

In Focus

Experiences of older people without children

- Approximately 15% of older people are without children. This includes those who had never had children and those whose children have died.
- This means there are approximately 1.5m older people without children in the general English population.
- There is evidence to suggest this is a growing demographic.

This briefing summarises findings from a project undertaken by Independent Age to explore the experiences of specific groups of older people.

This is one of a series of six briefings based on findings from 45 interviews with older people in 2019 and analysis of data from the *Understanding Society* survey. It focuses on England only.

This briefing focuses on older people without children. In our quantitative work, we defined this group as older people who do not have any living children.

Health and wellbeing

Doing fine, for now

- Some of our interview participants expressed concerns that they may struggle in the future without children to provide informal care or help them with simple things such as a lift after an operation. Some were experiencing this already.
- From our participants who did have children, we heard how many relied on them heavily for things such as travel, informal care, navigating the social care system and social connection.
- We found very few statistically significant differences in the health and wellbeing of older people without children compared to older people with children. However, we did find that older people without children are more likely to need care but not receive any, as well as less likely to receive informal care (Figure 1).

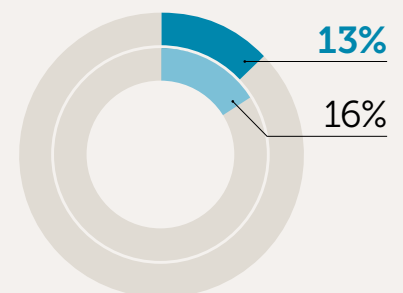
Financial security

A mixed picture

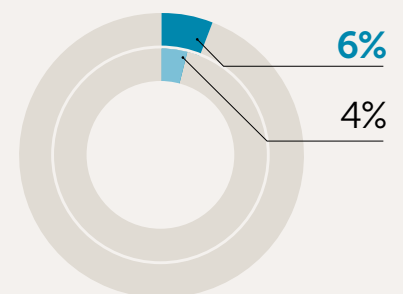
- Our interview participants reported that they had more disposable income for themselves as a result of not having children.
- However, our participants without children had less help with financial administration tasks, such as filling in forms, managing finances, applying for grants or moving house.
- Some participants were worried that they had no 'back up' if things went wrong financially.
- Our data also found a mixed picture. We found that older people without children are more likely to be in the poorest income quintile after housing costs, and the lowest spending quintile for food and groceries.
- However, we also found that older people without children were less likely to report finding it difficult or very difficult to get by financially.

Figure 1: Older people without children have different care outcomes

Receive informal care



Unmet care needs



- Older people without children
- All older people



I've never had children, so I don't miss having them. I suppose they could help with things, but at the moment I don't really need much help! Ask me again in 10 years.

Arthur 66

Social connectedness

Staying connected challenge

- Our participants were largely living full social lives and emphasised the freedom they had to spend their time as they wished with no obligations. However, our participants in this subgroup were generally younger and not experiencing severe health challenges.
- Many said that they were not particularly thinking ahead about issues they might face as a result of not having children.
- Many had fewer visitors to the home overall and tended to meet friends outside the home.
- Many of our interview participants were very familiar and comfortable with technology.
- Interestingly, our quantitative findings very much cut against our qualitative findings in this area. This is likely because our qualitative group was younger, whereas the quantitative sample had a range of ages 65+. As a result, the data may be picking up the problems that the 'without children' group recognised they may face in the future.
- We found that older people without children tend to be less socially connected compared to the average older person. They are more likely to:
 - live alone (Figure 2)
 - have few close friends
 - not go out socially
 - have limited use or access to technology to connect socially (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Older people without children are more likely to live alone

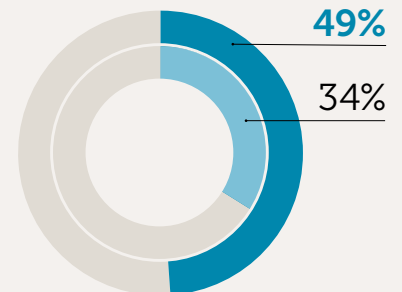
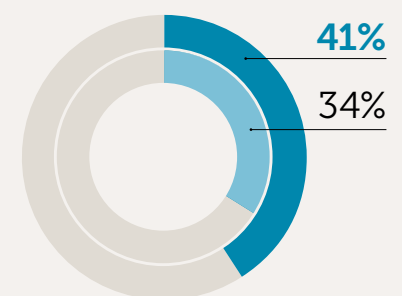


Figure 3: Older people without children are more likely to never use the internet



- Older people without children
- All older people



My children and my grandchildren are my life... I can ask them to help me with things like fill in forms, or take me to places, and they stop me from worrying. If I didn't have them I would be utterly lost.

Nancy, 94



How to find out more

You can read our in-depth report and other briefings on physical health, mental health, low income, carers and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) older people at independentage.org/in-focus