental stress. And in linguistically diverse India, external circumstances such as language barriers, relocating recently and migration background play a bigger role.

A 62-year-old male from Saudi Arabia confided:

“My expatriation made me feel lonely as I left my family, relatives and friends, and I suffered for a long time to establish new friendships and get out of isolation.”

His experience reflects two of the key psychological triggers: difficulty in approaching new people and a lack of family support. Without a familiar social network or the confidence to reach out, feelings of loneliness can deepen, making it even harder to form new connections.

Many of these factors can, over time, become self-reinforcing cycles. Those who struggle with self-confidence may find social situations daunting, leading them to withdraw from potential connections. Those who feel misunderstood may hesitate to open up, reinforcing their feelings of loneliness. Meanwhile, financial stress can create barriers based on practicalities, making it harder to participate in social activities or maintain relationships.

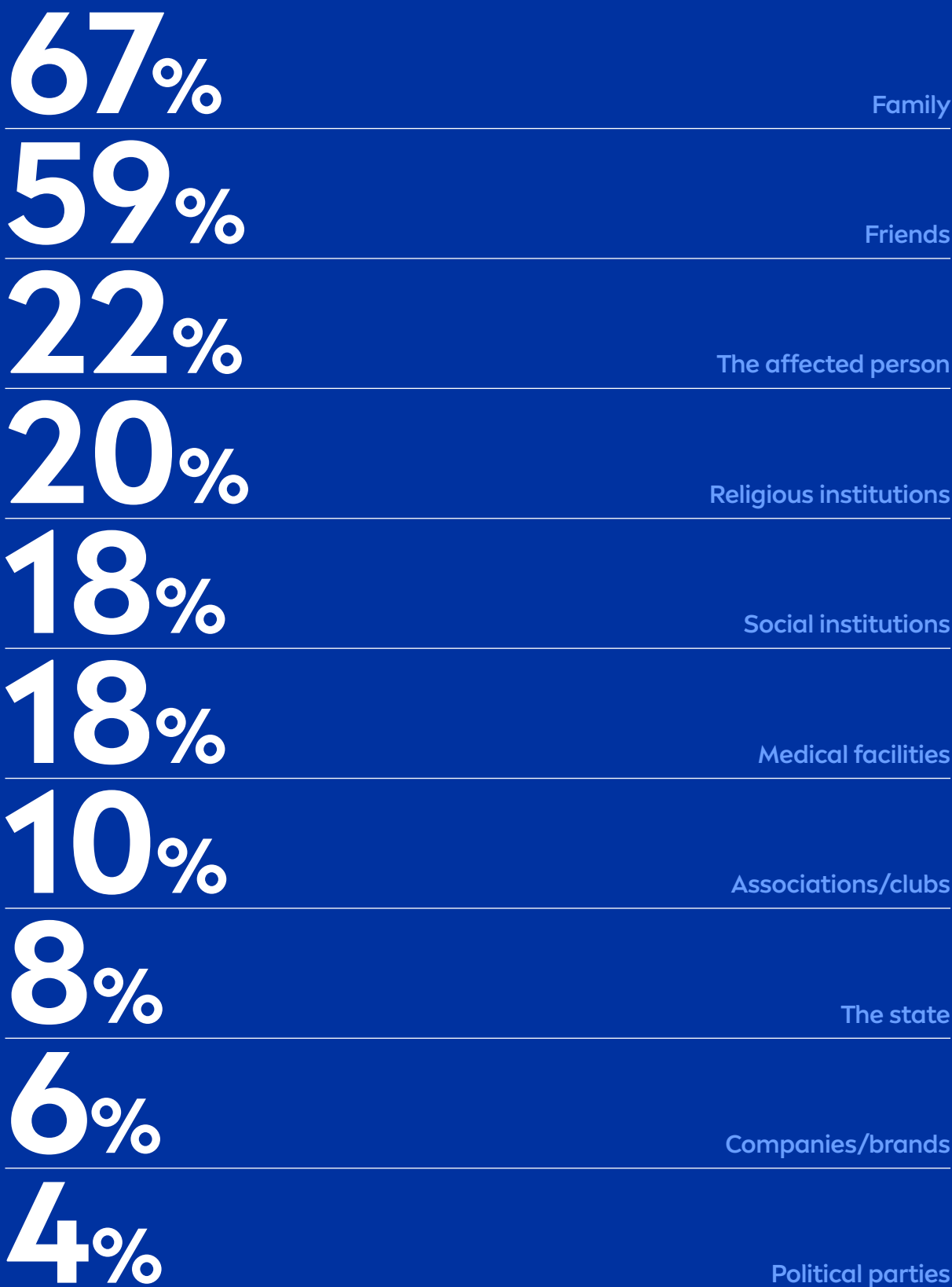
This complexity underscores the need for a more compassionate and nuanced approach to addressing loneliness. Recognising that both psychological and external factors play a role allows for more effective support systems that not only encourage social interaction but also foster emotional resilience and understanding.

Loneliness Deepens Stress and Sadness – But Connection Heals

Loneliness can have profound, long-lasting effects on our emotional and psychological well-being. Its impact on mental and physical health has garnered increasing attention in recent years, with the WHO recognising loneliness as a global public health priority. In 2023, the WHO launched a commission on social connection to address the rising concern that loneliness is not only an individual experience but a societal issue that needs urgent action.^{iv}

Indeed, this study findings paint a stark picture of the toll loneliness takes, pointing to a host of negative consequences for mental and emotional health. Stress and declining self-confidence are two of the most commonly reported effects, each cited by 42% of respondents. Sadness is the dominant emotion, reported by 59% of those who experience loneliness, followed by depression (48%) and anxiety (40%). Respondents in South Africa and the US, in particular, reported being negatively impacted by feelings of loneliness, and declines in mental health were most commonly reported in China, Japan, the UK and the US.

When asked who should be helping people who feel lonely, friends and family top the list



A poignant insight came from an 18-year-old male from China, who shared his personal experience: “Loneliness makes you sad and depressed. Everyone should have another person in their life so that they can enjoy time together. There should always be places where lonely people can turn to.”

Unfortunately, the effects of loneliness can often spiral into physical and behavioural challenges that make it even harder to reach out to others. Among the most common are deteriorating relationships (reported by 36% of those affected), sleep disturbances (35%), and even a loss of meaning in life (35%). Without intervention, these compounding effects only deepen the sense of loneliness.

However, the solution to this cycle is clear – and it’s rooted in connection. The findings from the study are full of examples of people who have intuitively sought connection with others as an antidote to loneliness. One 33-year-old female from the UK shared that she

“...overcame loneliness by joining a support group, forming connections, and finding a sense of community and belonging.”

When people feel socially connected, the impact on their mental and emotional well-being is transformative. Some 63% of those who experience connection report feeling happy, while 48% say they feel accepted and 48% feel relaxed. These findings underscore just how essential meaningful relationships are for our well-being. Whether through family, friends, or community engagement, connection with others becomes not just a remedy for loneliness, but a vital foundation for a happier and healthier life.

Finding Relief in Familiar Faces: The Role of Loved Ones in Easing Loneliness

Loneliness can feel like a deeply internalised experience, yet it is often shaped by our social environment. When asked who should be helping people who feel lonely, family (67%) and friends (59%) are viewed as the most pivotal sources for reducing loneliness. This reliance on loved ones underscores the fundamental role of intimate relationships in emotional well-being. In contrast, external entities such as governments (8%), brands (6%) and political parties (4%) are brought up less as meaningful contributors to alleviating loneliness. These findings suggest that because support from these institutions is often not visible or widely experienced, people have come to expect little from them – yet this presents a powerful opportunity for brands to use their voice, reach and resources to raise awareness and actively contribute to combatting loneliness and social isolation.

Moreover, the expectation that support comes primarily from loved ones doesn’t always guarantee that such support is fulfilling or sufficient. Despite family and friends being viewed as the most important sources of support, not everyone finds complete solace in these relationships. Just 63% of people report satisfaction with their family life, while only 59% feel content with their friendships. Almost a third of people feel they can’t rely on members of their family, including their partners, and almost half of people feel they can’t rely on their friends. These numbers indicate that while close relationships are expected to serve as a primary defence against loneliness, they often fall short, as they are not immune to strain, distance or misalignment in emotional needs.

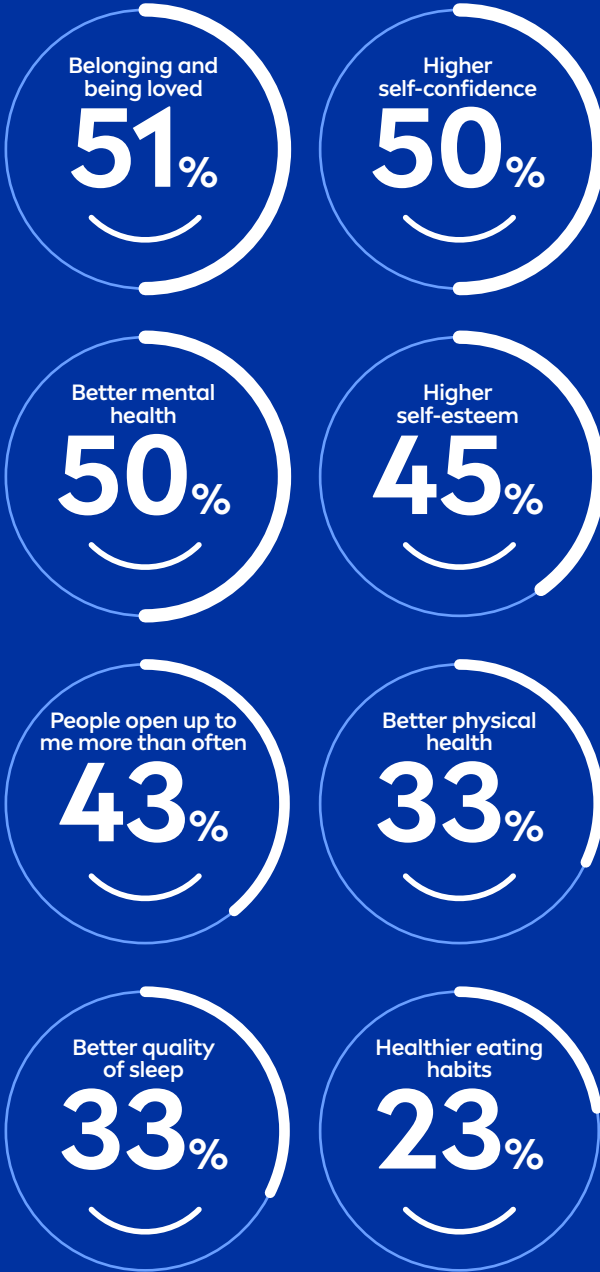
For most people who feel lonely and isolated, the best solutions are often found in the small yet meaningful moments of daily life. Simple activities such as spending quality time with family and friends (44%), engaging in hobbies (41%), exercising (38%) and practicing self-care (33%) emerge as the most beneficial ways to combat isolation. These approaches offer a sense of purpose, routine and joy, reinforcing the importance of personal agency in building connections.

Loneliness versus Connection

Loneliness has negative emotional and physical impacts



Connection benefits both mind and body



Interestingly, more structured or institutionalised interventions – such as joining group activities, attending spiritual events or seeking professional help – come to mind less, with only 25% or fewer people mentioning these solutions. This perception could be influenced by limited exposure or experience; with greater awareness and access, formalised programmes may play a more significant role in helping people feel supported and connected. It is also worth noting that this finding is not universal. For example, in India, Indonesia, Nigeria and South Africa, visiting a religious event is seen as a viable coping strategy.



As this report has shown, loneliness is a universal yet deeply personal experience that affects people across all demographics, regions and cultures. We may be living in an era of unprecedented digital connectivity, but we are highly disconnected. The data from this report highlights the startling prevalence of loneliness, with one in five people reporting frequent loneliness and more than half experiencing loneliness sometimes. For many, this ongoing sense of loneliness is not just a passing feeling, but a persistent challenge with far-reaching consequences for mental and physical health. The public health challenges associated with loneliness are urgent and growing. Yet, amid these challenges, the report also points to the profound power of connection, with meaningful relationships offering essential relief from these feelings of isolation.

While the NIVEA CONNECT COMPASS 2025 sheds valuable light on the extent and impact of loneliness, it also highlights the opportunity for further research. The data reveals clear patterns of higher loneliness – among young people, singles, those facing financial hardship and those in more isolated living conditions – but it cannot fully explain the complex psychological, social and cultural factors at play. Further research is needed to explore the underlying causes of loneliness and how different interventions can effectively support people in diverse contexts. Additionally, the stigma surrounding loneliness continues to be a significant barrier to addressing this issue, with many people hesitant to seek help due to fear of rejection or embarrassment. Moving forward, it is crucial to deepen our understanding of loneliness and take action to create environments where open conversations and meaningful connections are more common, ultimately creating a world where fewer people have to suffer in silence.

i <https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316>

ii <https://www.NIVEA.com/home/about-us/NIVEA-connect>

iii <https://www.who.int/news/item/15-11-2023-who-launches-commission-to-foster-social-connection>

iv <https://www.who.int/groups/commission-on-social-connection>

Interview with

Dr Julianne Holt-Lunstad



Dr Julianne Holt-Lunstad is a professor of psychology and neuroscience and director of the Social Connection & Health Lab at Brigham Young University. She is also the founding scientific chair and board member for the US Foundation for Social Connection and the Global Initiative on Loneliness and Connection. Julianne is serving as the lead scientific advisor to NIVEA CONNECT.

NIVEA CONNECT:

Your work has made you a leading voice in the field of loneliness, social isolation and social connection. What will be your most important endeavour in the next few years?

Dr Julianne Holt-Lunstad:

I've spent much of my career trying to understand this issue using the most robust data and working to translate that evidence into practical implementation. The translation part is the most challenging aspect and will be one of the most important endeavours moving forward. If scientific knowledge remains confined to academia and scholarly pursuits, it can never truly achieve the level of impact needed in the real world. My primary focus going forward will be on driving impact in an evidence-based way, and a key part of that involves raising awareness. Although this topic has gained more attention over the past several years, particularly since the pandemic, there is still a significant underappreciation of the importance of social connection for our health and the widespread effects it can have, not only on individuals but also on communities and society as a whole. The first step in behaviour change is awareness because people often don't realise they need to change something if they are not even aware that a problem exists. Both effective implementation and raising awareness will be among the most critical priorities moving forward.

You recently accepted the role as the scientific advisor of NIVEA CONNECT. What do you see as the potential benefits of that partnership, and how can this partnership contribute to a bigger global dialogue surrounding social isolation and loneliness?

A broader global dialogue is going to be essential, and a widely recognised global brand may have a far bigger audience to raise awareness than any kind of scientific publication, local effort or even governmental effort. It can open a public discourse that can broaden and even change the global conversation. On the one hand, we see that dialogue around this issue has become more global. For instance, the World Health Organization has established a commission on social connection. We're seeing that maybe a dozen countries around the world are starting to adopt national initiatives. But it's not entirely widespread. There is a gap here, and an opportunity for channels of communication different from what governments can do, channels that may reach different kinds of people who may not be paying attention to what their government is doing. Or maybe disagree with or not trust what their government is doing.

Are you also thinking about the vast area of education, beyond awareness, maybe even global standards of educating people about loneliness and connection?

There are education efforts that are beginning. But they are not necessarily consistent. It's a bit of a scattered and dispersed kind of effort. While it could be intriguing to develop a more consistent approach, we have to be careful about its effectiveness. If we think about the broader scientific evidence we currently have, human social connection seems to be a universal need. No matter where you live, what age you are, everyone seems to need connection. But across different stages of life needs may be greater and different cultures might influence expectations associated with connection and the barriers to it as well.

From our study we know that triggers of loneliness are complex, and psychological factors seem to play a big role. People often feel misunderstood, lack self-confidence and struggle to connect with others. Is this a new phenomenon driven by societal changes? And how come that humans have become so filled with doubt, distancing themselves from each other while what they desire most is to feel meaningfully connected?

There is some scientific debate about whether loneliness has actually increased over time. Some data suggest that it has, while other data suggest that it has not. This discrepancy may be related to how loneliness is defined. Loneliness is more about the perception of the discrepancy between one's desired level of connection and actual connection. While it's unclear whether loneliness itself has increased, we do have evidence across many metrics indicating that social connection has declined over time.

The bigger question is what aspects of this trend are being driven by societal change. Modern advances have provided us with various tools that allow us to navigate our lives in much simpler ways. While these conveniences are beneficial, they also reduce our need to rely on one another as much as we did in the past. This shift may lead us to value independence over interconnectedness. Additionally, there has been the development of various tools that mimic connection. Social technologies, for instance, may provide some aspects of human connection but not necessarily all. This raises the question: Do these technologies truly fulfil the same kinds of needs that have traditionally been met through direct, face-to-face interactions? The evidence on this matter remains insufficient, and

"Others' lives, particularly their social lives, might look far more exciting than one's own. It could also be that the greater frequency of getting on social media might lead to greater exposure to negative content, including hostility or even becoming aware of how one might be excluded."

we are continuously working to understand these co-occurring trends more thoroughly.

Is social media one of those tools that mimic connection?

You could have a nice, healthy debate among scientists on whether it is. Many would argue that connection on social media is connection, whereas others might say it's more of a pseudo-process – mimicking social connection without fulfilling all the beneficial aspects of human connection. I think the NIVEA CONNECT study highlighted something interesting. Those people who report high-frequency use of social media – several times in one hour, every hour – show higher levels of loneliness than those using social media in a more average way.

There are a couple of explanations for that. On one hand, more frequent use might lead to greater loneliness by exacerbating the discrepancy between perceived expectations and actual connection. That can occur through social comparison. There's a wide body of research showing that because we often see people's highlights – all the best bits of their lives – on social media, that other people's lives, particularly their social lives, might look far more exciting than

one's own. It could also be that the greater frequency of getting on social media might lead to greater exposure to negative content, including hostility or even becoming aware of how one might be excluded. Also, it may be displacing time that you could be spending with someone in person. Each of these could potentially lead to greater loneliness.

The alternative explanation is that because someone feels lonely, they are going onto social media to try to fulfil that social need. They are craving social contact and using social media to try to get it. So, we need to be careful when loneliness and social media use data is collected at the same time, as it's difficult to say which is the predictor and which is the outcome. It could also very well be that there are bidirectional associations creating a cyclical process.

Lonely individuals often avoid seeking help because they don't want to be a burden, appear weak or feel embarrassed. How has loneliness become stigmatised and what can be done to reduce the stigma?

Loneliness is a completely normal human experience, much like hunger and thirst – it's a signal that we are missing something essential, namely the biological

need for social connection. From that standpoint, all of us, as humans, will feel lonely from time to time. However, it becomes problematic when loneliness becomes chronic. Unfortunately, loneliness is often perceived as a personal failure, which creates a significant amount of shame and stigma around it. To reduce this stigma, it is crucial to raise awareness of loneliness as a normal experience. It triggers an adaptive response that motivates us to seek something beneficial for our well-being – social connection. Even when loneliness becomes chronic, it's important to recognise that external factors can contribute to it.

I think one silver lining of the pandemic is that it helped us become aware of this issue beyond an individual's personal experience. We shared a collective experience where we could relate to others who were going through something similar. This led to a realisation that external factors can contribute to loneliness and that it shouldn't be viewed as a personal failure. Numerous external factors can act as barriers to social connection – factors beyond an individual's control. Therefore, we shouldn't place the burden entirely on the individual to resolve it. For instance, if someone faces severe discrimination or lives in an unsafe neighbourhood where they don't feel secure engaging with others, they can adjust how they cope with this but it doesn't actually get at the root cause. Effectively addressing loneliness may require changes at broader social and community levels.

One key finding of the study indicates that young people are disproportionately affected by loneliness, impacting their emotional and physical well-being. What recommendations would you offer to policymakers and influencers to address this concern?

This is truly remarkable data, and it underscores and aligns with findings from other studies, providing converging evidence of just how important it is to invest in and prioritise efforts focused on youths.

One of the key tasks we need to address is identifying the drivers of loneliness among youths. Rather than merely reacting to what is happening, we must identify ways to prevent loneliness and intervene earlier. We have an opportunity to disrupt the factors contributing to loneliness from the outset. Let me highlight two particularly important avenues:

The first is within the healthcare system. Youths often receive regular preventative care through primary healthcare systems, which provides valuable opportunities to identify those at risk early and offer appropriate support. The second avenue is education. While educational opportunities vary across the globe, schools remain a critical touchpoint where most children can be reached. Integrating social connection into the educational curriculum presents a powerful opportunity to establish a strong foundation for social connection as children develop. This effort should also include early childhood, even before formal education begins, as caregivers play a pivotal role in supporting

“One of the key tasks we need to address is identifying the drivers of loneliness among youths. Rather than merely reacting to what is happening, we must identify ways to prevent loneliness and intervene earlier.”

children and adolescents. Workplace policies that prevent caregivers from being present and providing the necessary support can be critical barriers. Addressing these barriers can be a highly effective point of intervention. These areas offer tremendous potential for policymakers to make a meaningful impact.

The NIVEA CONNECT COMPASS 2025 highlights a call for stronger relationships with family and friends, which seem crucial to overcoming loneliness. Respondents place big expectations on these relationships. However, in the perceived ability to rely upon them or the satisfaction with the relationship remains relatively low. How do you explain this?

What the data suggest is that there is a high expectation that family members and friends are the primary go-to people for helping with loneliness. However, we also see evidence of a desire for these relationships to be better, which comes down to two key areas where improvements can be made.

The first area is the availability of support. A significant portion of people report that they do not have adequate access to support – they are unable to rely on their family and friends as much as they would like. The second area concerns the quality of relationships. While family and friends can be sources of joy and many positive experiences, these relationships can also be frustrating, potentially unreliable, or even sources of conflict. When considering how to reduce loneliness, it is essential to think about improving the quality and availability of close relationships – the very relationships we rely on in times of need. Part of this involves raising awareness about how we can be more available and more responsive to one another. These dynamics are reciprocal. Relationships are rarely satisfying when they are one-sided, and when they are, dissatisfaction is often the result.

Now, let's talk about regions. How does the state of social isolation and connection compare across countries with different economic challenges, levels of progression and cultures? And do these differences inform the solutions we need there?

Having global data is essential because, for far too long, most of our evidence has come from North America, Europe and parts of Asia – primarily Western, wealthy, industrialised, educated countries. We cannot simply assume that findings from these regions apply globally. One of the key benefits of conducting research like NIVEA CONNECT did across thirteen countries across all regions of the globe is the ability to examine various regions to identify both universal patterns and local variations. What's fascinating is that the differences we see across countries do not align with the expectations many might have. It's not simply a matter of seeing more loneliness in the Global North. In fact, there's a common misconception that loneliness is exclusively a problem of wealthy nations. What we find is that loneliness is a global phenomenon, not necessarily correlating with factors such as GDP.

However, economic challenges do appear to increase the risk of loneliness, and this can manifest in various ways. For instance, if someone is struggling to meet their basic needs, they may have to work multiple jobs, leaving them with less time to establish or maintain relationships. Similarly, economic necessity may motivate people to leave their village, neighbourhood or local community – whether through relocation or migration. Being displaced from one's home of origin can increase loneliness, not only for the individual who has left but also for those who are left behind. We see these economic struggles playing out differently across regions, and understanding these patterns is essential for effectively addressing loneliness.

These findings also don't perfectly divide into regions of the world that are viewed as more collective versus individualistic countries. Of course, there are variations in the cultural norms and expectations around the extent of family and community involvement. Such expectations can shape perceived discrepancies. However, consistent with other research, because we don't find concerning data confined to any one particular region, these findings suggest that this is a global issue.

"One of the key benefits of conducting research like NIVEA CONNECT did across thirteen countries worldwide is the ability to examine various regions to identify both universal patterns and local variations."

Our world is becoming increasingly polarised within countries and between countries. How do you think this growing divide will impact social connection?

The more we are divided, the more it creates a self-defensive environment where we view our own group as somehow superior to an out-group. This "us versus them" mentality leads us to see our own group as more valuable, more virtuous and more deserving of whatever limited resources may exist. We tend to view the out-group as less deserving, as a competitor and as more of a threat to our own well-being. This kind of mentality can be highly destructive.

One way to potentially break down these barriers is by developing what is referred to in the scientific literature as building "bridging social capital". This concept is not just about the connections you have within a particular group but also the connections that bridge across various differences or divides. What's interesting is that we often create categorisations based on a single point of division – whether it's race, class, religion or politics. However, where differences exist in one area, there may actually be commonalities in others. Research shows that when people build more bridging social capital connections, it leads to better decision-making, more innovative solutions and ultimately improved outcomes across various settings, such as workplaces and communities. It's about creating a society where individuals and communities can thrive rather than being divided.

Interview with

Chantira Somboonkerd

Fund Development and
Communications Director,
SOS Children's Villages Thailand



Chantira Somboonkerd has been the Communication and Fundraising Director for SOS Children's Villages Thailand for 15 years. SOS Children's Villages Thailand was established in 1971 as part of the global SOS Children's Villages network. The organisation provides quality alternative care in a family-like environment for nearly 700 Thai children and young people who have lost parental care. Chantira works across five locations in Thailand, Samutprakarn (a suburb of Bangkok), Hat Yai, Nong Khai, Chiang Rai and Phuket, and also supports SOS Children's Villages in Laos. She lives with her family near Bangkok.

NIVEA CONNECT:

SOS Children's Villages is famous for creating a family-based environment for children who have lost parental care. Does it also help to prevent loneliness and social isolation? What are the key elements of your success?

Chantira Somboonkerd:

Our approach is rooted in the belief that every child belongs to a family and deserves to grow up with love, respect and security. We help children develop their individual skills, interests and talents while providing them with a supportive community. This way, we are there to help children shape their futures, become independent and successfully integrate into society. All of that helps to prevent loneliness and social isolation in life. Growing up with someone who loves and cares for you is essential to feel connected, build resilience and thrive. Our caregivers, known as "mothers", and the "siblings" they live with form strong, meaningful relationships, even though they come from different backgrounds and experiences.

Through our partnership with NIVEA, we are expanding our mission by helping children who have no one build meaningful connections with families and communities. This collaboration perfectly aligns with our purpose.

Our research shows that low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence and difficulty connecting with others can contribute to loneliness. Based on your experience, what psychological factors contribute to loneliness in children, and how do these manifest?

If children are lacking the emotional foundations – such as a strong family bond and a caring community – they struggle with self-esteem, confidence, and forming relationships. That can reinforce their sense of isolation. What we shapes a child's resilience, emotional well-being, and sense of belonging. Unlike other child welfare systems that may only provide for basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing, we offer a family structure and emphasise emotional support, love and security.

How do you help children build meaningful relationships with caregivers and each other? What philosophy or approach do you use?

The main thing is safety. Creating a safe environment where children feel emotionally secure is our priority. When children feel safe, trust develops naturally. This helps form deeper bonds with caregivers and peers. The trust-building process fosters self-esteem and

the confidence needed to build healthy relationships. We have a structured training programme for new caregivers, called "aunties", who undergo a two-year probation period to prepare them for the role of a "mother" within our villages. During this period, they work under the supervision of experienced mothers, learning how to nurture children and build trust. Also, we provide psychological support through social workers and therapists to help children process their emotions and build resilience. We emphasise education and skill development, which helps children gain confidence and feel empowered to connect with others.

In Thailand, you've created a "Meditation Retreat Program" held at a local temple. What makes this programme unique, especially compared to similar initiatives at other SOS Children's Villages worldwide? Do you think the principles of this programme could be applied elsewhere?

In Thailand, where Buddhism is deeply rooted, our Meditation Retreat Program allows children and youth to engage in traditional practices such as temple visits, performing good deeds and meditation. Think about fostering mindfulness, emotional resilience and a deeper connection to the surroundings. It is very culture-specific, but the core principles of meditation – breathing exercises, self-awareness and inner balance – can be adapted to other settings. For example, similar techniques can be applied through yoga or mindfulness exercises in non-Buddhist countries. What kind of programme works best is a local decision however. That is why at SOS Children's Villages, we operate globally but are led locally, ensuring our programmes align with each country's cultural context.

How would you describe the impact of your programmes? What methods do you use to assess whether your initiatives are making progress and creating positive change?

To assess the impact and progress of SOS Children's Village we focus on both personal and professional success in three key areas: First, we evaluate the quality of care through structured assessments, for instance half-year reviews, that look at how well our programmes provide the emotional, educational and social support children need. Second, we prioritise safeguarding measures: We place a strong emphasis on child safety and well-being, which goes beyond preventing abuse. It includes protecting emotional well-being, data privacy and personal information.

"Our aim is to equip children and young people with the skills they need for the future job market. Including training in soft skills like communication, self-confidence, and digital literacy."

We gather regular feedback and also track reported incidents. Third, and most importantly, we assess youth empowerment and employability: Our aim is to equip children and young people with the skills they need for the future job market. This includes training in soft skills such as communication, self-confidence and digital literacy. A key outcome we track is the percentage of alumni who achieve financial self-sufficiency and actively contribute to their communities.

People around the world are increasingly reporting feelings of loneliness and being left out. In your view, what is missing in society today? What can we learn from the approach of SOS Children's Villages to foster stronger, more meaningful connections in our communities?

The feeling of loneliness and disconnection often arises because people lack a reliable support system. When children grow up feeling as though they have no one to rely on, it creates a deep sense of isolation. I talked about the family-like environment. But beyond that, we also reach out to the wider community through initiatives such as the Family Strengthening Program. This initiative helps parents improve their household income and caregiving skills by providing tools, training and resources. By strengthening families, we create bridges between our children and those in the surrounding community. We are also enhancing shared spaces within our villages to serve as community hubs, providing physical areas where children and families can connect. Additionally, we encourage our children to support other local NGOs, fostering empathy and a sense of social responsibility.

In our partnership with NIVEA, we emphasise three pillars to prepare children for today's complex world:

1. Provide information: Offering self-care, mental development training and empowerment workshops for youths and caregivers.
2. Enable connection: Renovating common areas to create community hubs where children and families can connect, and providing sports and music equipment to strengthen community bonds.
3. Strengthen resilience: Encouraging children to support local NGOs, fostering empathy and helping them contribute positively to their community.

We believe that our approach can inspire broader societal efforts to build stronger, more inclusive communities where everyone feels they belong.

"By strengthening families, we create bridges between our children and those in the surrounding community. We are also enhancing shared spaces within our villages to serve as community hubs, providing physical areas where children and families can connect."

Interview with

Shaun Friel

Director of Childline UK, NSPCC



Shaun has been the Director of Childline UK since June 2019. He joined the NSPCC in 2002. He has worked across a range of roles within the organisation, prior to his current role as Head of NSPCC Schools Service, a UK-wide preventative education programme delivered to primary schools. Shaun started his career working in mental health services as a psychiatric nurse before qualifying as a social worker and working in statutory child protection services. He holds an MSc in Professional Leadership and Management and has more than 33 years' experience in child protection.

NIVEA CONNECT:

The NSPCC has been a leading voice for child protection in the UK for over a century. What are your core activities today to protect and rebuild children's lives?

Shaun Friel:

The NSPCC has over 130 years of experience in protecting children. Today, we're focused not just on helping individual children but also pushing for systemic change. We want a social care system where early intervention is the norm, where families get help before they reach breaking point. We're working hard to change that through our policy work and partnerships with other children's charities. We're committed to being there for every child who needs us, whether that's through Childline, which is open 24/7, or through our safeguarding workshops in schools. We've developed programmes such as "Speak Out, Stay Safe", where we visit schools directly, and "Talk Relationships", which helps young people understand what healthy relationships look like. At the same time, we work with fewer children more intensively through services such as "Domestic Abuse Recovering Together" for families impacted by domestic violence. Even though those services might not reach millions, they allow us to learn and innovate in ways that can later be scaled up more broadly.

How has your work evolved over the years to respond to modern challenges such as online safety, mental health and the pressures of digital life?

The world children grow up in today is radically different from even ten years ago. Technology is everywhere. Nearly all children in the UK use the internet, and about one in three have seen something worrying online in the past year. Yet adults often feel less confident supporting them in that space.

Keeping children safe online is one of the biggest challenges of our time. Online risks move fast – faster than regulation often can. That's why we helped shape the Online Safety Act, and we're working toward five big goals for 2031, all co-created with children themselves. Among them giving children the knowledge and confidence to handle online risks, making sure they can access effective support if something goes wrong and holding technology companies accountable through smarter regulation. We want online spaces to be safer by design – not just fixing problems after harm has been done.

And we also work to equip adults – parents, carers, teachers – with the tools they need. If you search "NSPCC parenting", you'll find guidance on everything from family life to managing online risks.

"We're committed to being there for every child who needs us, whether that's through Childline, which is open 24/7, or through our safeguarding workshops in schools."

"When Childline first started in 1986, the world was a very different place. Today, a child contacts Childline every 45 seconds, and mental health and anxiety are some of the most common reasons they reach out."

The UK was among the first to recognise and invest in tackling loneliness and social isolation. How have you seen these issues develop over time? Why do you think young generations are experiencing loneliness more intensely than older ones?

Loneliness has always been part of growing up to some degree, but I think the pace of modern life, social media and the lasting impacts of the Covid lockdowns have made things much harder for young people. It's so easy now to compare your real life to someone's highlight reel online, and that can make genuine connection feel harder to achieve. When Childline first started in 1986, the world was a very different place. Today, a child contacts Childline every 45 seconds, and mental health and anxiety are some of the most common reasons they reach out.

Loneliness and mental health issues often feed into each other. They can create a vicious cycle. That's why we set up a service where young people work with a trained befriender over a number of weeks. It is called "Building Connections". That is the programme we are partnering in with NIVEA CONNECT. It's different because it focuses on one relationship at a time, helping participants to gain the confidence to build real-world friendships too. We see a lot of young people saying they struggle to form relationships at all, especially if they've faced bullying or feel different because of their background, sexuality or religion.

Can you walk us through the key elements of this initiative? What makes it different from other programmes aimed at youth well-being?

We're really excited about our partnership with NIVEA because this initiative is such a vital service. It's aimed at young people aged nine to nineteen who are struggling with loneliness. When they come to us, they're matched with a trained volunteer befriender who works with them online over around eleven sessions.

What makes it unique is the relationship they build with the same befriender over time. Young people see that they have the ability to form meaningful relationships. It's also about resilience – understanding that relationships can change and end, and that's okay, you can build new ones too. Referrals mostly come from schools, but we're seeing increasing numbers from mental health services, voluntary organisations and statutory agencies as well. Many of the young people we help are going through big life changes such as moving schools, dealing with bullying, or coping with issues related to identity and feeling different. It is amazing to see that just two hours of online volunteering a week can make a real difference in a young person's life.

What does a successful outcome look like for a young participant in the programme? What kind of feedback have you received so far, and how are you measuring the programme's impact?

Success really depends on the objectives of each young person. For some, it's about feeling more confident in social situations. For others, it's simply believing in themselves again. From the beginning, we work with each young person to identify what success looks like for them personally. We use standardised tools to establish baseline metrics in terms of loneliness, connection or ability to cope and we measure this at the end to establish what impact has been achieved. It's been overwhelmingly positive. One school recently told us they think it's crucial for children to learn to talk about their emotions early – that it sets them up for life. And one twelve-year-old girl said that she didn't think she would feel as confident without the support of her befriender. That's exactly what we hope to achieve.

Looking ahead, what do you see as the biggest challenges society must address in the next five years when it comes to children's well-being? What can each of us do to help?

There's still so much to do. Passing the Online Safety Act was a huge milestone, but the next challenge is making sure it's enforced properly and that tech companies are genuinely held accountable. We have to keep pushing to make children's safety a real priority across society. Individually, we all have a role to play. Talk to the children in your life, not just about school or hobbies, but about what they're experiencing online. Make conversations about their digital life a normal part of your relationship. If they know you're someone they can talk to without fear or judgment, they're far more likely to come to you when something's wrong. What matters is that children know they're not alone.

“Passing the Online Safety Act was a huge milestone, but the next challenge is making sure it's enforced properly and that tech companies are genuinely held accountable.”

IMPRINT

NIVEA CONNECT REPORT 2025

LONELINESS UNMASKED:

A GLOBAL CRISIS OF ISOLATION

This report has been put together to highlight the results of the NIVEA CONNECT COMPASS 2025, share expert perspectives and start a conversation on loneliness, social isolation and social connection.

ABOUT NIVEA CONNECT

It is our social mission to fight social isolation and foster meaningful social connections.

ABOUT THE NIVEA CONNECT COMPASS 2025

This research was conducted by DVJ insights, an international market and social research agency, in collaboration with Dr Julianne Holt-Lunstad, professor of psychology and neuroscience at Brigham Young University, and scientific advisor to NIVEA CONNECT.

It was carried out with 30,912 people in 13 countries across five continents.

We would like to thank everybody who contributed their knowledge and passion.

NIVEA CONNECT REPORT 2025

Loneliness Unmasked:

A Global Crisis of Isolation

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"Loneliness is often perceived as a personal failure. It is crucial to raise awareness of loneliness as a normal experience." Dr Julianne Holt-Lunstad