



Planning tomorrow **today**

## Isolation: the emerging crisis for older men

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# ILC-UK Planning Tomorrow, Today

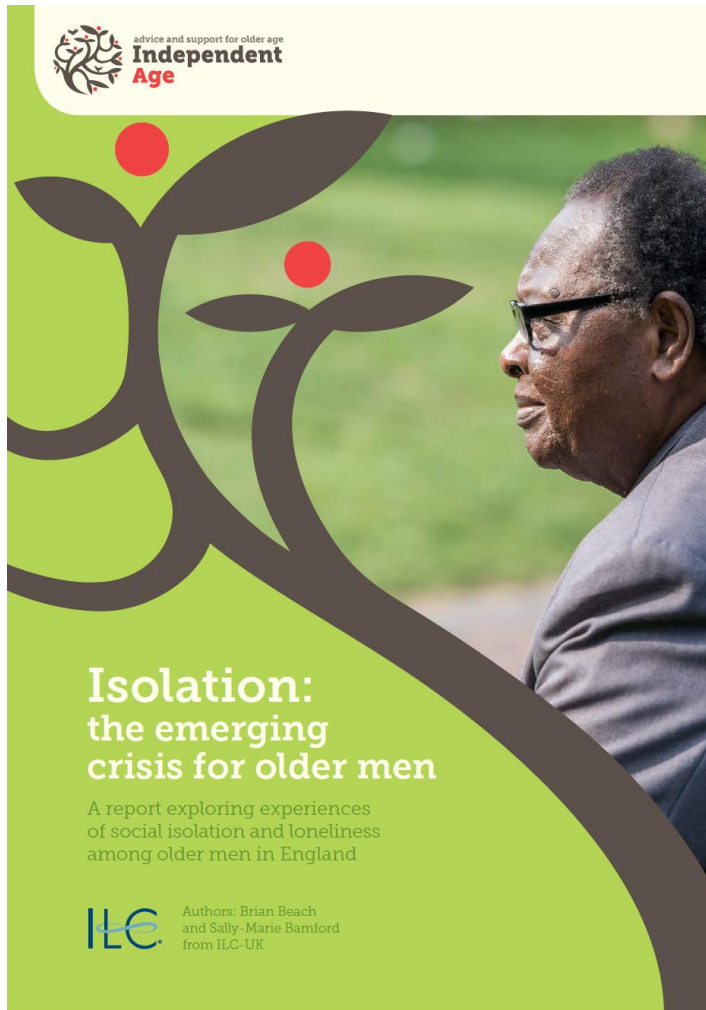


- Westminster based think tank
- Evidence based research organisation
- Focussed on policy
- Independent
- Experts in ageing, demography and longevity
- Broad remit in research
- Take a balanced approach to intergenerational fairness
- Well respected
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Planning tomorrow **today**

- Explored the experiences of social isolation and loneliness among older men
- Review of existing evidence
- Analysis of latest data from ELSA
- Interviews and focus groups

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## Topics for Today

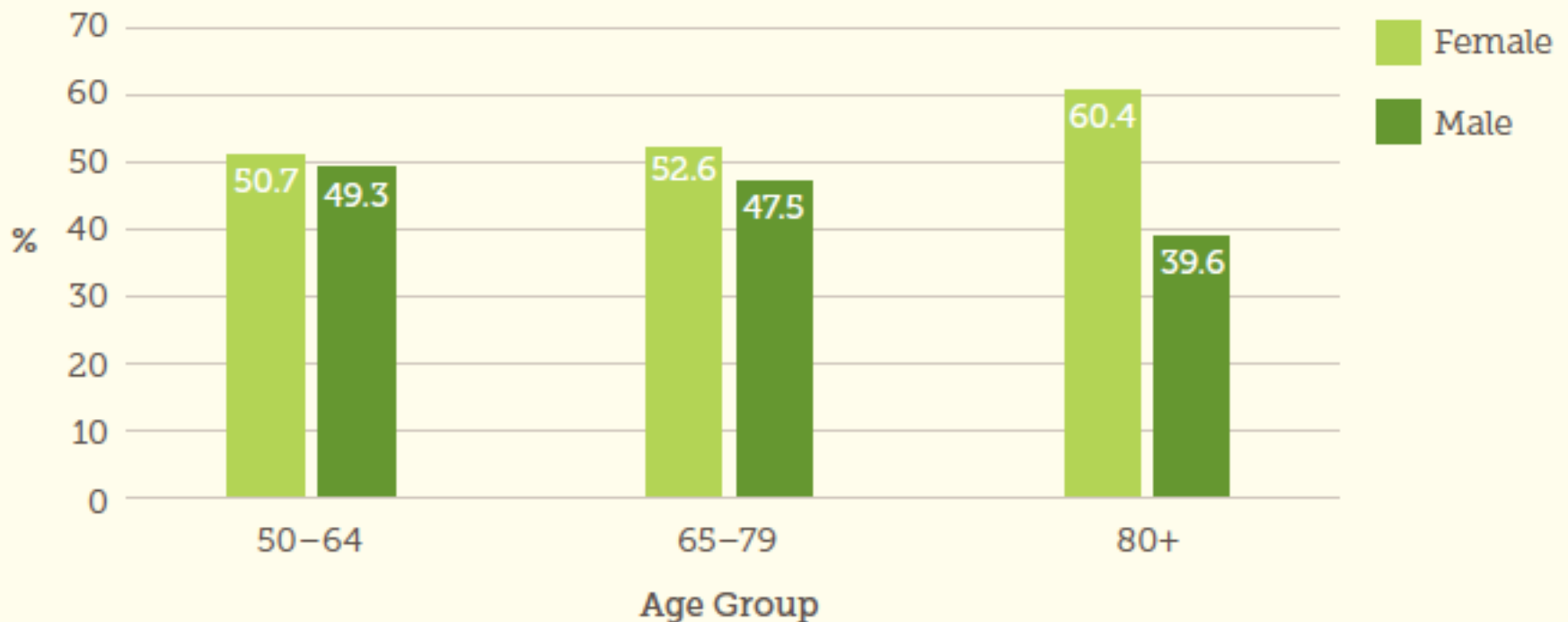
- Why look at older men? How do they differ from older women?
- What do we mean by social isolation and loneliness?
- How prevalent are social isolation and loneliness among older men?
- Why do older men experience social isolation and loneliness differently than women?
- What do we know about the most isolated and loneliest older men?
- What lessons can be learned about how to improve services to address social isolation and loneliness among older men?

# Why look at older men?

- Previous evidence suggests that older men and women experience social isolation and loneliness in different ways, and that men are less likely to seek help and support, e.g. medical services
- Women tend to use support services more – *are they failing older men?*
- Male-specific programmes have grown in number and scope, while providers need a better understanding of best practices and what works – *are current programmes effective?*
- Women have received greater focus in ageing research and policy debates – *are men being left out?*

# Women make up more of the 'oldest old'...

Figure 1: Proportion of age group by gender (%)



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## ...but the gap in life expectancy is shrinking

In 2012 in England & Wales:

- 16% of men were aged 65+
- 23% of women were aged 65+



In 20 years:

- 21% of men aged 65+
- 24% of women aged 65+



past increase in people aged 85+ in 2001-2011<sup>18</sup>  
(England and Wales)



projected increase in people aged 85+ in 2011-2030<sup>19</sup>  
(England and Wales)

# What do we mean by social isolation and loneliness?

- **Loneliness:** a subjective perception in which a person feels lonely
  - **Social isolation:** broadly refers to the absence of contact with other people
- 
- **Social exclusion:** refers to being marginalised; closely related to social cohesion



## Social isolation and loneliness among older men

- 13.9% of men aged 50+ reported a **moderate to high** degree of social isolation
  - 29.9% were **not** isolated
- 8.1% of men aged 50+ reported a **high** degree of loneliness
  - Over half (52.2%) were **not** lonely



## Differences between men and women

- Overall, men reported **more** social isolation but **less** loneliness than women



- Social isolation:** While women are more likely to outlive their partners, a lack of contact with children, family, and friends explains higher isolation among men

## Differences between men and women

- **Loneliness:** Despite appearing more isolated, men report being less lonely
    - Are older men alone but not lonely?
- OR**
- Are older men under-reporting loneliness?

# Loneliness, partnerships, & living alone

- When we take partnership into account, a higher proportion of older men without partners report loneliness
- Over time, the number of older men living alone could be expected to grow by 65% to around 1.5 million men aged 65+



## Other factors impacting the most isolated older men

- Living arrangements
  - Renters are more likely than homeowners to report moderate to high isolation rather than no isolation
- Income
  - Men with higher income are more likely to report no isolation



# Other factors impacting the loneliest older men

- Health
  - Poorer general health
  - Limitations with I/ADLs
  - *However, NOT just chronic illness or disability*
  - Depression
- Informal care responsibilities
- Marital status (not being married or cohabiting)

## What older men want from services

- A service for people – not for lonely older people
  - Some men may not acknowledge they need such services
- Services appealing to men's interests and passions
  - Services can appear or feel 'feminised'
- User-led involvement and engagement
  - Encourages effective recruitment, buy-in, & follow-up

## Examples of best practice

- **Men in Sheds** – shared space for hands-on DIY activities
- **Walking Football** – open to everyone, but particularly attracts men aged 50+
  - Incorporates both social and physical activity
- **Culture Club** – more intellectual activity focused on learning
  - Built around group's interests, who help select speakers





## How might services be improved?

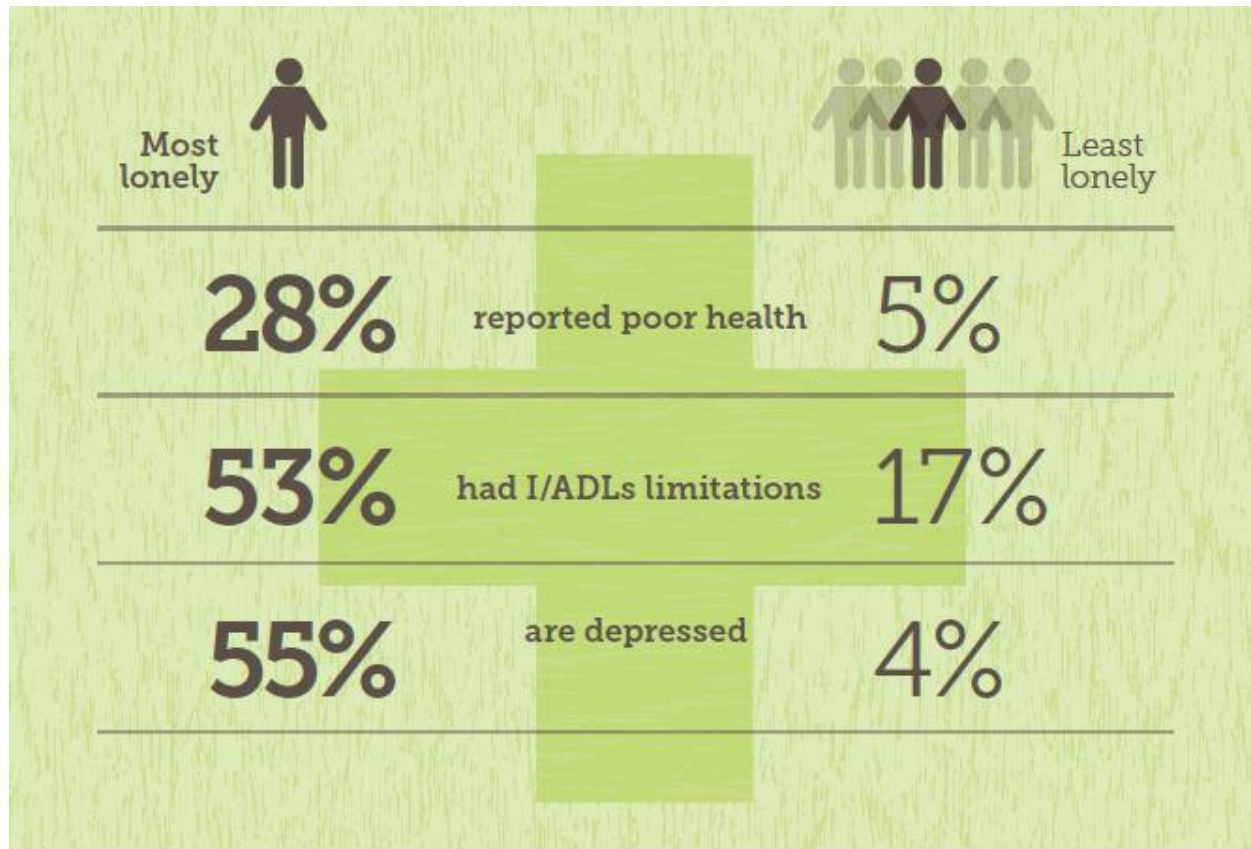
- Better engaging older men through their partners
- Better support in preparation for retirement
- Referrals through health services to proper support
- Think about older men who have moved, especially those into institutional care

## Areas of further work

- Older men in care homes
- Engaging older men with dementia
- Addressing living alone among the oldest old
- Other hard-to-reach groups: ethnic minorities, LGBT
- Adapting to changing relationships: divorce/re-marriage
- The potential for technology

## Some concluding thoughts

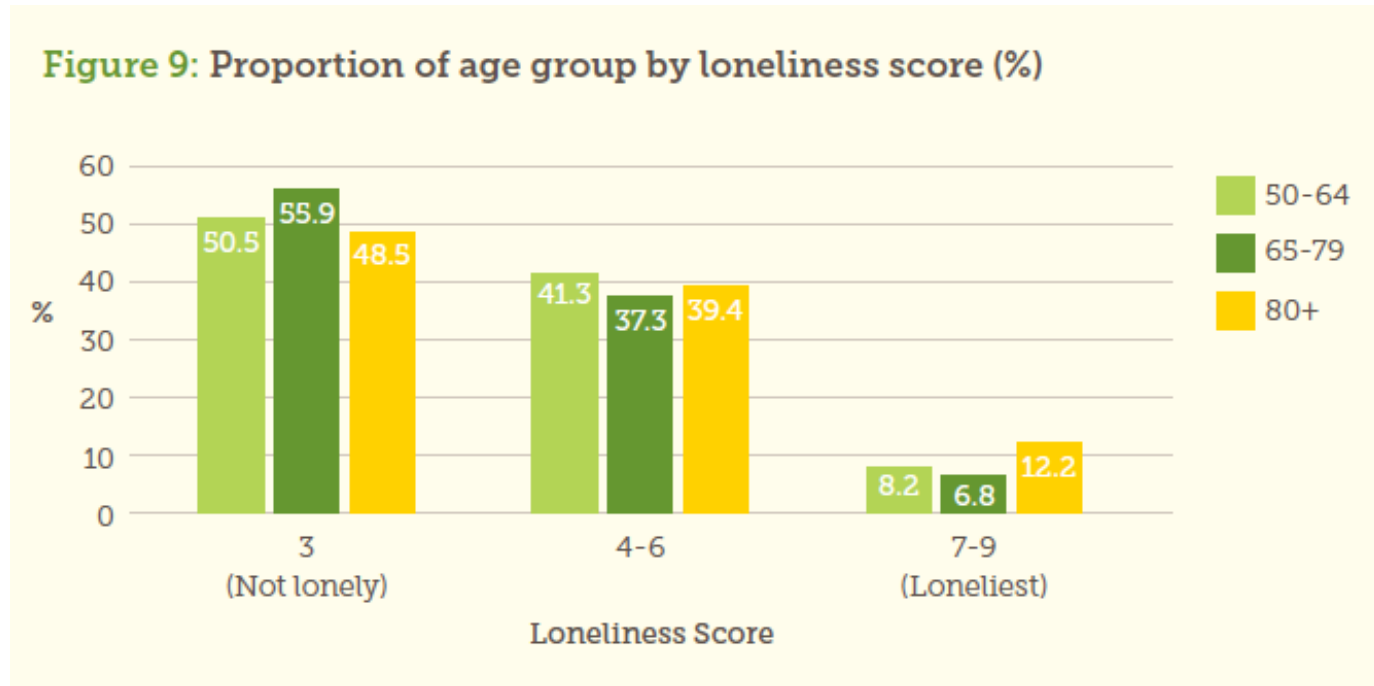
- Health and loneliness have a complicated relationship



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## Some concluding thoughts

- Health and loneliness have a complicated relationship
- Loneliness is not an inevitable consequence of ageing



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## Some concluding thoughts

- Health and loneliness have a complicated relationship
- Loneliness is not an inevitable consequence of ageing
- Socio-economic disadvantages appear to be a main driver for social isolation – suggesting a life course perspective needed
- Key transitions – in particular the loss of one's partner – play an important role in older men's experiences of social isolation and loneliness

## Many thanks

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