

# SURVEY ON LONELINESS - 2022

## Faculty for Social Wellbeing

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...198,198 PERSONS...

- **The data states that there was an increase of a sense of loneliness from 2019, 43.5% to 54.6% (198,198 persons) in 2022.**
- **In terms of severity there was an increase from 1.7% in 2019 to 4.6% (16,698 persons) in 2022.**
- **To top it up an estimated 198,198 (54.6%) persons feeling lonely to a degree or other.**

### A. INTRODUCTION

This study is almost an exact replica of the one the Faculty did in 2019 when Prof. Marilyn Clark, Jamie Bonnici and myself, were the authors. The study had surfaced 'loneliness' as a major social issue that affects our communities on so many levels (emotional, social and mental). The same three researchers were involved once again for the 2022 study (Annabel Cuff was added to the team).

I am relatively satisfied that through the study of 2019 the Faculty placed this issue on the national agenda and now the general population, policy makers, NGOs, social operators, political parties and politicians are speaking about it - but as yet not much is being done in terms of direct policy actions. Another positive is that this study has steered the Faculty to research other areas like '*solitary conferment*' and '*deinstitutionalisation*', amongst other, which have also drawn the necessary attention and we managed to place even these issues on the social agenda.

Our plan was always to have this loneliness survey taking place every three years so that we can identify any trends and how our social policy was responding (this exercise will be done in the coming weeks). In the meantime, the data presented in this document (more to be revealed soon) is a clear indicator that we have a serious problem to contend with and we urgently need tangible actions to respond to this growing and complex phenomenon.

As always, the Faculty, which this year is celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, is determined to keep providing data but at the same time democratising this knowledge for easier and quicker access by the community of scholarship and also for service providers.

But now, as a Country we urgently need to walk the talk. The evidenced-based data and the numbers are all there and policy proposals are piling up. What is needed is action and to name just a few:

- More widespread access to talk therapy;
- Closer work with GPs who can indicate physical ailments that are possibly a result of loneliness and/or vice versa;
- Improved coordination between services like the Government's LEAP, the Church's Diakonia and Soup Kitchens;
- Bringing to life a national policy and strategy on Suicide ideation and prevention;
- Writing up a Loneliness national policy and strategy;
- Contemplating a change in our economic model;
- Evaluating our lifestyles and our drive for status, money and estate as if there is no tomorrow;
- Making drastic changes for example by lowering the full-time hours of work and combatting the culture of part-time and seeing an exponential growth in wages;
- Re-thinking the concept of institutional care;
- Setting up of a Parliamentary Secretary on Loneliness within the Ministry responsible for social policy;
- Setting up a Commissioner for Loneliness;
- Reigniting rituals.

Lest we forget, loneliness is costing us a great deal of money.

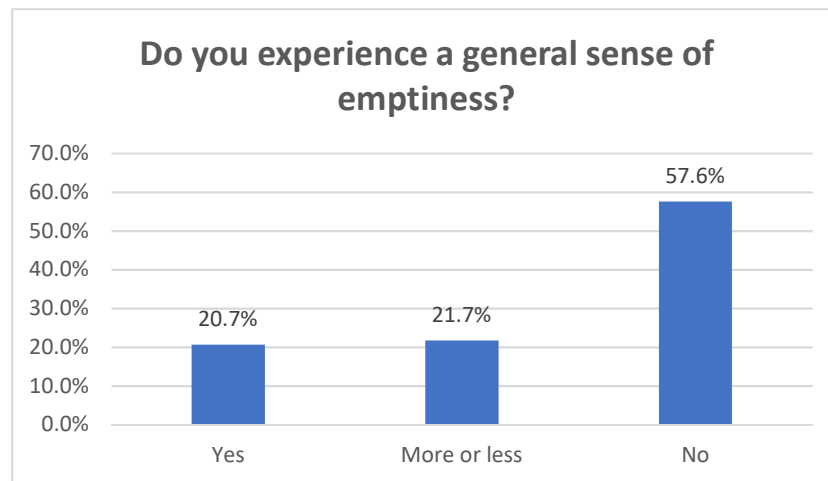
Now the 'excuse' I see coming across is that we blame it on Covid. I think that would be minimalistic and a shallow argument. Even if it was the case (which I don't think so) that these numbers are so high it also means what I have been saying these last 12-18 months that no work is being done to address the post-Covid trauma. However, what I think is happening is way different. Covid is a reality that exposed us. It simply put to the surface stuff that we didn't want to show (such as, change in family dynamics; lack of solid community services; families drifting away from each other; new family models that are not given the necessary support to function effectively; people over dedicated to their work; drop in volunteering; growing poverty and risk of social exclusion; increasing numbers of suicide and suicide ideation). I predict that the statistics we are showing wouldn't have been very different without Covid-19 in between now and 2019.

## **B. METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHICS**

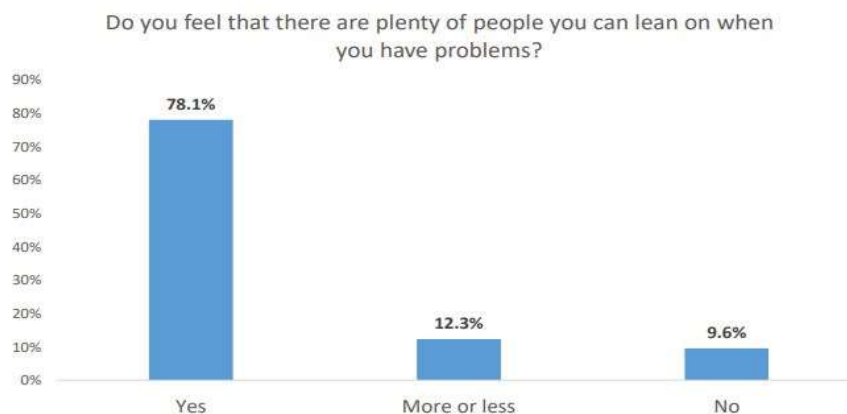
- The survey was carried out through telephone interviews
- A sample size of 572 individuals was collected amongst the Maltese
- Population (Age: 11 years of age and above)
- Level of confidence: 95%
- Confidence interval: +/- 4.1%
- The sample was stratified based on gender, districts and age
- The data was collected during July 2022
- An estimated 363,000 people would be the real number involved in the study as we started the study from 11 years upwards (from a Maltese population of 404,313)
- This study does not include foreigners (an estimated 115,449) and those in institutions that vary in number but a guesstimate would be of another 8-10k)
- The questions included in the survey form part of the standardised loneliness measure (De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale) and that analysis is currently underway to calculate the overall loneliness rates and identify any statistically significant associations between socio-demographic variables.

### C. INITIAL OUTCOMES (FIRST WAVE OF DATA)

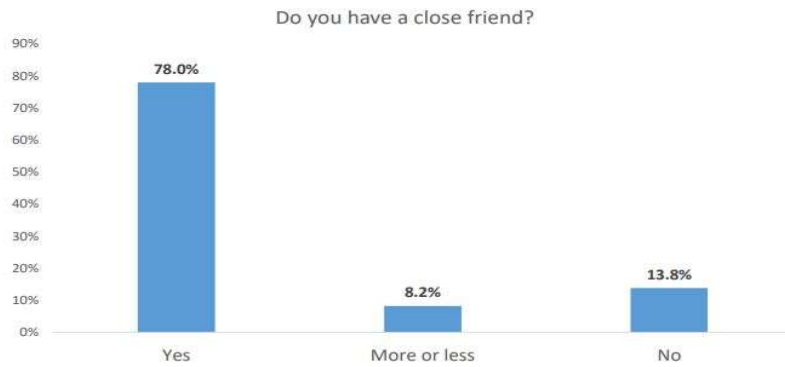
- Participants were asked about their ability to cope with **stressful situations or unpleasant emotions**; Although the majority (90.7%) felt that they had a very good, good, or fair coping ability, 7.4% (26,862 persons) rated their coping ability as ‘not so good’ and 1.8% (6,534 persons) rated their coping ability as ‘poor’.
- The questionnaire attempted to understand participants’ ratings of **subjective wellbeing** by asking, ‘In general, do you feel positive about life?’. Results reveal that just over a tenth of respondents (10.5% - 38,115 persons) do not feel positive about their life.
- Two out of ten of the respondents (20.8% - 75,504 persons) experience a **general sense of emptiness**.



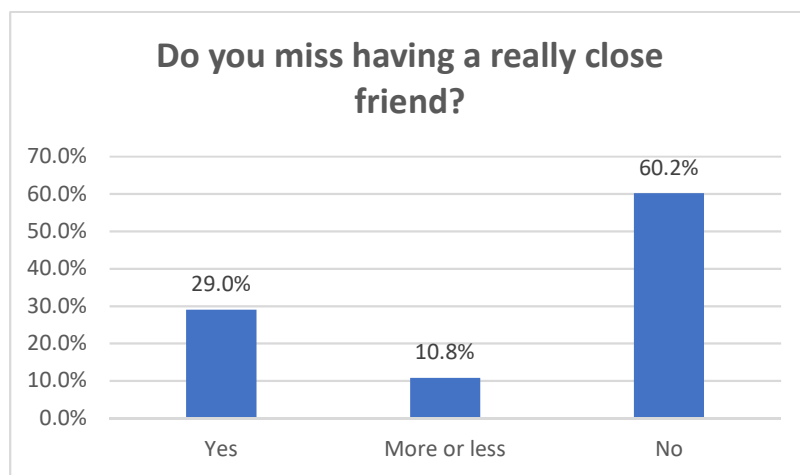
- Almost one in ten of respondents (9.6% - 34,848 persons) revealed that they **do not feel that there are plenty of people they can lean on** when they have problems.



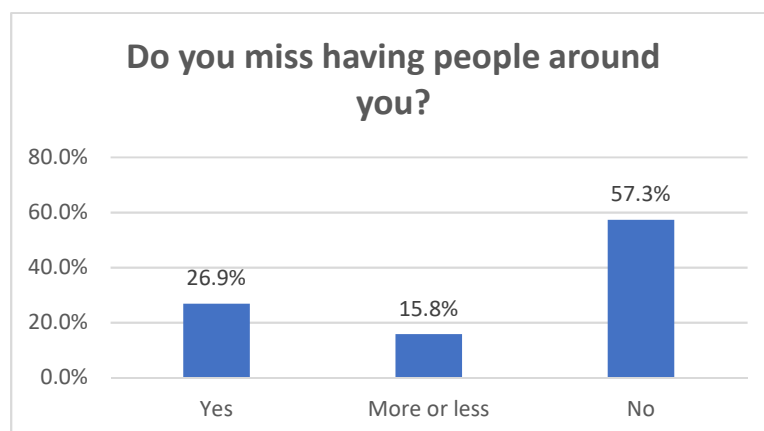
- More than one in ten respondents (13.8% - 50,094 persons) reported that they **do not have a close friend**. This was more common among those over the age of 51, compared to younger age groups.



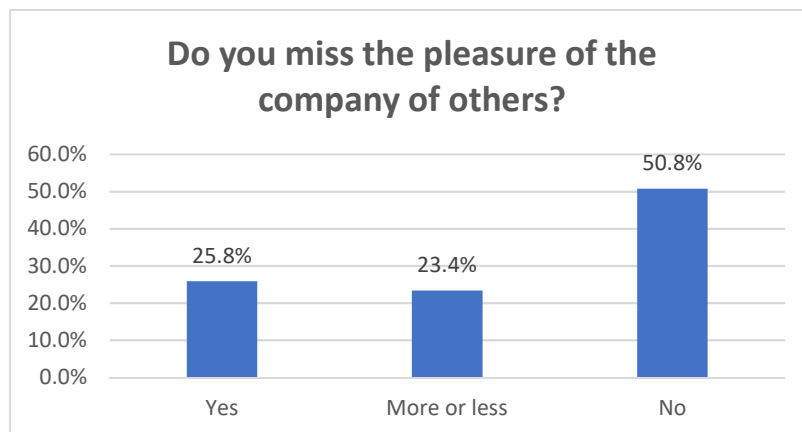
- When participants were asked whether **they miss having a really close friend**, 29% (105,270 persons) replied with 'yes'. This figure was higher amongst the 11-19 year old age group (39.2%).



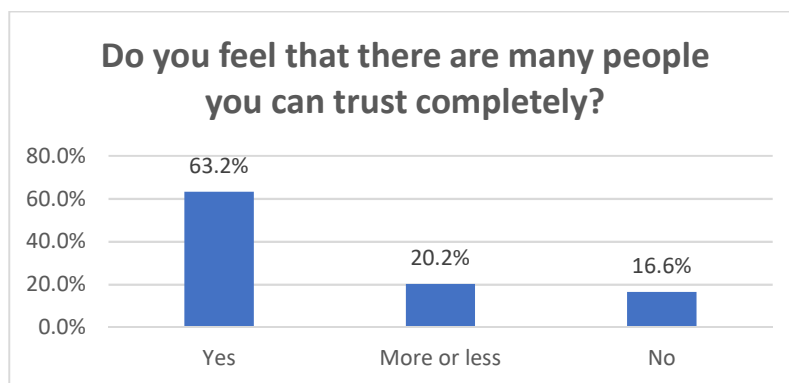
Over a quarter of the respondents (26.9% - 97,647 persons) stated that **they miss having people around them**. Slightly more males (28.4%) compared to females (25.3%) responded that **they miss having people around them**. The highest percentages of respondents who miss having people around them were those aged between 20 to 34 years old (34.1%), followed by those in the 11-20 year old age group (29.1%).



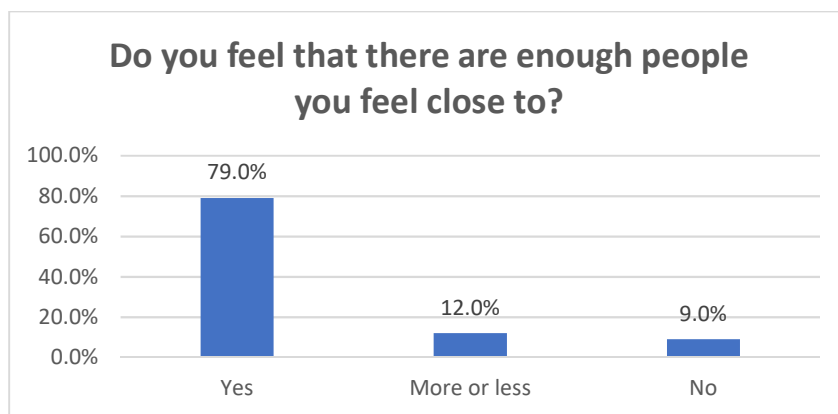
- Around a quarter of respondents (25.8% - 93,654 persons) indicated that **they miss the pleasure of the company of others**.



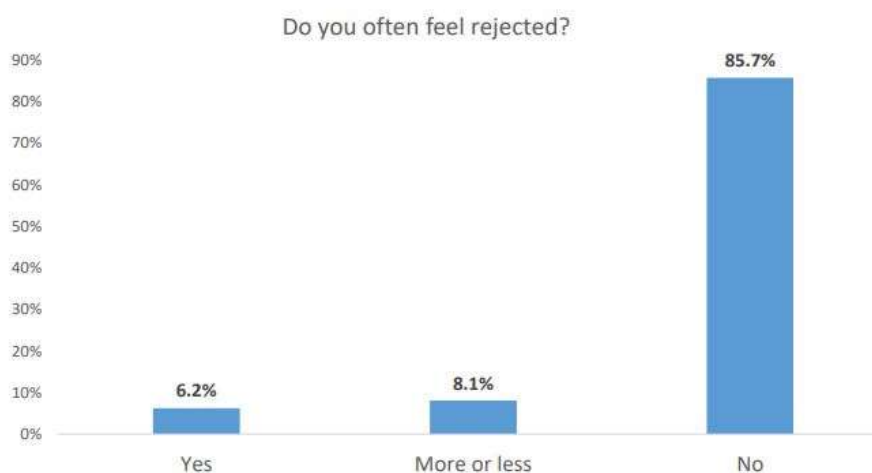
- Nearly three-quarters of the respondents (74.3%) feel that they can call on their friends whenever they need them, whilst 13.7% (49,731 persons) **do not feel that they can call on their friends** whenever they need them.
- The majority of the respondents (63.3%) feel that there are many people they can trust completely. Conversely, 16.6% (60,258 persons) of respondents **do not feel that there are many people they can trust completely**. This lack of having many people one can trust completely was felt more strongly by participants with a worse self-rated physical health (60% of participants with 'poor' physical health compared to 5.4% of those with 'very good' physical health).



- More than three-quarters of the respondents said that there are enough people they feel close to (79%), whilst 12% replied with 'more or less (43,650 persons)'. The remaining 9% (32,670 persons) of respondents **do not feel that there are enough people they feel close to**. This sentiment was highest amongst older respondents, with 10.8% of those aged 55 years and above stating that they do not feel there are enough people they feel close to.



- Whilst the majority of respondents (78.8%) felt that they have enough friends and acquaintances, 9.4% (34,122 persons) of **respondents find their circle of friends and acquaintances too limited**. The feeling of not having enough friends or acquaintances was more commonly reported by participants who did not feel a strong sense of belonging in their neighbourhood; Only 5.3% of those with a very strong sense of neighbourhood belonging and 6.3% of those with a fairly strong sense of neighbourhood belonging, felt that they did not have enough friends and acquaintances. Meanwhile, not having enough friends and acquaintances was reported by 13% of those who consider their neighbourhood belonging to be not very strong, and the figure was 17.8% of those with a ‘not at all strong’ sense of neighbourhood belonging.
- Another question asked respondents whether they often feel rejected. Whilst the majority replied in the negative, 6.2% (22,506 persons) replied in the positive, and 8.1% replied with ‘more or less’ (29,403 persons). A greater percentage of unemployed respondents (16.7%) stated that **they often feel rejected**.



*This study captured Maltese citizens. So far, the estimated 22% of our population which is foreign c. 115,449 from the total population of 519,562 (Maltese citizens- 404,113) and the thousands that reside in institutional care (c. 8-10k) are not being bagged by this data which I foresee would have given us even higher numbers.*

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