

Understanding senior Australians and their communities: Findings from a nationwide survey

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**Productive
Ageing Centre**

**National Seniors
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Understanding senior Australians and their communities: Findings from a nationwide survey

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Executive Summary

Local communities play an important role in the wellbeing of senior Australians. Communities can act as a form of social support for people who experience a distressing life event, such as loss of a spouse. More generally, living in a safe and secure community can undoubtedly support people's quality of life as they age. To understand more about the experiences and perceptions of senior Australians and their communities, this research monograph explored their involvement in community activities, their feelings of safety, their overall satisfaction with living in their community, and whether there are certain population groups who face social isolation and insecurity.

This study used data from the National Seniors Social Survey Wave 2 that was conducted in August 2012, which surveyed 1,993 adults aged 50 years or over. The questionnaire gathered data from participants on their financial, health, and social wellbeing, as well as their demographic and socio-economic backgrounds. The results indicated that the majority of senior Australians are engaged in their community, with over half feeling safe in their community. The factors that were found to be significant predictors of feeling safe were the number of years lived in the community, high school education, household income, feeling confident that neighbours would help in time of need, health status, gender and residence. A very high proportion of senior Australians reported feeling satisfied with living in their community. The factors that contributed significantly to the prediction of community satisfaction were age, health, feelings of safety and feeling confident that neighbours would help in time of need. Even though a high proportion of seniors indicated that they rarely or never experienced a lack of companionship or loneliness, there were however certain population groups which face some degree of social isolation and insecurity in the population, such as those from lower socio-economic groups and with poorer health.

Overall, the findings in this report paint a detailed picture of how senior Australians are engaging in their community, their concerns around social isolation and safety, and how these factors relate to their satisfaction with the community. There is scope for further research to investigate how specific interventions in the community can act as a safety net for people who may face social isolation. Many areas of society, including government, non-governmental organisations and citizens themselves, have a role to play in supporting seniors remain actively involved in their community.

Understanding senior Australians and their communities: Findings from a nationwide survey

Introduction

Background

Communities play an important role in the quality of life of senior Australians. People may face a range of significant life events as they age — such as retirement, possible loss of a spouse, and changes in mobility and health — and communities can act as a vital source of support and prevent social isolation. In this context, it is important to understand the experiences and perceptions of senior Australians with their community. How do they engage in community groups and events? What are their social connections, including relations with neighbours and any feelings of social isolation? What are their experiences and perceptions of crime in their community? What is their overall satisfaction with living in their community?

Literature review

A useful starting point when investigating community engagement is the concept of social capital, which has been used to explore community participation and social connections (Narayan & Cassidy, 2001). Social capital has become an area of great interest to various organisations and government agencies, including community, welfare, and research institutions (ABS, 2005). Although there is no universally agreed definition of social capital, the definition provided by the OECD is “*networks together with shared norms, values and understanding that facilitate co-operation within or among groups*” (OECD, 2001, p. 41). This definition captures the main dimensions of social capital that were identified by Narayan and Cassidy, which included “*group characteristics, generalized norms, togetherness, everyday sociability, neighbourhood connections, volunteerism, and trust*” (p. 67). A large number of studies have established a positive link between social capital and health (e.g., Berry & Welsh, 2010; Baum, Palmer, Modra, Murray & Bush, 2000; Ziersch, Baum, MacDougall, & Putland, 2005), and social capital and perceptions of safety (Ziersch, Putland, Palmer, MacDougall & Baum, 2007; Donder, Witte, Buffel, Dury, & Verte, 2012).

Other research has focussed specifically on how engagement in community and social activities is an important component of productive ageing. A study by Harlow and Cantor (1996) found that participation in community activities and social activities predicted life satisfaction. Similarly, a very recent study by Gilmour (2012) in Canada explored the relationship between various social activities and three measures of health and wellbeing, including self-perceived health, loneliness, and life dissatisfaction. Their results showed that social participation was positively associated with self-perceived health and negatively associated with life dissatisfaction and loneliness. In Australia, research has focussed on social participation and its relationship with psychological distress. Further research has found that seven types of social participation were independently associated with lower psychological distress; these include contacts made with various people, particularly friends, immediate family members, extended family members, and neighbours; engagement in community activities and current affairs, and religious observance (Berry, Rodgers, & Dear, 2007). Addressing the same theme, Olesen and Berry (2011) found that greater participation in three activities (contact with friends and neighbours, and voluntary sector activity) were more strongly associated with a reduced level of psychological distress amongst retired people compared with working people aged 45-54 years.

Research literature has also focussed on safety and its relationship with participation in the community. Findings by Ziersch et al. (2007) from Australia indicated positive associations between perceptions of safety and neighbourhood trust and neighbourhood connections. Donder and colleagues (2012) also examined the relationship between various aspects of social capital (namely, social ties, place attachment and civic participation) and feelings of safety, in a study in Belgium. They found that greater social ties, such as having more frequent contact with friends and acquaintances, were related to higher levels of feelings of safety. Being involved in the neighbourhood and enjoying living there were also significantly related to a higher likelihood of feelings of safety. Finally, civic participation (such as participating in social organisations or clubs) and cultural participation were all significantly related to higher levels of feelings of safety.

Several studies have explored how some of these issues are related to socio-economic and demographic factors, and have established:

- People who were retired and around 60 years old reported higher levels of community participation, and contacts with neighbours compared to those aged around 41 years who were mostly in full time paid work (Berry, 2008);
- Social participation was significantly associated with higher levels of education and satisfaction with housing, as well as a sense of belonging to neighbourhood (Richard, Gauvin, Gosselin, & Laforest, 2008);
- Most people maintained regular contact with family and friends, but fewer did so with neighbours, and visiting the neighbours was more likely for those aged 60 or over compared to those under 60 years of age (Baum, Bush, Modra, Murray, Cox, Alexander, & Potter, 2000);
- There were no significant differences found for community satisfaction by income, employment, residence, sex, age or family structure (Bubolz, Eicher, Evers, Sontag, 1980);
- The level of residential satisfaction varies according to gender but increases with age (Perez, Fernandez, Rivera, Abuin, & Manuel, 2001);
- Informal support from family and relatives correlated significantly with residential satisfaction (Phillips, Oi-Ling, Yeh, & Cheng, 2004);
- Gender and age were both negatively associated with perceptions of safety, with women having lower levels of perceived safety and older age groups being less likely to feel safe (Ziersch et al., 2007);
- Older age groups were more likely to be trusting of their neighbours than younger groups (Ziersch et al.).

Outline of study

In Australia, there is scope for detailed exploration of the relationship of senior Australians with their community, and the role of community in supporting people's quality of life as they age. The specific research questions this report seeks to answer are:

1. How engaged are senior Australians in their communities and what is the extent of feelings of social isolation?
2. What are senior Australians' perceptions of safety in the community, and its predictive factors?
3. Overall, how satisfied are senior Australians living in their community, and what factors predict community satisfaction?

Data and methods

The National Seniors Social Survey Wave 2 (NSSS2) was conducted in August 2012. Participants were members of National Seniors Australia aged 50 years and over. A total of 10,000 members were selected to participate in the survey. Stratification of the sample was done by age (50-64, 65-84, 80+ years), sex and state/territory to form 48 strata (three age groups x two sexes x eight states/territories). The number of respondents allocated to each strata was calculated proportionally to reflect the Estimated Resident Population in Australia aged 50 years and over as at June 2010. Respondents within each stratum were randomly selected from the database of over 200,000 National Seniors Australia members. Selection was performed such that no two members from the same family were chosen.

At the beginning of August 2012 a paper survey was mailed to the members selected. They were asked to complete the survey and return it by 31 August 2012. Respondents were given the option of completing the questionnaire using the paper format or online. A total of 1,993 questionnaires were entered at the Canberra office of National Seniors Australia in September 2012.

Survey weights were applied to each combination of age, sex and state/territory, to adjust for differences in response rates by these population groups and to make the results representative of the Australian population aged 50 years and over.

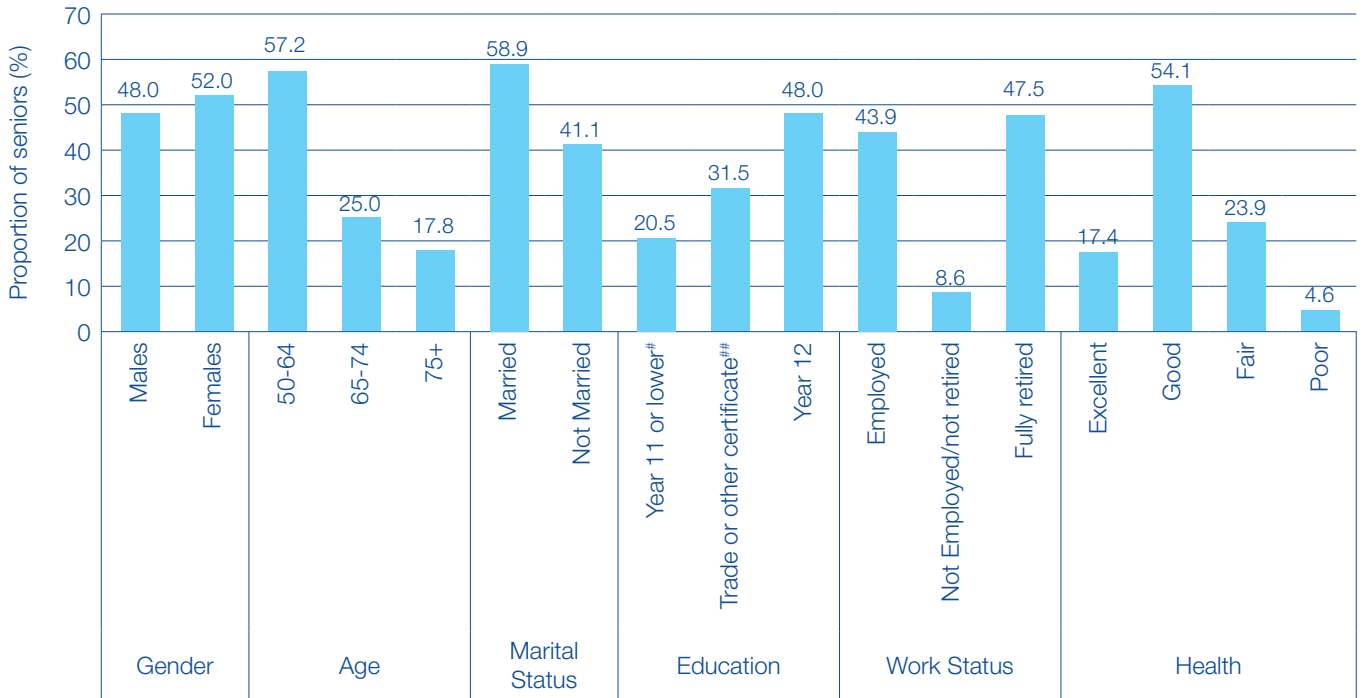
The survey asked participants to respond to a series of questions that cover the three main aspects of wellbeing (financial, health, and social wellbeing), questions relating to their retirement relocation, as well as demographic and socio-economic questions. This report focuses on findings in the social wellbeing module. This module contains questions about the number of years lived in the community, participation in community groups and organisations, and perceptions of safety and crime in the neighbourhood. It also covers participants' perceptions of their neighbours' helpfulness and trustworthiness, their relationships with various people and groups, their satisfaction with living in the community and companionship. The findings for some of these indicators were briefly reported in the Seniors Sentiment Index report (National Seniors Australia, 2012), and they will be further explored in this report.

Exploratory analysis and tests of significance were conducted to assess significant differences between various basic demographic variables (such as age, sex, marital status) and the set of social wellbeing variables. The type of logistic regression methods that were applied to the two models for predicting feelings of safety and community satisfaction is discussed in Section B in the Appendix. Full tables of crosstabulations and regression results are also shown in the Appendix. The Appendix can be found at productiveageing.com.au.

Basic characteristics of Senior Australians

Some of the basic characteristics of senior Australians are shown in Figure 1. There were slightly more females who participated in this survey than males. Most participants were in the 50 to 64 years age group (57%), were married (59%), and had completed year 12 education (48%). About 48% of the participants were fully retired, and 44% still employed. Over half of participants reported having good health (54%), while 24% reported their health as fair, and 17% said it was excellent (Table A.1, Appendix).

Figure 1: Basic characteristics of senior Australians (%)



#without trade or other certificates
##but not finished year 12

Community engagement

Taking part in community events

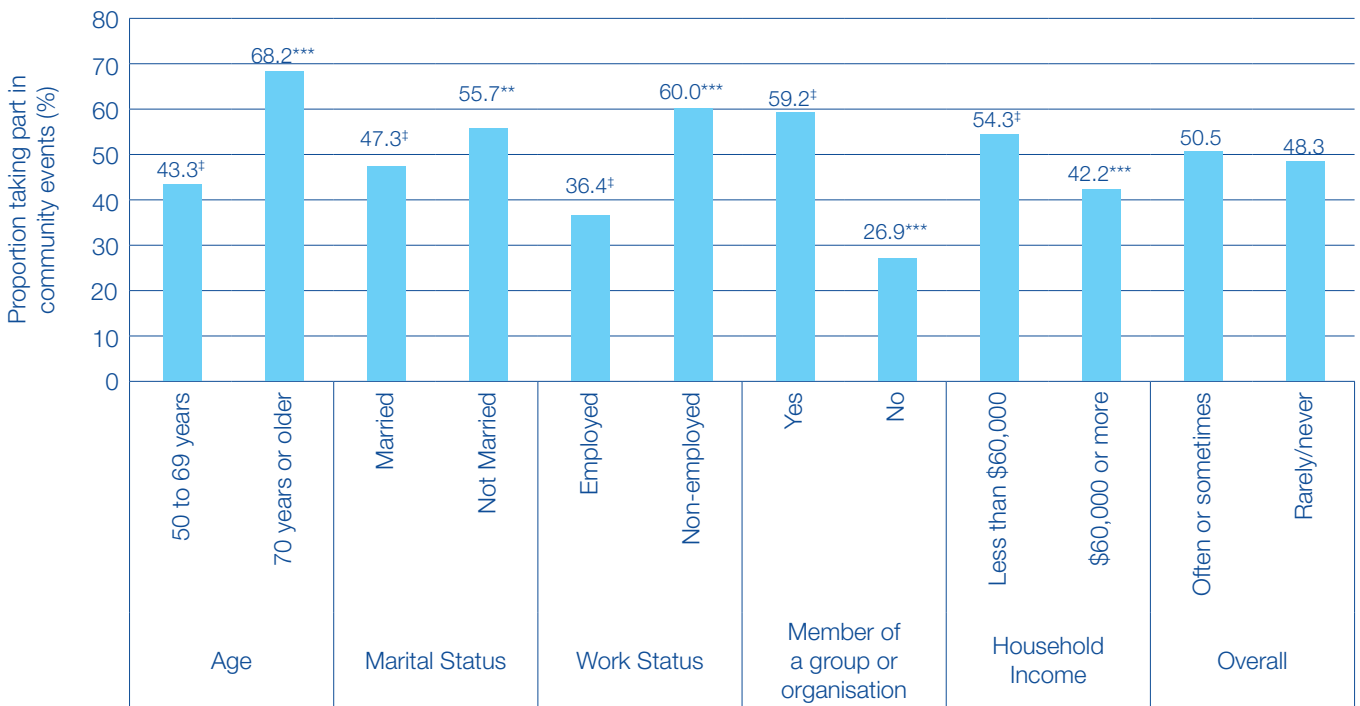
Sixty-three per cent of respondents indicated that their community organises and holds events at least sometimes (i.e. often or sometimes). Half of the respondents took part in community events at least sometimes (Table A.2, Appendix).

Figure 2 shows significant differences for several factors with respect to those who took part in community events. It shows that significantly more of those in the older age group took part compared to those in the younger age group. Similarly, significantly more people who were not married took part than those who were married.

There were no significant differences in taking part in community events by gender, high school education, and health status (Table A.3, Appendix).

Of those who rarely or never took part in community events (48%), about 34% indicated that the events were not interesting, and about 12% indicated that it was due to health or a medical condition. Thirty-five per cent specified that there were “other” reasons for not attending community events (Table A.2, Appendix).

Figure 2: Proportion (%) of seniors taking part in community events at least sometimes



Note: Taking part in community events had 1.2% of “can’t say” responses and these were excluded from analysis.

†Reference group

***significantly different from reference group (p < 0.001)

**significantly different from reference group (p < 0.01)

*significantly different from reference group (p < 0.05)

Membership of a group or organisation

Two-thirds of senior Australians reported belonging to a group or organisation. About half had been with the group/organisation for 10 years or more, 27% for less than five years, and the remaining 20% had belonged for between five to 10 years. The most common types of groups/organisations that respondents belong to were community service/charities groups (46%), followed by sports groups (31%), and religious/spiritual groups (28%). Only 4% of respondents reported belonging to a political group.

Of those who did not belong to a group/organisation (31%), a very high percentage of respondents indicated that they were not interested in groups/organisations (46%), and 11% indicated that health prevented them from joining a group/organisation. Twelve per cent indicated that they could not afford to join a group or organisation (Table A.2, Appendix).

Table 1 shows significant differences for group membership by age group, work status, and high school education. Gender and marital status did not show any significant differences with respect to group membership status.

Table 1: Proportion (%) of seniors belonging to a group or organisation

Variables	Belong to a group or organisation		
	Yes	No	
Gender			
	Male [†]	66.7	33.3
	Female	70.2	29.8
Age group			
	50 to 69 years [†]	62.0	38.0
	70 years or older	86.0 ^{***}	14.0 ^{***}
Marital status			
	Married [†]	68.7	31.3
	Not married	67.7	32.3
Work status			
	Employed [†]	58.8	41.2
	Non-employed ¹	76.2 ^{***}	23.8 ^{***}
High school education			
	Did not complete year 12 [†]	65.0	35.0
	Completed year 12	72.5 ^{**}	27.5 ^{**}
Total % of respondents²		66.4	30.5

[†]Reference group

^{***}significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.001$)

^{**}significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.01$)

^{*}significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.05$)

¹ Non-employed includes those not employed and not retired, as well as those fully retired.

² About 3% of respondents had "can't say" responses, but these were excluded from the analysis.

Senior Australians' perceptions of their neighbours

Overall, senior Australians' perceptions of their neighbours were very positive. Eighty-one per cent of senior Australians were either *very or somewhat* confident that their neighbours would help in a time of need, and 86% felt that their neighbours were *very or somewhat* trustworthy (Table A.2, Appendix).

Table 2 shows the significant differences for several factors regarding neighbours' help and trust. There were significantly more females than males who felt very confident that their neighbours would help in a time of need (54% versus 48%); and more in the older age group than the younger age group who felt very confident that their neighbours would help (63% versus 46%) and who also felt that their neighbours are very trustworthy (78% versus 58%).

Table 2: Proportion (%) of seniors' perceptions of their neighbours' help and trust

Variables	Very confident of neighbours' help	Somewhat confident of neighbours' help	Neighbours are very trustworthy	Neighbours are somewhat trustworthy
Residence				
Reside in capital city [†]	48.9	32.4	62.9	26.8
Reside outside capital city	52.7	32.0	63.2	26.1
Gender				
Male [†]	47.5	34.2	61.6	27.6
Female	53.9**	30.0	64.5	25.3
Age group				
50 to 69 years [†]	46.3	33.8	57.5	30.0
70 years or older	63.1***	27.1**	78.2***	16.7***
Marital status				
Married [†]	51.9	31.5	63.6	27.4
Not married	50.0	32.5	62.9	24.3
Work status				
Employed [†]	45.7	35.5	59.6	28.0
Non-employed	54.8***	29.5*	65.9*	25.2
Health status				
Excellent or good health [†]	53.6	31.0	65.0	25.5
Fair or poor health	43.9***	34.6	58.6*	28.5
High school education				
Did not complete year 12 [†]	48.9	33.0	60.9	27.9
Completed year 12	53.6	31.0	65.0	25.7
Member of a group/organisation				
Yes [†]	54.3	31.2	65.8	26.0
No	43.9***	34.6	56.9***	28.4
Lack of companionship or lonely				
Daily, often, or occasionally [†]	40.9	36.5	55.1	31.4
Rarely or never	55.7***	29.6**	66.8***	24**
Total % of respondents³	50.1	31.5	60.8	25.4

[†]Reference group

***significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.001$)

**significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.01$)

*significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.05$)

Significant differences also occurred for work status, health, membership of a group, and companionship with respect to both feeling very confident that neighbours would help and that neighbours are very trustworthy. However, there were no significant differences for place of residence, marital status, and high school education with respect to neighbours' help and trust.

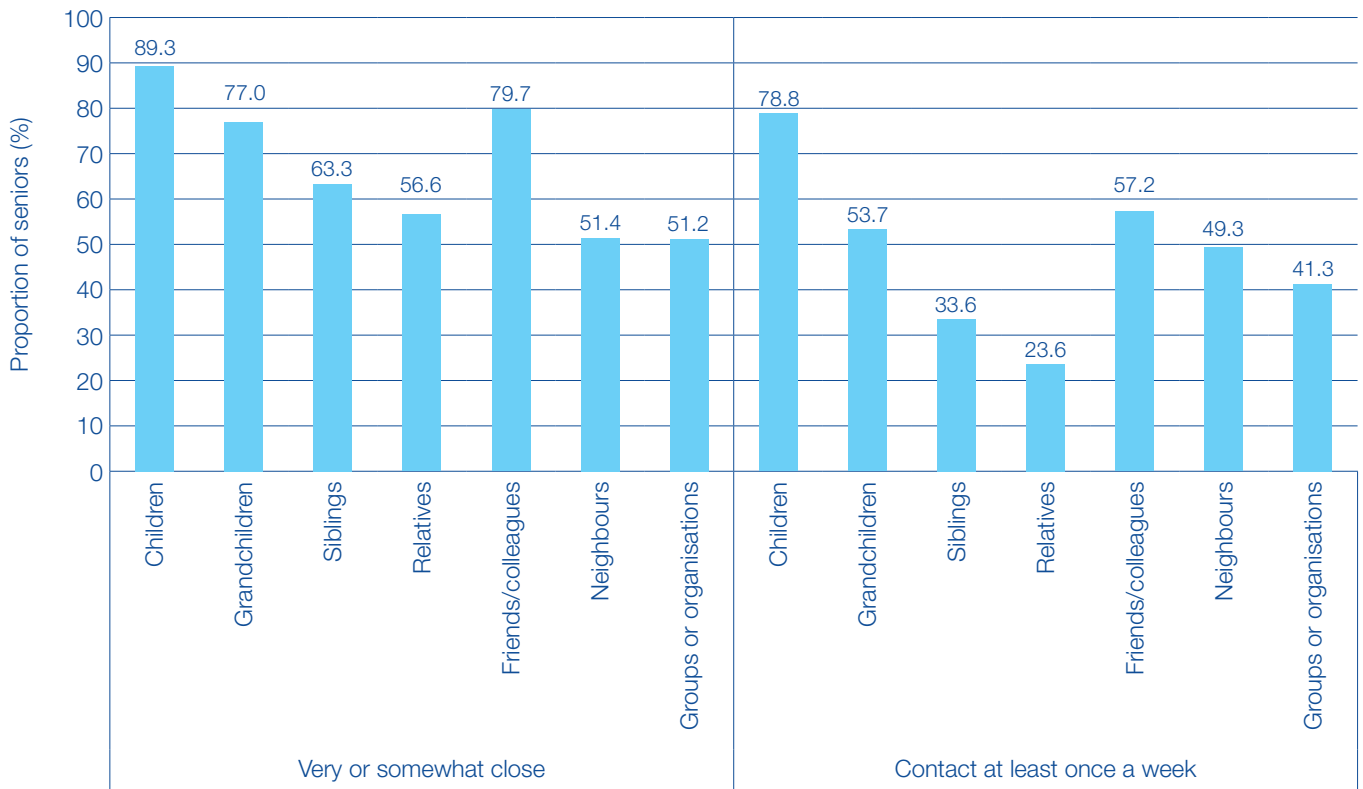
³ The total % of respondents for neighbours' helpfulness had 18.4% of respondents belonging to the other categories (i.e. neutral, not very confident, not confident at all, and can't say). For neighbours' trustworthy, the remaining 13.9% is made up of the other categories (i.e. neutral, not very trustworthy, not trustworthy at all, and can't say). However, the "can't say" responses were excluded from analysis.

Senior Australians and their relationships

Relationship closeness and frequency of contacts

Almost 90% of respondents reported having a very or somewhat close relationship with their children (Figure 3). The percentage reporting this level of closeness decreased for grandchildren, siblings and relatives. The second highest group having this level of closeness was with friends or colleagues (80%), which was a similar result to that reported for grandchildren. The reported percentage of relationship closeness was the same for neighbours as it was for groups or organisations, at 51%.

Figure 3: Proportion (%) reporting relationship closeness and contacts for different people/groups



Note: The remaining categories of relationship closeness are occasional contact, not very close, not close at all, and can't say. The remaining categories of relationship contacts are approx. once every two weeks, approx. once a month, rarely/never, and can't say.

As shown in Figure 3, the proportion of people who contacted their children at least once a week was 79%. This proportion decreased for grandchildren, siblings, and relatives. Friends and colleagues were the second highest group reported, whereas neighbours and groups/organisations were higher than siblings and relatives, with 49% and 41% respectively.

Since having neighbourhood connections is considered to be one of the dimensions of social capital and is associated with higher feelings of safety (Ziersch et al., 2007) it is worth examining in more detail. Table 3 shows significant differences for some factors relating to having a close relationship with neighbours and with groups or organisations.

As shown in Table 3, significantly more females reported having a very or somewhat close relationship with their neighbours compared to males (55% versus 48%). Similarly, a much higher proportion of the older age group compared to the younger age group reported having a close relationship with their neighbours (70% versus to 45%), and likewise, those not employed reported a higher proportion compared to those employed (59% versus 43%). This trend was repeated for having a close relationship with groups or organisations, with the exception of high school completion, which was not significant for having a close relationship with neighbours.

Table 3: Proportion (%) having a close relationship with neighbours and groups or organisations

Variables		Having a very or somewhat close relationship with neighbours	Having a very or somewhat close relationship with groups or organisations
Gender	Male [†]	47.8	55.3
	Female	55.2**	61.3*
Age group	50 to 69 years [†]	45.0	52.1
	70 years or older	69.8***	73.5***
Marital status	Married [†]	49.7	56.9
	Not married	54.6	60.0
Work status	Employed [†]	43.2	50.7
	Non-employed	58.5***	63.8***
High school education	Did not complete year 12 [†]	52.2	54.8
	Completed year 12	51.7	62.3**
Total % of respondents⁴		51.4	51.2

[†]Reference group

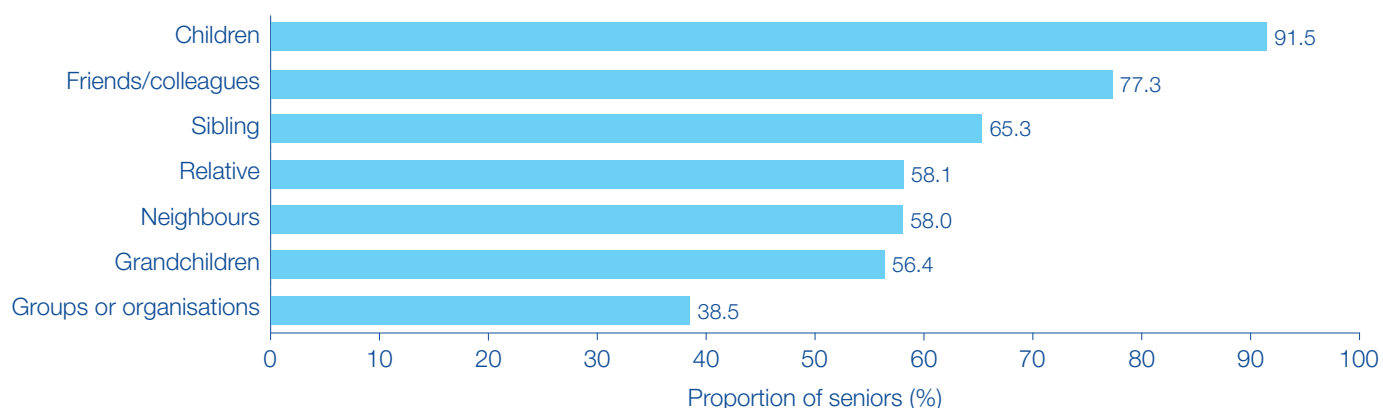
***significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.001$)

**significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.01$)

*significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.05$)

Potential source of support

Figure 4 shows the proportion of seniors that rate each potential source of support in time of need as “very important” or “somewhat important”. Consistent with the rating of relationship closeness, which showed that children and friends/colleagues were the people with whom the respondents had a very close relationship, the majority of respondents rated children as being a very or somewhat important potential source of support in a time of need (92%), with friends/colleagues receiving the second highest rating (77%), followed by siblings (65%). Relatives and neighbours were rated equally (58%). Groups or organisations were the least rated as being a potential source of support (38%).

Figure 4: Seniors’ rating of people as being very or somewhat important potential source of support

Note: The remaining categories are neutral, not very important, not at all important, and can't say.

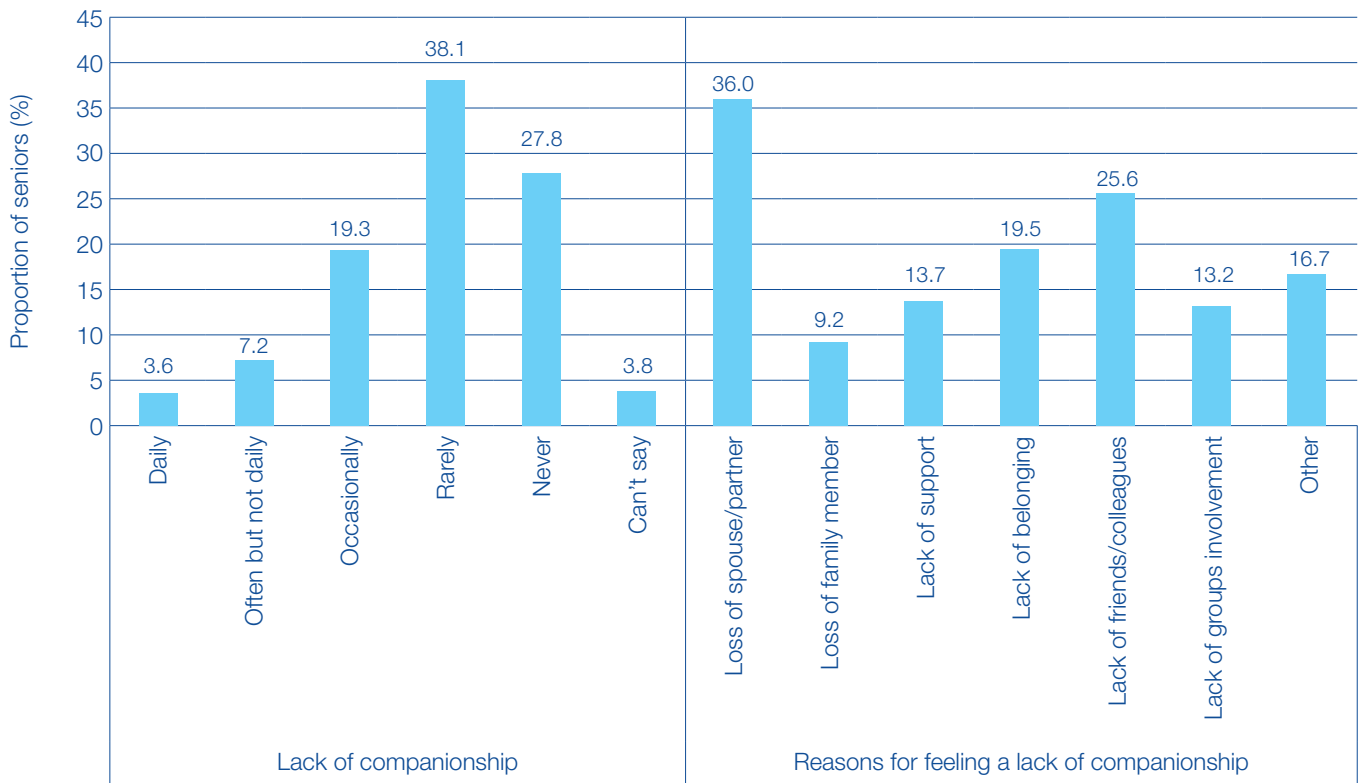
⁴ The remaining 48.6% of respondents for relationship with neighbours consists of other categories (i.e. occasional contact, not very close, not close at all, and can't say). For relationship with groups or organisation, the remaining 48.9% is made up of other categories (i.e. occasional contact, not very close, not close at all, and can't say). The “can't say” responses were excluded from analysis.

Senior Australians and their experience of a lack of companionship or loneliness

Two-thirds of respondents indicated that they *rarely or never* experienced a lack of companionship or loneliness (Figure 5); 19% felt this way *occasionally*, and about 11% felt this way either *daily* or *often but not daily*. The reasons for having these feelings were due to loss of spouse/partner or family members such as children, grandchildren and siblings, lack of belonging, and lack of friends/colleagues.

Table 4 shows that significantly more females reported a lack of companionship or loneliness than males either *daily or often* (13% versus 9%). Similarly, those who were not married reported this feeling more frequently than those who were married (19% versus 6%). There were no significant differences reported for age group, work status, and high school education.

Figure 5: Proportion (%) of seniors who have felt a lack companionship or were lonely



Note: The total % for the reasons of feeling a lack of companionship or lonely does not sum to 100 because multiple responses are allowed.

Table 4: Proportion (%) of seniors who have felt a lack of companionship or were lonely

Variables	Felt a lack of companionship or lonely			
	Daily or often	Occasionally	Rarely or never	
Gender				
	Male [†]	9.3	17.3	73.4
	Female	13.1*	22.6**	64.3***
Age group				
	50 to 69 years [†]	11.8	19.7	68.5
	70 years or older	9.9	21.1	69.0
Marital status				
	Married [†]	6.1	14.9	79.0
	Not married	18.9***	27.5***	53.6***
Work status				
	Employed [†]	10.3	19.3	70.4
	Non-employed	11.9	21.0	67.2
High school education				
	Did not complete year 12 [†]	10.9	20.8	68.3
	Completed year 12	10.8	19.4	69.9
Total % of respondents⁵		10.8	19.3	65.9

[†]Reference group

***significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.001$)

**significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.01$)

*significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.05$)

⁵ About 4% of respondents had "can't say" responses, and these were excluded from analysis.

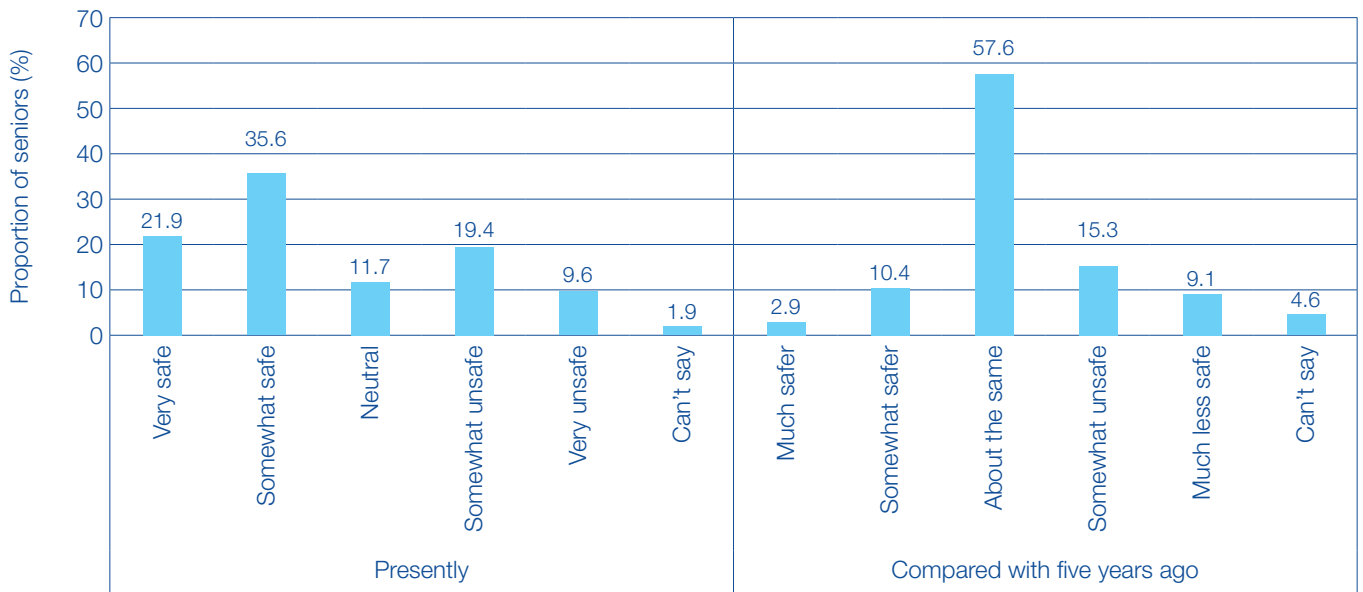
Senior Australians' perceptions of safety and crime

Overall perceptions of safety and crime

Figures 6 to 8 show the proportion of seniors' feelings of safety and perceptions of crime, and their comparison to five years ago.

As shown in Figure 6, the proportion of seniors who felt *very or somewhat* safe in their community was 57%, which is the same as the proportion of those who reported that their feeling of safety is *about the same* as it was five years ago. And 29% of respondents felt *somewhat or very unsafe* in their community.

Figure 6: Proportion (%) reporting different feelings of safety - presently and compared with five years ago



As shown in Figure 7, the proportion who perceived the incidence of petty crime as being *very or somewhat* common was 56%. One-third reported that it is *much more or somewhat* more common than five years ago, and a half reported that it remains about the same.

A much lower proportion perceived the incidence of serious crime in the community to be *very or somewhat* common (34%), with 43% perceiving it as *somewhat or very* uncommon (Figure 8). However, over half perceived the incidence of serious crime as *about the same* compared to five years ago (57%).

Figure 7: Proportion (%) reporting different perceptions of petty crime - presently and compared with five years ago

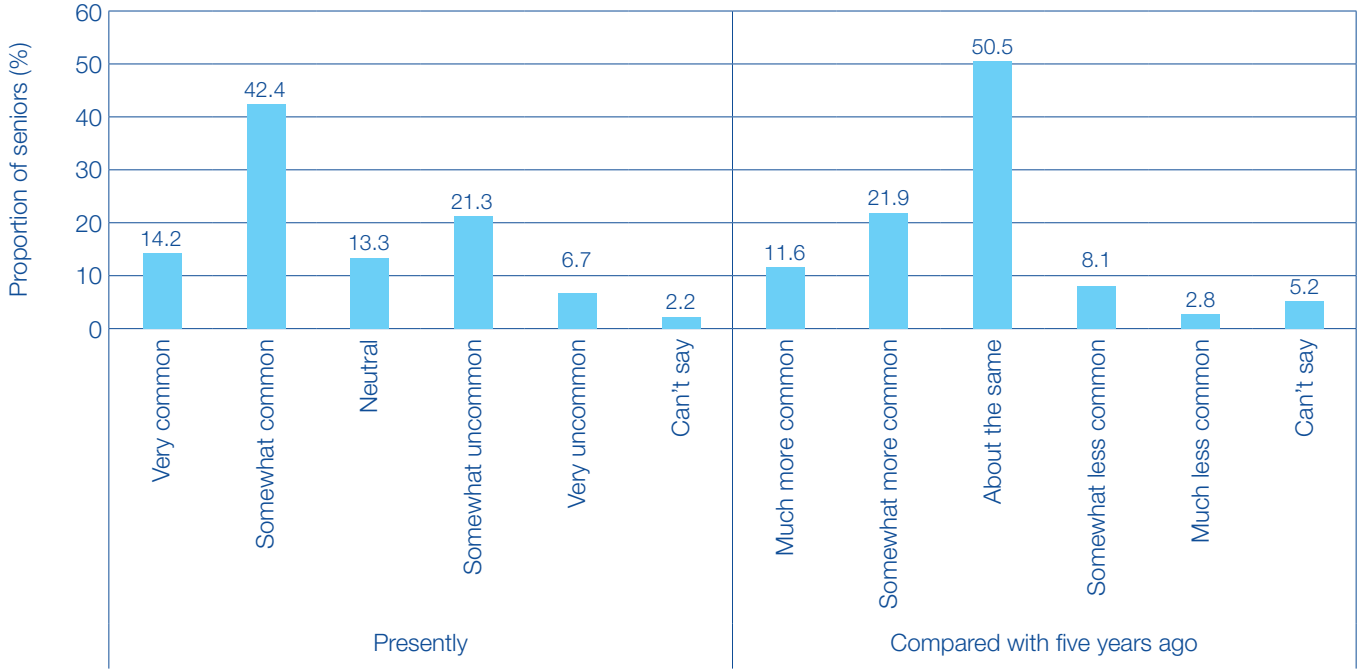
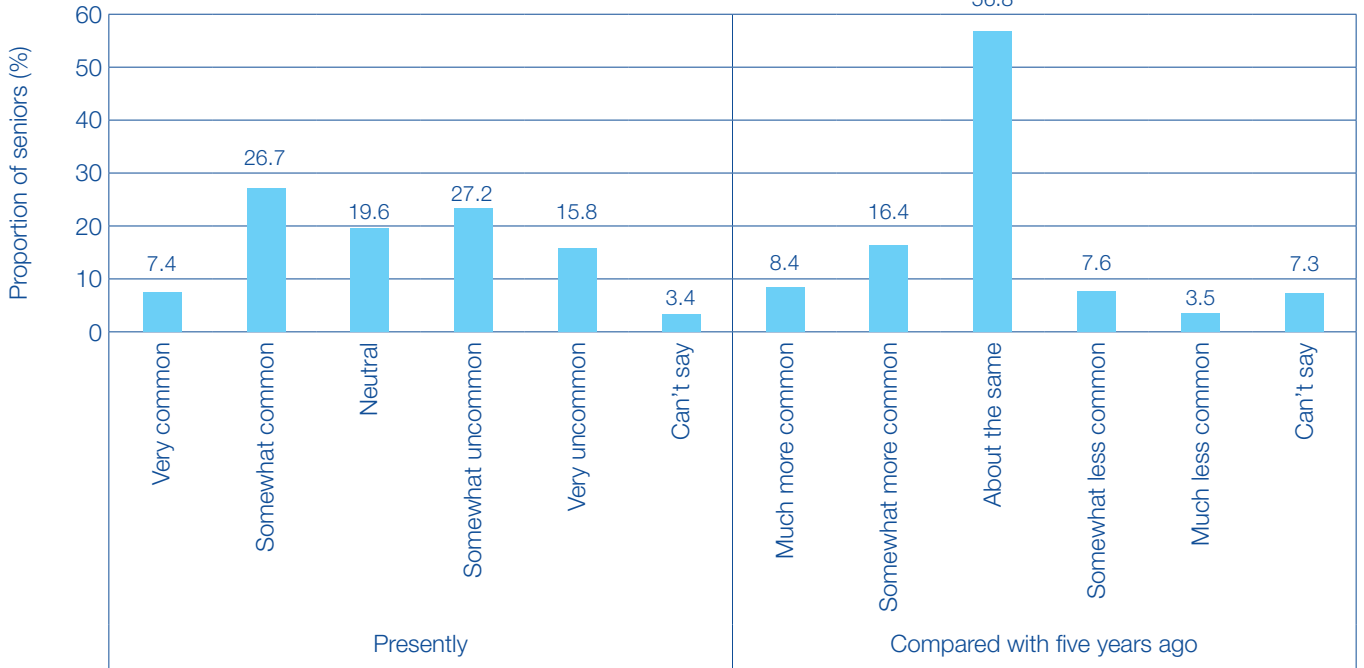


Figure 8: Proportion (%) reporting different perceptions of serious crime - presently and compared with five years ago



Factors associated with perceptions of safety and crime

Significant differences were found for various factors related to feeling safe in the community and to perceptions of crime (Table 5). For example, significantly more people who do not live in a capital city reported feeling *very or somewhat* safe in their community compared to those living in a capital city (61% versus 56%), and significantly more males reported feeling this way compared to females (66% versus 52%).

Table 5 shows that five variables were found to be significant across all three areas of feeling safe, and perceptions of petty crime and serious crime. These five variables were age, health, neighbours' helpfulness, high school education, and household income. For example, significantly more people in the younger age group than the older age group reported feeling safe in the community (61% versus 53%), that petty crime is *very or somewhat* common (61% versus 49%), and that serious crime is *very or somewhat* common (37% versus 30%).

Interestingly, Table 5 shows that the proportion who reported feeling *very or somewhat* safe in the community was significantly less for those living in the community for *10 years or more* than those living there for *less than 10 years* (56% versus 66%). This finding did not support the common belief that the longer you live in the community the more likely you are to feel safe.

The feelings that the safety of the community was *about the same* as five years ago was significantly different for males and females (65% versus 56%); married and not married (63% versus 57%); those with *excellent or good* health compared to those with *fair or poor* health (64% versus 51%); those who completed high school education compared to those who did not (64% versus 57%); and those who have lived in the community for *less than 10 years* compared to those who have lived there for *10 years or more* (65% versus 59%) (Table A.4, Appendix).

Table 5: Proportion (%) of seniors and their perceptions of safety and crime in the community

Variables	Feel very or somewhat safe	Petty crime is very or somewhat common	Serious crime is very or somewhat common
Residence			
Reside in capital city [†]	56.0	57.9	32.4
Reside outside capital city	61.0*	58.6	38.3*
Gender			
Male [†]	65.7	55.4	33.8
Female	51.9***	60.1	36.7
Age group			
50 to 69 years [†]	60.7	61.1	37.4
70 years or older	52.7**	48.9***	29.6**
Marital status			
Married [†]	62.2	56.1	32.3
Not married	53.7***	60.7	39.7**
Work status			
Employed [†]	62.7	61.3	37.1
Non-employed	55.3**	55.0**	33.9
Health status			
Excellent or good health [†]	63.6	56.0	32.6
Fair or poor health	46.2***	62.1*	42.3***
Neighbours would help			
Very or somewhat confident [†]	61.2	55.9	32.8
Neutral, not very, not confident at all	46.1***	67.6***	47.1***
High school education			
Did not complete year 12 [†]	53.8	62.3	41.3
Completed year 12	63.9***	53.0***	29.6***
Member of a group/organisation			
Yes [†]	59.7	56.2	33.2
No	56.2	61.5*	40.2**
Household income			
Less than \$60K [†]	54.4	59.7	37.9
\$60K or more	66.3***	53.9*	30.1**
Take part in community events			
Often or sometimes [†]	59.6	56.2	33.2
Rarely or never	59.8	60.7	36.0
Years lived in the community			
Less than 10 years [†]	65.8	47.8	32.5
10 years or more	56.3***	61.2***	36.3
Total % of respondents⁶	57.5	56.6	34.1

[†]Reference group

***significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.001$)

**significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.01$)

*significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.05$)

⁶ For feeling safe in the community, the remaining 42.6% consisted of other categories (i.e. neutral, somewhat unsafe, very unsafe, and can't say). Similarly, the remaining 43.5% of the perception of petty crime and 66.0% of serious crime consisted of other categories (i.e. neutral, somewhat uncommon, very uncommon, and can't say). However, the "can't say" responses were excluded from analysis.

Predictors of feeling safe in the community

The logistic regression analysis and results for predicting the feelings of safety are shown in Appendix, Section B.

In summary, factors that were found to be significant predictors of feeling safe in the community included: years lived in community; high school education; household income; feeling confident that neighbours would help in a time of need; gender; place of residence and health. On the other hand, the factors that did not contribute significantly to feeling safe in the community included age, marital status and work status.

The results showed that females were less likely to feel safe in the community than males. Those who had completed high school and those with household incomes of \$60,000 and over were far more likely to feel safe than early school leavers and those with an income of less than \$20,000. Those living outside the capital city tend to feel safer than those living in the capital city. This is probably due to the fact that crime rates in the capital cities tend to be higher (BTRE, 2005). Those not feeling confident that their neighbours would help in time of need were less likely to feel safe compared to those feeling *very or somewhat* confident. Lastly, those having *fair or poor* health were also less likely to feel safe compared to those having *excellent* health.

A somewhat surprising result is that the odds of feeling safe for a person who has lived in the community for *10 years or more* was half the odds for others. One explanation for this may be due to the fact that significantly more people in the older age group have lived in the community for *10 years or more*, and older people tend to feel less safe.

Predicted probabilities of feeling safe in the community

Table 6 shows the predicted probability of feeling safe in the community for various hypothetical scenarios. As an example, one scenario shows that for females aged *75 years or more*, having completed year 12, with household income of *at least \$60,000*, and having *fair or poor* health would have a 41% likelihood of feeling safe in the community. Another example would be males aged between *50 to 64 years*, with *excellent* health, having completed year 12, with household income *at least \$60,000*, would have an 81% likelihood of feeling safe in the community.

Table 6: Predicted probabilities of feeling safe in the community for various scenarios

Gender	Age (yrs)	High school education	Household income	Health	Predicted probability
Female	75+	Year 12 or equivalent	\$40 to \$60K	Fair or poor	0.36
Female	75+	Year 12 or equivalent	\$60K or more	Fair or poor	0.41
Female	50-64	Year 10 or equivalent	Less than \$20K	Excellent	0.48
Female	65-74	Year 11 or equivalent	\$40K to \$60K	Good	0.53
Male	75+	Year 12 or equivalent	\$60K or more	Fair or poor	0.57
Male	50-64	Year 10 or equivalent	Less than \$20K	Excellent	0.64
Male	65-74	Year 11 or equivalent	\$40K to \$60K	Good	0.68
Male	75+	Year 11 or equivalent	\$40 to \$60K	Excellent	0.71
Male	50-64	Year 12 or equivalent	\$60K or more	Excellent	0.81

Community satisfaction

Overall, senior Australians were satisfied with living in the community, with two-thirds of seniors reported feeling *very satisfied*, and a quarter reported feeling *somewhat satisfied* (Table A.2, Appendix).

Various demographic and social factors were linked with feeling *very or somewhat* satisfied with living in the community (Table A.5, Appendix). Some examples included more of the older age group feeling satisfied compared to the younger age group (96% versus 91%); more of those who were married compared to non-married (93% versus 90%); and more of those having excellent or good health compared to those having fair or poor health (94% versus 86%). Other factors important to feeling satisfied with community life included having helpful neighbours, being a member of a group, taking part in community events, and feeling safe in the community.

Predictors of community satisfaction

The logistic regression analysis and results for predicting community satisfaction are shown in the Appendix, Section C.

The results showed that several factors were significantly contributed to predicting community satisfaction. These factors were: age group, health status, feeling safe in the community, and feeling confident that neighbours would help in a time of need. Factors that were not significant in predicting community satisfaction included: marital status, taking part in community events, and belonging to a group or organisation.

Those in the oldest age group (75+ years) were far more likely to feel satisfied with living in the community than the younger age group (50 to 64 years). However, those having *fair or poor* health were less likely to be satisfied with community life than those having excellent health. Similarly, those who felt less safe and those not feeling confident that neighbours would help in time of need were also less likely to feel satisfied.

Predicted probabilities of community satisfaction

Table 7 below shows the predicted probability of feeling satisfied with living in the community for various hypothetical scenarios. Overall, the probability of feeling satisfied with living in the community is very high despite having *fair or poor* health, and irrespective of age and marital status.

Table 7: Predicted probabilities of community satisfaction for various scenarios

Age (years)	Marital status	Health status	Predicted probability
65 to 70	Not married	Fair or poor	0.87
50 to 64	Not married	Fair or poor	0.88
50 to 64	Married	Fair or poor	0.91
65 to 70	Not married	Good	0.92
50 to 64	Not married	Excellent	0.93
50 to 64	Married	Good	0.94
50 to 64	Married	Excellent	0.95
75+	Not married	Good	0.96
75+	Not married	Excellent	0.97
75+	Married	Excellent	0.98

Satisfaction with overall social wellbeing

Approximately 62% of senior Australians felt *very or somewhat* satisfied with their overall social wellbeing, and 9% felt *somewhat or very* dissatisfied (Table A.2, Appendix).

Tables 8 and 9 show that significant differences were found for feeling *very or somewhat* satisfied with overall social wellbeing by various demographic and social factors. As shown in Table 8, significantly more people who live in the capital city felt *very or somewhat* satisfied with their overall social wellbeing than those living outside the capital city (67% versus 61%). Similarly, more females and more of the older age group reported feeling *very or somewhat* satisfied with their overall social wellbeing compared to males and to the younger age group, respectively.

As shown in Table 9, not surprisingly, a higher proportion of those who were *very or somewhat* satisfied with living in the community reported feeling satisfied with their overall social wellbeing, compared to those who were not happy in their community (67% versus 29%). Having a *very or somewhat* close relationship with neighbours (72% versus 55%) and groups or organisations (74% versus 54%), as well as feeling confident that neighbours would help (68% versus 42%) tend to indicate being satisfied with overall social wellbeing. Likewise, more people who *rarely or never* experience a lack of companionship reported being satisfied with overall social wellbeing compared to those who experienced a lack of companionship on a *daily, often, or occasionally* basis (69% versus 52%).

Table 8: Proportion (%) feeling satisfied with overall social wellbeing by demographic factors

Variables		Very or somewhat satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat or very dissatisfied
Gender	Male [†]	60.5	30.5	9.0
	Female	66.9**	23.7**	9.4
Age group	50 to 69 years [†]	60.7	29.0	10.3
	70 years or older	72.1***	21.6**	6.4**
Marital status	Married [†]	64.5	27.3	8.2
	Not married	62.5	26.8	10.7
High school education	Did not complete year12 [†]	58.6	31.9	9.5
	Completed year12	69.5***	21.7***	8.8
Non-high school qualifications	Certificates, diploma, or other [†]	61.6	28.6	9.8
	Bachelors, masters, or doctorate	70.6**	19.6***	9.8
Health	Excellent or good [†]	67.4	25.0	7.7
	Fair or poor	54.1***	32.7**	13.3**
Work status	Employed [†]	61.2	29.0	9.8
	Non-employed	66.0	25.4	8.6
Residence	Reside in capital city [†]	66.6	23.8	9.6
	Reside outside capital city	61.2*	30.3**	8.5
Total % of respondents⁷		61.0	26.2	9.0

[†]Reference group

***significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.001$)

**significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.01$)

*significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.05$)

⁷ About 3% of respondents had "can't say" responses and these were excluded from analysis.

Table 9: Proportion (%) feeling satisfied with overall social wellbeing by other social factors

Variables	Very or somewhat satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat or very dissatisfied
Satisfied with living in community			
Very or somewhat satisfied [†]	66.8	25.7	7.5
Neutral, somewhat, or very dissatisfied	28.8***	42.4***	28.9***
Relationship with neighbours			
Very or somewhat close [†]	72.1	21.8	6.2
Occasional contact, not very close, not close at all	55.3***	32.4***	12.4***
Relationship with groups or organisations			
Very or somewhat close [†]	73.6	20.2	6.2
Occasional contact, not very close, not close at all	54.1***	31.9***	14.0***
Feel a lack of companionship or lonely			
Daily, often, or occasionally [†]	51.9	28.3	19.8
Rarely or never	69.2***	26.5	4.3***
Currently living with others or by self			
Live by myself [†]	64.2	25.4	10.5
Live with others	63.8	27.6	8.6
Home ownership			
Fully owned home [†]	65.9	25.9	8.14
Rent or paying off mortgage	57.8**	30.3	11.86*
Hours worked in an average week			
Less than 40 hours [†]	64.0	25.2	10.8
40 hours or more	55.5*	36.1**	8.5
Taking part in community events			
Often or sometimes [†]	71.9	21.7	6.3
Rarely or never	62.6***	27.2*	10.3*
Member of a group or organisation			
Yes [†]	68.8	23.4	7.8
No	54.2***	33.7***	12.1*
Confident that neighbours would help			
Very or somewhat confident [†]	68.2	24.8	7.0
Neutral, not very, not confident at all	42.1***	37.1**	20.8***
Household income			
Less than \$60k [†]	64.0	26.8	9.2
\$60K or more	65.8	26.1	8.1
Years lived in the community			
Less than 10 years [†]	61.1	27.7	11.2
10 years or more	64.8	26.6	8.6
Total % of respondents[§]	61.0	26.2	9.0

[†]Reference group

***significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.001$)

**significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.01$)

*significantly different from reference group ($p < 0.05$)

[§] About 3% of respondents had "can't say" responses and these were excluded from analysis.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that the majority of senior Australians are engaged in their community either through participating in community events or belonging to a group or organisation. Consistent with previous research (Berry, 2008), older age groups were found to be more involved in community participation, showed a higher degree of trust in their neighbours, and were more likely to have a close relationship with their neighbours. On the other hand, this study did not support the finding by other studies (such as, Baum et al., 2000; Richard et al., 2008) that those with higher levels of education were more likely to participate in community activities; however, education was positively related with group membership. Most senior Australians rarely or never experience feelings of loneliness; however, those most likely to experience loneliness at least occasionally were those who had lost a spouse. The greater likelihood of those not married in being members of community groups demonstrates the importance of such groups in providing social support for those at most risk of social isolation.

Just over half of senior Australians felt safe in their community, with near to 30% feeling unsafe. Petty crime was perceived to be common by over half of seniors, and just over one-third perceived serious crime to be common. This study supported previous studies (Ziersch et al., 2007; Oh & Kim, 2008), which revealed that gender and age are important factors in relation to neighbourhood interactions and perceptions of safety and crime. Significantly fewer respondents in the older age group perceived petty crime and serious crime as common. Like previous findings (Ziersch et al.; Donder, Verte & Messelis, 2005; Windsor & Pearson, 2012), this study also found that females tend to feel less safe than males in the community, and were more likely to fear crime than men. This study also found a link between group membership and perceptions of crime, with people who were members of a group less likely to report that crime was common. Those with a higher household income were less likely to report feeling unsafe and that crime was common, which supported the results of the study by Donder and colleagues.

Despite 30% who reported feeling unsafe in the community, a very high proportion of seniors were satisfied with living in their community. Those factors that were found to be significant predictors of community satisfaction included age, health, feelings of safety, and neighbour's help. However, the results of the predicted probabilities revealed that across all combinations of social and demographic characteristics, community satisfaction is very high among senior Australians.

This study has underlined the importance of community in the lives of senior Australians. The vast majority of respondents in this survey indicate strong levels of social capital; they are satisfied with the community they live in and have good relations with their neighbours. Communities can act as a source of support for those at risk of social isolation. There is scope for further research to investigate how specific interventions in the community can act as a safety net for people who may face social isolation, such as those who have recently lost a spouse. Many actors in society, including government, non-governmental organisations and citizens themselves, can actively support seniors' community involvement.

Understanding senior Australians' ties with their community is also important given the ageing of the Australian population and the need to develop strategies that consider the residential needs of older age groups. Programs such as Home and Community Care (HACC) that support for people to age in their own homes through measures such as nursing, and personal and health care subsidies can help people maintain independence in their community.

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Appendix

Appendix tables are available at productiveageing.com.au

Section A: Detailed tables

Table A.1: Basic demographic variables of senior Australians (%)

Table A.2: Module 3 - Social Wellbeing variables (%)

Table A.3: Proportion (%) of seniors taking part in community events

Table A.4: Proportion (%) feeling safe in the community compared to five years ago

Table A.5: Proportion (%) of seniors feeling satisfied with living in the community

Section B: Regression methods

Table B.1: Logistic regression result for predicting feelings of safety - Likelihood Ratio test

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Table B.3: Logistic regression result for feelings of safety, coefficients and p-values

Table B.4: Predictors of feeling safe in the community, odds ratio and p-value

Section C: Regression methods for predicting community satisfaction

Table C.1: Logistic regression result for predicting community satisfaction - Likelihood Ratio test

Table C.2: Logistic regression result for predicting community satisfaction - Goodness-of-fit test

Table C.3: Logistic regression result for predicting community satisfaction, coefficients and p-values

Table C.4: Predictors of community satisfaction, odds ratio and p-value

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