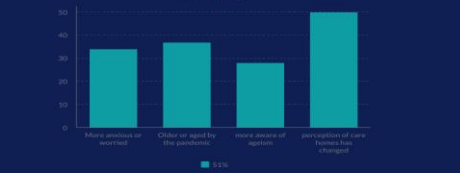


AWOC and Covid19 in the UK



The Covid19 pandemic affected all of us in many different ways. This survey was designed to find out how the pandemic has affected people ageing without children in the UK. Ageing without children covers a wide range of older people who cannot consistently rely on support from their adult children who are the most common source of help in later life.

Key Findings



Themes

Invisibility of people ageing without children
"I am very upset by the number of people I know who just seem to have forgotten I exist"

The situation of older people without children or immediate family and living either with a partner or in single households was not highlighted in public consciousness or reflected in Government, social policy or the media.

Loneliness and social isolation
"People don't realise that when you are on your own without partners or children that no one checks on you"

Over 50% of respondents reported feeling more isolated or lonely. Effects on mental and physical health were noted. People living with partners/spouses were more aware of the challenges that might face them if their partner died

Emphasis on the family narrative
"There was no-one stood at the bottom of our garden path waiting anxiously to be reunited with us when lockdown lifted. It is a lonely place to be"

Little if any attention was paid to older people without families. Media coverage focused on the separation of grandparents from grandchildren or residents in care homes being separated from family. Single person households were rarely covered and when they were, it was from the perspective of young people

Feeling the pandemic has been an ageing experience
"I feel I have aged and lost my social network and activities and I cannot see a way of restoring these in the immediate future."

The reinforcement of narratives of around the dependency and vulnerability associated with ageing (rather than resilience, coping strategies and alternative networks of support) made people feel that they lacked value in society. This compounded the feelings of exclusion associated with people ageing without children

Residential Care

50% of people had changed their view of residential care because of the pandemic
"I'm likely to go into a home as have no children but care homes seem devalued even more since Covid"

The role of friendship

People who are AWOC often have different social networks - friends or families of choice but these have been impacted negatively by Covid restrictions
"Friends and friendships have been sorely overlooked in the context of the pandemic in relation to older people."

Impact on AWOC carers

A number of respondents talked about caring for a partner/spouse or ageing parents (or both) and the impact of bereavement during the pandemic.
"Not being able to support my mum emotionally in her care home for over a year. I can't help thinking what would have happened to me in the same circumstances - I have no kids so who would be worrying about me?"

"Loneliness, the stronger realisation that we are not considered the norm and everyone talks about their families and grandchildren and regular Zoom together. None of these when you have no family."

"I approach the lifting of restrictions with some dismay! Lockdown has been a great leveller. The minority of us with no family at all, have ended up in the same boat as everyone else! With the easing of restrictions, the disparity becomes more obvious as life returns to 'normal'"

"Returning to 'normal' will not be for me what it is for many other people. My pre-existing problems will not have gone away. I feel depressed and anxious about other peoples' attitudes and behaviour much more than before so fear I will feel much more lonely and not 'fitting in' from now on"

The survey was completed by 213 respondents in March/April 21