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Mapping Loneliness in Australia

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Summary

This paper maps loneliness in Australia. Using national survey data, it outlines patterns of loneliness, support and friendship and assesses who is most at risk of emotional and social isolation and who is socially supported and connected. The paper focuses on young adults aged 25 to 44, a demographic that has been neglected in existing studies of loneliness despite the fact that solitary living has shown the most significant increase among such people.

Data for this study come from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, a national survey of Australian households. We assess loneliness and social support by constructing an index based on responses to ten survey questions regarding the personal support and friendship available to respondents. The Index of Social Support reflects people's experiences of social and emotional loneliness or connection.

Our analysis finds that there is a marked gender gap in the experience of loneliness, evident among adult men and women of all age groups. Men tend to be lonelier than women from early adulthood right through to old age. They are more likely to agree that 'I often feel very lonely'; 'People don't come to visit me as often as I'd like'; 'I don't have anyone I can confide in'; and 'I have no one to lean on in times of trouble'. And men are less likely than women to agree that 'I seem to have a lot of friends'; 'There is someone who can always cheer me up when I'm down'; 'When I need someone to help me out, I can usually find someone', and so on.

Whether we compare men and women in lone person households, or men and women in households shared with others, this gendered contrast in their perceptions of support remains. Men living either alone or with others experience less social support than women who live alone or with others, with the contrast particularly striking between those who live alone. It seems the type of household in which these individuals reside does make a difference, at least for men. Among people aged 25 to 44, men who live alone report much lower levels of support and friendship than men who live with others; but the same is not true for women. Women who live alone and those who live with others perceive very similar levels of support and friendship. In short, while men are generally lonelier than women, the difference is much greater in the case of men living alone.

Using the Index of Social Support to examine the different types of households, we find that single fathers with young children have the lowest levels of support and friendship amongst men and women in any household situation. In other words, single fathers with children are the loneliest people in the country. They are more likely than men in other living situations and women in general to agree that 'I often feel very lonely' or 'I often need help from other people but can't get it', and less likely to agree that 'I enjoy the time I spend with the people who are important to me' or 'There is someone who can always cheer me up when I'm down'. Similar levels of loneliness and isolation are experienced by men living by themselves and single fathers living with children aged 15 and over.

These men also report that neighbours only rarely help each other out or do things together. And men who live on their own or as single fathers have worse physical, emotional and mental health than men in other household situations. In other words,

these men's emotional and social isolation is complemented by unsociable neighbourhoods and poor health. Among women, single mothers with older children report the lowest levels of neighbourhood cooperation and interaction.

The data suggest that men rely on their wives or de facto partners for their emotional and social needs to a greater degree than women who draw on wider sources of support. Men in most couple households experience far higher levels of personal support than men who live alone, but this is not as true for women. While women in childless couple households also report high levels of support, women in couple households with young children report levels similar to those experienced by women who live by themselves. This finding suggests that a relationship with a spouse or intimate partner is a more important source of support for men than it is for women. In short, men need women more than women need men.

The HILDA survey includes a question asking respondents about the degree to which they 'often feel very lonely'. Using this single-item measure of 'emotional loneliness' rather than the summed Index of Social Support which measures 'social loneliness', men living by themselves are the most likely of all men to report that they 'often feel very lonely'. Next are lone fathers with children. About one-third of men living alone agree that they 'often feel very lonely', as do one-quarter of lone fathers with children. This compares with the 13 per cent of men in childless couple families who say they often feel very lonely. The pattern among women is similar. Single mothers with children report the highest levels of emotional loneliness, followed by women living alone. Close to one-third of single mothers with older children and over one-quarter of single mothers with younger children agree that they 'often feel very lonely'.

While a divorce or separation at some time in the past does not seem to have an association with lower levels of support, *recent* separation or divorce does. However, women who have separated in the last year indicate levels of support that are virtually identical to those of women who have not been through this. Thus social isolation experienced by men living alone does not appear to be a consequence of separation or divorce per se, except in the short-term. Men who live either alone or as single fathers suffer similarly low levels of support whether they have been separated or not.

Separation and divorce do have an indirect effect on social isolation among men. Men tend to have fewer close persons in their primary social networks than women, and are more likely than women to nominate their spouse or partner as the person to whom they feel closest. In couple households men are likely to rely both on the direct support of their partners and on the greater social networks maintained by those partners. But if they separate or divorce, men's levels of social support return to the low levels experienced by their single counterparts.

Our analysis confirms that social engagement in paid work, caring for others, and participation in clubs and sporting groups act as buffers against loneliness. Both men and women face a greater risk of social and emotional isolation if their financial situation has deteriorated or they have lost their jobs. Much more than women, men show a reliance on paid employment as an important source of their personal support and friendship and their levels of support and friendship rise as their participation in paid employment increases. Among women on the other hand, those in part-time employment and those working full-time for an average number of hours experience little difference in support, although the highest levels are to be found among female

employees with the longest work hours. For women living alone in particular, participation in employment is associated with greater levels of support and friendship, and it appears to provide such opportunities regardless of the number of hours worked.

Two forms of community involvement are consistently associated with higher levels of social support: voluntary or charity work, and active membership of sporting groups and community organisations. Carers who spend time looking after other people's children each week also describe higher levels of personal support and friendship.

As one might expect, both men and women who live alone socialise more frequently than those who live with others, and men and women in the same living situations experience similar levels of socialising overall. But getting together with friends and relatives does not appear to compensate for a sense of social isolation among lone men or lone fathers, given that men in these household situations encounter such low levels of access to personal support and friendship. The gender gap in support and friendship also reflects the differing quality of men's and women's social networks.

In an age where technological developments have meant it has never been easier to reach out and contact someone, many Australians feel lonely and isolated. They have no one to confide in or assist them, and they lack the friendships and social connections they desire. This research documents that there are significant differences among the Australian population in social support and that particular groups in our communities experience considerable levels of loneliness and social isolation.

1. Introduction

This paper maps loneliness in Australia. It documents who is the loneliest and who is the most socially supported and seeks to answer two questions:

1. Is it the case that informal and formal social networks are declining in Australia and peoples' lives are increasingly isolated, lonely and individualistic?
2. Is the rise in lone person households exacerbating loneliness and social isolation?

These questions are assessed by drawing on data from the HILDA survey, a national survey of Australian households. The focus is on young adults in their twenties and thirties, and includes particularly the growing numbers of people in Australia who live alone.

1.1 The decline of relationships?

People's perceptions of personal and social support are an important indicator of the health of communities and social networks. Various commentators have argued that our communities are fragmenting and our interpersonal relationships are in decline or, at least, that the nature of the relationships available to people in modern society is undergoing a damaging transition. Schluter and Lee (1993) argue that our relationships with others are increasingly contingent, intermittent, provisional and with strangers, while relationships based on commitment, obligation and trusting interactions with known others are increasingly rare. Tanner (2003) takes up this same theme. He argues that 'We are leading more crowded lives, but slowly losing our sense of connection with each other,' in a society 'with less connection, more alienation, and more loneliness' (Tanner 2003, p. 10). Contemporary trends towards affluence, mobility and anonymity are fuelling a trend towards interpersonal relationships that are transient, conditional and mediated through large institutions (Tanner 2003, pp. 19-20). These authors argue that there has been a retreat into individualism and self-interest, the growing distance between people has anaesthetised their sense of moral responsibility, personal choice has been fetishised over relational commitment and social obligation, and relationships with one's partner, children, other family members, and others are increasingly seen as provisional (Schluter and Lee 1993, pp. 16-44; Tanner 2003, pp. 21-25).

Perhaps the most prominent version of this thesis comes from Robert Putnam's book *Bowling Alone*. Putnam frames his account in terms of 'social capital', defined as 'social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (Putnam 2000, p. 19). He argues that over the past three decades there has been an overall decline in social capital and civic engagement in the US and provides evidence of this in the following categories: politics and public affairs; clubs and community associations, religious bodies and work-related organisations; the informal ties of sporting leagues, parties and games; and philanthropy and volunteering. He also notes counter-examples found in small groups, social movements and the internet.

This paper assesses the state of relationships and social networks in Australia by focusing on loneliness. Longitudinal data with which to trace changes in perceptions of loneliness and social support over time is not available. Nevertheless, using national survey data, the paper contributes a detailed mapping of contemporary patterns of loneliness, support and friendship, documenting who is most at risk of emotional and

social isolation and who is socially supported and connected. The paper also examines connections between these circumstances and people's participation in such forms of neighbourhood and community life as socialising with friends and relatives, caring for others, voluntary and charity work, and membership of sporting groups and community associations.

1.2 Feeling alone and living alone

Loneliness is a symptom of the absence of interpersonal relationships. People's feelings of loneliness and their perceptions of personal and social support provide useful markers in evaluating the health of our communities and social networks. Loneliness has been defined as 'an experienced lack of social contacts, intimacy, or support in social relationships... a discrepancy between actual and desired interpersonal relationships' (van Baarsen *et al.* 2001, p. 120). Loneliness refers to a subjective state, a negative one, as Koropecykj-Cox (1998, p. S304) makes clear in her definition of loneliness as 'an unpleasant feeling of dissatisfaction with either the number or quality of existing social relationships'.

While apparent declines in interpersonal relationships and community networking have been attributed to many causes, one potential factor is said to be the rise of lone person households. In the last half-century or so, the fastest growing household type in Australia has been the lone person household (de Vaus 2004b). Using the HILDA sample as representative of the Australian population, 14.8 per cent of all adults (aged 18 years and older) now live by themselves and over the next 25 years, lone person households are expected to multiply by anywhere from 57 to 105 per cent, the greatest increase of all household types (ABS 2004, p. 1).

Living alone has been seen as a particularly important risk factor for loneliness, especially among older people. Old age in general is stereotyped as a life of loneliness, isolation and social neglect (Victor *et al.* 2000, p. 407), and older people who are childless are assumed to be particularly lonely (Koropecykj-Cox 1998, p. S303). However, the majority of older people aged 65 years and over are neither lonely nor socially isolated, and in fact the prevalence of self-reported loneliness among this age group in British studies is lower than that among younger people (Victor *et al.* 2000, p. 408). The research among older people suggests that living alone does not have a deleterious effect in general on health. For example, an American longitudinal study of close to 30000 women aged 60 to 72 years found that:

... women living independently are neither socially isolated nor at increased risk for decline in functional health status. In fact, these women actually fare better on measures of psychologic function than do women living with a spouse. (Michael *et al.* 2001, p. 123)

Among the elderly, various studies have found that living alone is not related to poor physical health outcomes and is protective against deterioration in functional health status and mortality, although it also predicts greater risk of institutionalisation (Michael *et al.* 2001, p. 123).

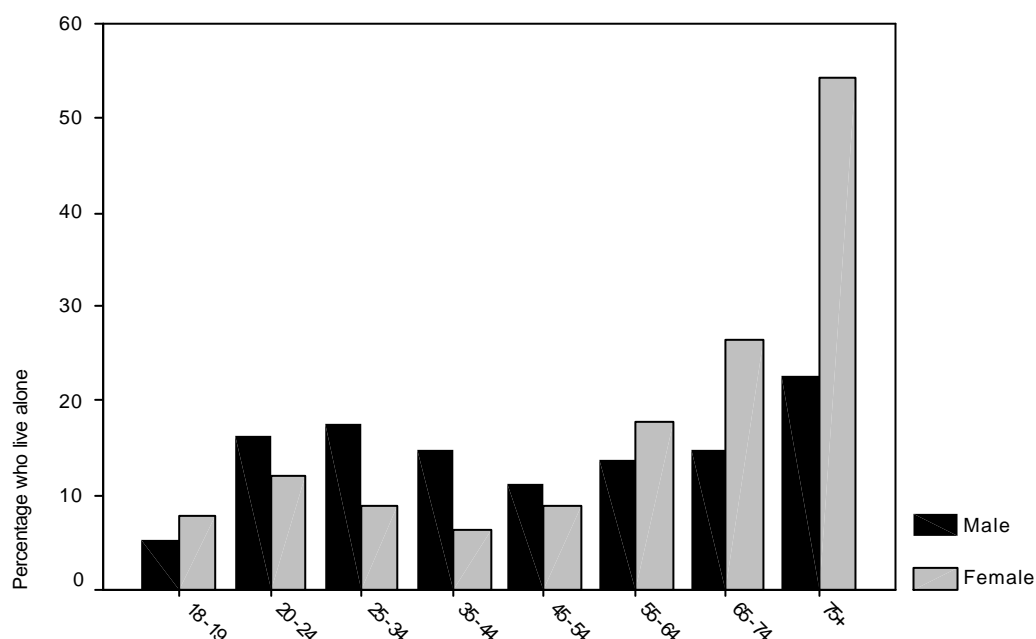
While this paper examines the social correlates of living alone, it does not assume that living alone is necessarily equivalent to isolation or loneliness. Living alone does not mean being alone. Some studies find that people who live alone are more likely to experience loneliness than people who live with others, while other studies find no such

association or document positive aspects to living alone (Victor *et al.* 2000, p. 412). Indeed, people may feel lonely or isolated while spending time or even living with others.

It is social engagement and social integration that appear to make the critical difference to the wellbeing of those who live alone and both act as powerful influences on the experience of living alone. Social integration can be experienced through participation in informal networks of friends and relatives, or through formal engagement in paid employment, caregiving, clubs, church and other activities. Various studies among the elderly find that social integration is associated with improved physical and mental health and longevity (Michael *et al.* 2001, p. 123). For example, the four-year American study of women aged 60 to 72 years found that social interaction acted as a buffer between general stress and physical or psychological health. Contact with friends and relatives and social engagement were protective of decline in mental health among women living alone, but not among women living with a spouse (Michael *et al.* 2001, p. 129). This paper assesses the extent to which social engagement is a buffer against loneliness among younger adults.

To date, most research on and media discussion of interpersonal relationships, lone person households and community has concentrated on the elderly reflecting Australia's ageing population and its potential to drive the projected rise in lone person households (ABS 2004, p. 29). However, over the past 30 years it is among people aged 15 to 44 that the greatest rate of increase in solitary living has occurred. In this age group, the number of women living alone has increased by 264 per cent, while the number of men has increased by 224 per cent (de Vaus 2004a). Significant proportions of young adults now live alone, as Figure 1 shows. The rise in the numbers of lone person households is being fuelled by such factors as increases in divorce and separation and the delaying of marriage. Yet there has been relatively little research on the significance of living alone among younger age groups.

Figure 1 Proportions of men and women who live alone, by age range



Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

This paper focuses on young adults aged 25 to 44 for a number of reasons. Living alone is a recent and fast-growing trend among adults of this age, with implications for fertility, employment, housing and, most importantly for this paper, changing interpersonal networks and personal and social wellbeing. In addition, our examination of loneliness and social connection among young adults contributes to an understanding of the health of Australia's communities and complements existing research focused on their older members.

2. Measuring relationships and community

The data used in this analysis come from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, a nationwide longitudinal survey focused on issues relating to family, employment and income which commenced in 2001. This paper relies on data collected in Wave 2 of the HILDA survey, released in 2003 and representing over 13000 people in over 7200 households (Watson and Wooden 2002). Comparison of the HILDA sample with population benchmark data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) suggests that the sample is broadly representative of the Australian population, although residents of Sydney are slightly under-represented (Wooden 2003, p. 3).

Given that HILDA is a longitudinal survey, assessment of claims about change over time in relationships and communities will be possible as successive waves of data collection occur. However, at time of writing, only two waves of data had been collected and this is an insufficient basis for longitudinal claims. This paper therefore concentrates on measures of difference and association rather than measures of change over time.

2.1 Measuring loneliness and support: The Index of Social Support

The key task of this paper, mapping patterns of loneliness, was achieved by using HILDA data to construct an index of personal support and friendship. The HILDA survey includes ten statements about people's perceptions of the personal support and friendship available to them. Respondents are asked to signal their agreement on whether each statement applies to them, on a seven-point scale from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'. The ten comprise five statements suggesting that personal support and friendship is lacking and difficult to access, and five statements suggesting that such support and friendship is readily available and accessible. They are as follows;

1. People don't come to visit me as often as I'd like.
2. I often need help from other people but can't get it.
3. I seem to have a lot of friends.
4. I don't have anyone I can confide in.
5. I have no one to lean on in times of trouble.
6. There is someone who can always cheer me up when I'm down.
7. I often feel very lonely.
8. I enjoy the time I spend with the people who are important to me.
9. When something's on my mind, just talking with the people I know can make me feel better.
10. When I need someone to help me out, I can usually find someone.

The construction of an index of personal support and friendship involved three steps. First we recoded responses on the five negatively-phrased statements (numbers 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7) so that a higher score on the seven-point scale indicates the perception of a higher degree of support. Second, we recoded responses on the seven-step scale so that the ‘most lonely’ response scored -3 and the ‘least lonely’ response scored +3. Third, we summed all responses to the statements for each person.¹ This means that, after summing responses to the ten statements, total scores on the Index of Social Support range potentially from -30 to +30. A score closer to -30 indicates that the person perceives that very little support or friendship is available to them: they often feel lonely, people do not visit, they cannot find people to help them out, they do not have people to confide in or lean on, and so on. A score closer to +30 indicates that the person perceives a high level of support or friendship. In other words, a high score on the Index of Social Support indicates *lower* loneliness, while a low score indicates *higher* loneliness.

Early work on loneliness distinguished between two types, social and emotional, associated with social isolation and emotional isolation respectively. Social loneliness results from the lack of a network of social relationships with peers (Green *et al.* 2001, p. 281), and can be remedied by social contact. Emotional loneliness results from the absence of a reliable attachment figure such as a partner, and can be remedied by finding a close, intimate bond (van Baarsen *et al.* 2001, p. 120). There is recent evidence, at least among older adults, that social and emotional isolation should be regarded as distinct dimensions of loneliness (van Baarsen *et al.* 2001). However, our examination found that it was not helpful to use this distinction in assessing responses to the ten statements in the HILDA survey. Neither a content analysis of the items themselves nor a factor analysis of responses to the items suggested that the ten statements could be usefully divided into signifiers of emotional and social loneliness and analysed in two separate clusters. The Appendix gives the details of these examinations. Rather than grouping the ten HILDA statements into separate indices of social loneliness and emotional loneliness, we have used the summed index of personal support and friendship described above.

However, one of the questions (Q7) asks respondents directly about their feelings of loneliness. We have supplemented the Index of Social Support with a more detailed examination of responses to this question in a later section.

2.2 Measuring formal and informal social engagement

As a further task of the paper, the relationship between loneliness and social engagement is assessed and again we drew on the HILDA survey which includes data on people’s participation in six different activities:

- paid employment;
- caring for a disabled spouse or disabled adult relative, or caring for elderly parents or parents-in-law;

¹ Cronbach’s Alpha was used to determine how well this set of items measures a single unidimensional underlying construct. We found that this summed scale displays strong internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.82).

- looking after other people's children (aged under 12 years) on a regular, unpaid basis;
- voluntary or charity work (for example, canteen work at the local school, unpaid work for a community club or organisation);
- socialising with friends and relatives who live apart; and
- involvement with sporting groups, hobby or community organisations.

Survey respondents are asked about the time they spend in each activity. The first four variables are phrased in terms of hours and minutes per week spent on each activity and respondents indicate the time they spend socialising by choosing among seven possible responses, ranging from 'every day' to 'less often than once every three months'. Finally, respondents choose a yes/no response with regard to participation in a sporting, hobby or community based association. The paper uses these measures of involvement in neighbourhood, community and working life to examine relationships between loneliness and social engagement.

3. How we live

What kinds of households are lived in today by young adults aged 25 to 44? Most live in couple households and many have children. Just under half are in couple families with children under 15, 20 per cent are in couple families without children, and just under 12 per cent live alone, as shown in Table 1. Nine per cent live with their children in single-parent households.

Out of a total population of 5.9 million young adults aged between 25 and 44, just under 700000 live in single-person households, representing 4.8 percent of the total adult population and 32 per cent of all adult Australians living alone. Men are twice as likely (16 per cent) as women (eight per cent) to be living on their own. On the other hand, by far the majority of single parents with children are lone mothers rather than lone fathers.

Table 1 Household types among young adults aged 25 to 44 (%)

| Household type | Men | Women | All |
|-----------------------------------------|------|-------|------|
| Lone person | 16.2 | 7.6 | 11.6 |
| Couple family without children | 20.8 | 17.9 | 19.4 |
| Couple family with children under 15 | 44.8 | 49.9 | 48.5 |
| Couple family with children 15 and over | 7.9 | 7.4 | 7.4 |
| Lone parent with children under 15 | 2.0 | 10.9 | 6.4 |
| Lone parent with children 15 and over | 3.1 | 2.3 | 2.6 |
| Group household | 3.2 | 1.8 | 2.2 |
| Multi family household | 0.9 | 1.4 | 1.0 |
| Other related family | 1.3 | 0.7 | 1.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

Close to three-quarters of 25 to 44 year-olds who live alone have never married nor been in a de facto relationship, while about one-fifth are divorced or separated.²

Among young adults aged 25 to 44, most men are in full-time employment while women are spread in almost equal measure across full-time work, part-time work and unemployment or non-participation in the labour force (Table 2).³ Women who live by themselves are far more likely to be in full-time paid employment than women who live with others but among men this is reversed. Men who live alone are less likely than other men to be full-time workers and more likely to be part-time or unemployed. While men in general display greater levels of participation in full-time employment than women, these levels are almost identical among men and women in single-person households.

² Another six per cent describe themselves as married or de facto although they live alone.

³ Our third category here is an aggregation of those categorised in the HILDA survey as: unemployed, looking for full-time work; unemployed, looking for part-time work; not in the labour force, marginally attached; and not in the labour force, not marginally attached.

Table 2 Employment participation among young adults aged 25 to 44 (%), by living situation

| | Living Situation | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|-------|------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | Live with others | | Live alone | | All | |
| | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| Employed full-time | 82.4 | 34.1 | 73.1 | 71.6 | 80.9 | 37.0 |
| Employed part-time | 7.5 | 31.5 | 11.6 | 13.9 | 8.2 | 30.1 |
| Unemployed/Not in labour force | 10.1 | 34.4 | 15.3 | 14.5 | 10.9 | 32.9 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

Given these contrasts in employment, it is not surprising that there are differences also in the incomes of people who live alone compared to those who live with others. Women who live alone receive average gross wages and salaries per annum of \$33850, significantly greater than the \$19400 earned by women living with others and reflecting their greater involvement in paid work. Among men the difference, although small, again runs the other way. Men living with others are paid gross annual wages and salaries of \$41550, slightly higher than the \$37850 received by their counterparts who live alone. Women who live by themselves tend to work in occupations classified as having high degrees of skill level and skill specialisation, such as managers and administrators or professionals, and do so in greater proportions than those who live with others.⁴ This is not the case among men. Male employees who live alone and male employees who live with others have jobs with similar patterns of distribution among the various occupational classifications.

Over two-thirds of people aged 25 to 44 and living alone are male, and most have never lived long-term with an intimate partner. Three-quarters are in full-time employment. In general, men who live by themselves participate less in paid employment and are on slightly lower incomes than men who live with others. Both contrasts are reversed among women, and women who live alone are far more likely to be in full-time employment than women who live with others.

To what extent do young adults in these and other living situations feel connected to wider networks of friends and relations? Who perceives that they have sources of friendship and support and who does not?

⁴ These categories come from the nine broad classifications in the ABS *Australian Standard Classification of Occupations*. Occupations are classified according to skill level and skill specialisation (ABS 1997, p. 5).

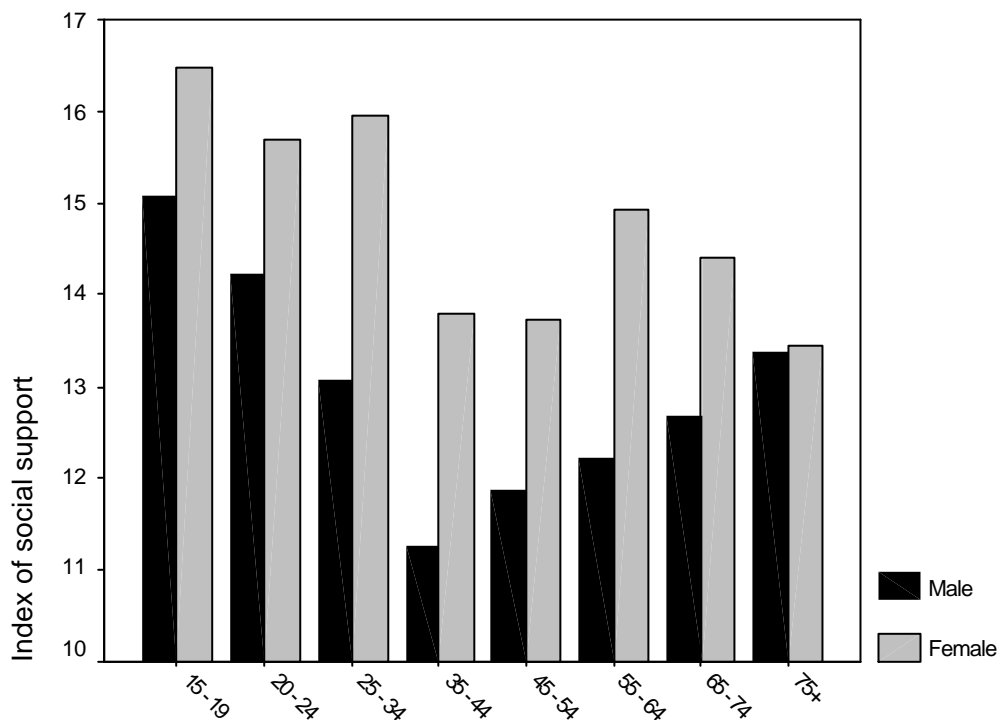
4. Feeling alone, feeling connected

Using the Index of Social Support as a benchmark, this section maps patterns of loneliness among young adults in Australia. The Index of Social Support is a summed index of people's perceptions of the personal support and friendship available to them, based on responses to ten statements in the HILDA survey. Higher scores indicate that the person perceives a greater level of support and friendship and reduced loneliness as a consequence, while lower scores indicate lesser support and greater loneliness.

4.1 Lonely men

There is a gender gap in loneliness, evident among adult men and women of all age groups. Figure 2 shows the levels of support and friendship perceived by men and women at different ages and across all living situations and suggests that men tend to be lonelier than women from early adulthood right through to their seventies. At these ages and older, this gender contrast is probably complicated by earlier male mortality and the corresponding fact that twice as many women as men are living alone. The deepest levels of loneliness appear to be experienced by men aged 35 to 44 and by women aged 75 and above.

Figure 2 Personal support and friendship by sex and age among people aged 15 to 75+



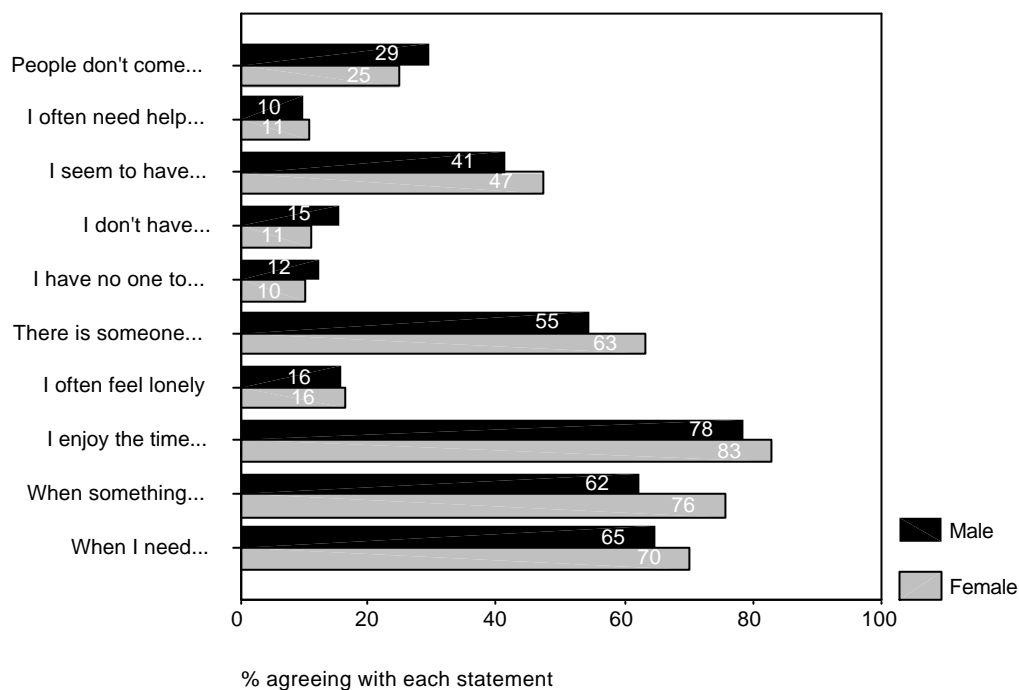
Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

This gender contrast holds for young adults. Among all people aged 25 to 44, men are significantly less likely than women to have access to personal support and friendship. In other words, men in general are more likely than women to feel that there is no one to lean on or talk to and that they have little social contact. Figure 3 shows the proportions of men and women who agree with each of the ten statements that make up the Index of

Social Support.⁵ More women than men agree with the five positive statements. Sixteen per cent of men and women agree with the statement 'I often feel very lonely'. However, as we discuss later, gender contrasts emerge once responses to this statement are organised by household type. For example, agreement that 'I often feel very lonely' is reported by 33 per cent of men who live alone but only 23 per cent of women, 29 per cent of men in group households but only ten per cent of women, and so on (see Figure 7).

Among 25 to 44 year olds, the average score on the Index of Social Support is 13.5; very similar to the average for the adult population (13.6). There is, however, a statistically significant difference between the averages for men and women. Men score 12.1 compared with their female counterparts who score 14.8, indicating that on average men are lonelier. Most people (89 per cent) score on the positive side of the Index or, in other words, score greater than zero. However, 18 per cent of people score three or less which means, at most, they agree with only three of the ten statements measuring friendship and support (when they are positively phrased). A score of three is one standard deviation (10) away from the mean (13.5).

Figure 3 Agreement with the ten statements in the Index of Social Support among men and women aged 25 to 44



⁵ The full text of these statements is as follows;

People don't come to visit me as often as I'd like.

I often need help from other people but can't get it.

I seem to have a lot of friends.

I don't have anyone I can confide in.

I have no one to lean on in times of trouble.

There is someone who can always cheer me up when I'm down.

I often feel very lonely.

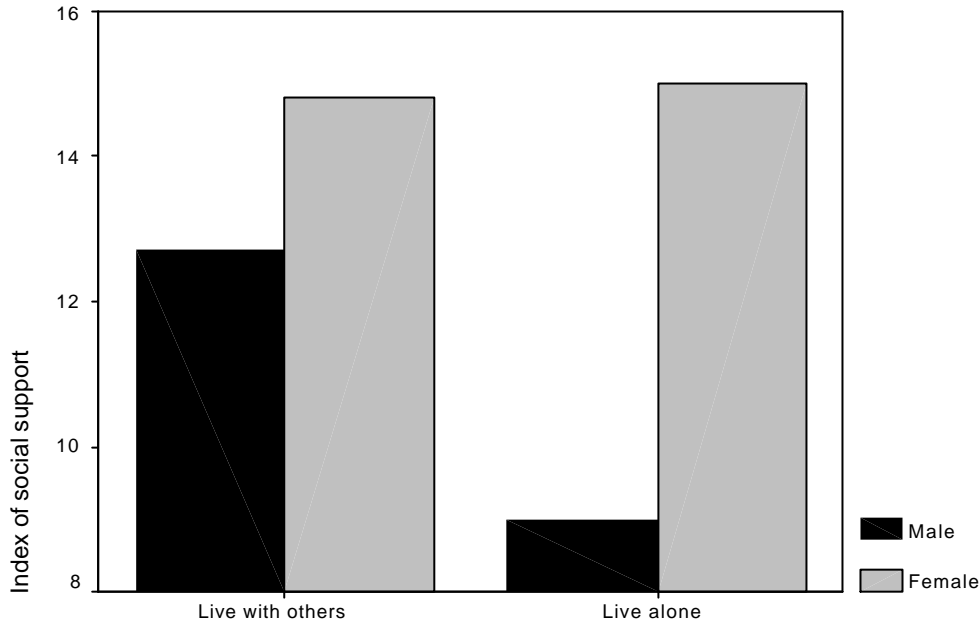
I enjoy the time I spend with the people who are important to me.

When something's on my mind, just talking with the people I know can make me feel better.

When I need someone to help me out, I can usually find someone.

Figure 4 shows that whether we compare men and women in lone person households, or men and women in households shared with others, this gendered contrast in their perceptions of support remains. Men who live alone perceive less social support than women who live alone, and men who live with others perceive less support than women who live with others. The contrast between men and women is particularly striking among those who live alone, with women scoring an average of 14.8 on the Index of Social Support and men scoring only nine.

Figure 4 Personal support and friendship, by living situation and sex, among 25 to 44 year-olds



Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

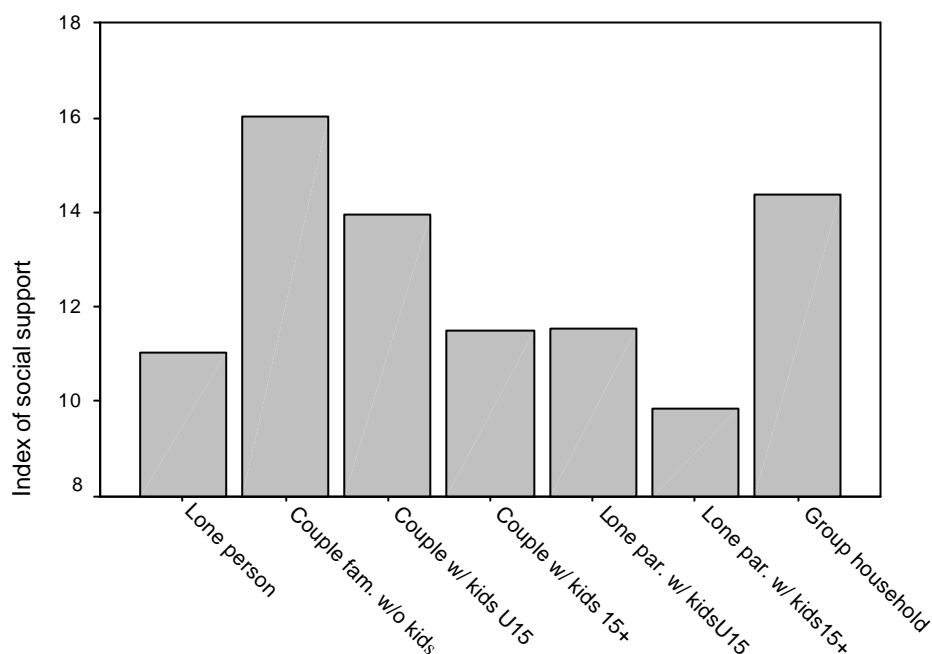
At the same time, the type of household these individuals reside in does make a difference, at least for men. Among people aged 25 to 44, men who live alone indicate strikingly lower levels of support and friendship than men who live with others. The same is not true for women, however. Women living alone perceive levels of support and friendship very similar to those perceived by women living with others. In short, while men are lonelier than women in general, the difference is much greater in the case of men living alone.

Levels of personal support and friendship across different types of household are shown in Figure 5.⁶ They are highest in households with two (or more) adults present, and lowest in households with only a single adult, whether or not children also reside with them. The highest scores on the Index of Social Support are recorded by couple households without children, followed by group households and couple households with

⁶ In this analysis, we have aggregated the 26 household types in the HILDA survey. For example, couple households with or without children which also include other individuals have been classified simply as couple households with or without children. (This does mean that in a very small number of households, the respondent on which the data is based will not be one or other member of the couple but another adult living in that household.) We have done the same for lone-parent households. Some household types, such as multi-family households and households with 'other related families', have been excluded from our analyses. Households classified as comprising a couple or lone parent and children under 15 may also include older children, while households with children 15 or over do not include any younger children.

children under 15. The high levels of support perceived by people in the first two household groups are likely to reflect both the support that the couple members or housemates can offer to each other and the higher levels of socialising in which these young adults without parenting responsibilities are able to engage. For the third group, couple families with children under 15, high levels of perceived support and friendship may represent both the support that each parent can offer the other and the various forms of social engagement fostered by having young children. The lowest levels of social support are experienced by people who are lone parents with children 15 and over, and people living by themselves. However, gender influences these patterns too.

Figure 5 Personal support and friendship by household type, among 25 to 44 year-olds



Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

While scores on the Index of Social Support display obvious gender differences across all age groups and households, these are also apparent in patterns of perceived support across particular household types. Figure 6 maps these patterns among 25 to 44 year-olds. Single mothers living with children report the lowest levels of support among women, with those caring for older children at the bottom of the scale.⁷ Among men this is reversed, with single fathers living with children aged under 15 perceiving lower levels of friendship than those with older children. It is possible that parents of young children experience divergent effects on their social support and networking, depending on their sex. Lone mothers with young children may be able to tap into readily available informal networks among mothers and the formal networks of child-care and pre-school, with these networks also providing sources of emotional support and friendship. In contrast, lone fathers with young children are outside the predominantly female networks which surround child rearing (Doucet 2001, pp. 170-171), and their

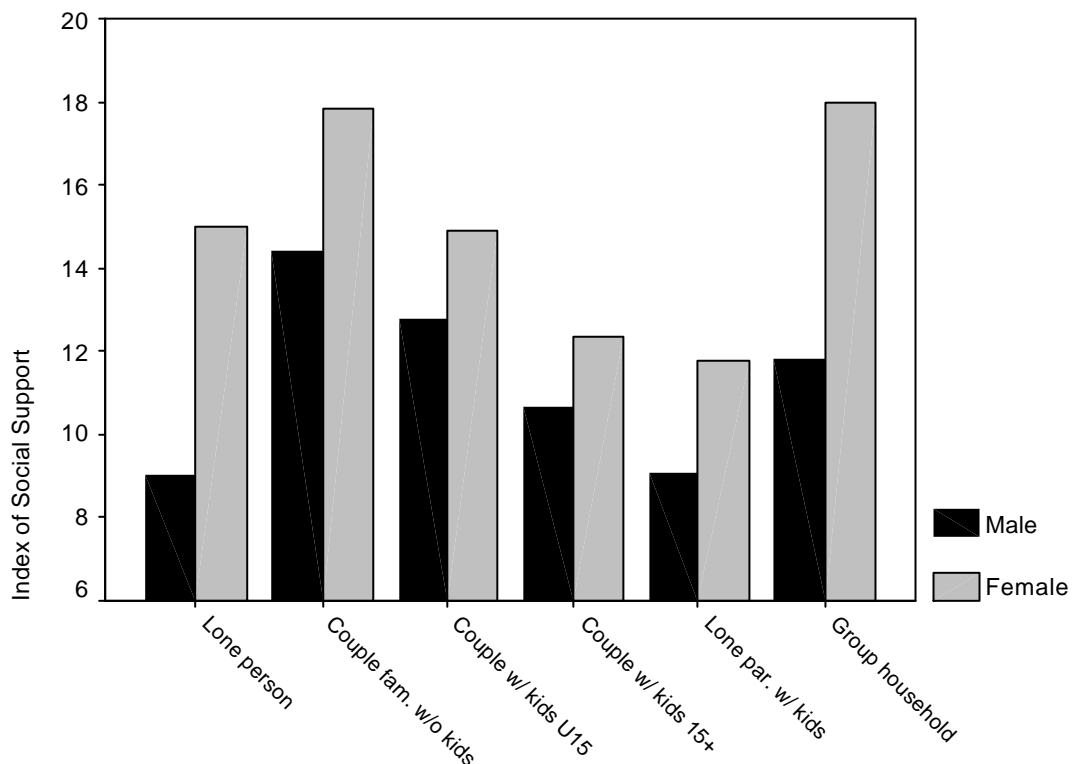
⁷ The HILDA survey divides households with children into those with children under 15 and those with children 15 and over. In the remainder of this paper 'younger children' refers to the former and 'older children' to the latter.

involvement as primary caregivers may exclude them from networks of male (and female) friends.

Single fathers living with children comprise 5.1 per cent of all men aged 25 to 44, and men living by themselves comprise 16.2 per cent. Lone fathers with younger children indicate levels of support and friendship much lower than those perceived by men in couple families without children or in couple families with children under 15. This is not simply the effect of their status as single parents, for single fathers with young children display levels of support which are much lower than those of single mothers with young children. While both groups are single parents with children, the men feel more isolated.

In fact, single fathers with young children suffer the lowest levels of support and friendship of men and women in any household situation. In other words, single fathers with children are the loneliest people in the country. They are more likely than men in other living situations, and than women in general, to agree that 'I often feel very lonely' or 'I often need help from other people but can't get it,' and less likely to agree that 'I enjoy the time I spend with the people who are important to me' or 'There is someone who can always cheer me up when I'm down'. Loneliness and isolation are also experienced by men living by themselves and single fathers living with children aged 15 and over.

Figure 6 Personal support and friendship by household type among 25 to 44 year-old men and women



Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

The gender effect is evident across all household types, with women constantly reaching higher scores on the Index of Social Support than men in similar household situations. It is most noticeable in lone-person and group households.

The men with the highest levels of support are in couple households with no children or with young children. But while women in childless couple households also have high levels of support, those reported by women in couple households with young children are the same as those reported by women who live by themselves. Men in most couple households have far higher levels of personal support than men who live alone, but this is not as true for women suggesting that a relationship with a spouse or intimate partner is a more important source of support for men than it is for women. Men rely to a greater degree than women on their spouses or de facto partners for their emotional and social needs, while women draw on wider sources of support. Thus women indicate similar levels of support whether they are in couple households or living by themselves; the lowest levels of support among women are experienced by single mothers with older children.

Further evidence for the point that men rely more than women on their intimate partners for their social support comes from the data on individuals in group households. While women in group households report some of the highest levels of social support, men in such households report far lower levels (although still higher than those among single fathers and men living alone). Both are in households with adult company, but the men continue to experience relatively high levels of loneliness and social isolation.

Table 3 presents this data in another way. It shows what proportion of men and women in each household type agree with the ten statements that comprise the Index of Social Support. Scores on the negative statements indicating low support have been reversed, so that agreement with a larger number of statements indicates a greater degree of social support. At least three-quarters of men and women in all household types agree with at least five of the ten statements in the Index of Social Support. As we have already outlined however, there is a gender gap which persists across household types. For example, less than half of men living alone or as single fathers agree with seven or more the statements, compared to between 58 and 72 per cent of their female counterparts. Close to twice as many women as men living alone agree with nine or more items.

Table 3 Agreement with the ten (positive) statements of personal support and friendship, by household type, among 25 to 44 year-old men and women (%)

| | | Agree with 5 or more items | Agree with 7 or more items | Agree with 9 or more items |
|--------------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Lone person | Male | 75.5 | 48.5 | 23.3 |
| | Female | 87.3 | 71.7 | 42.5 |
| Couple family without children | Male | 87.3 | 70.9 | 41.6 |
| | Female | 92.8 | 83.6 | 53.4 |
| Couple family with children under 15 | Male | 83.8 | 63.8 | 32.3 |
| | Female | 87.6 | 70.6 | 42.7 |
| Couple family with children 15+ | Male | 75.7 | 51.1 | 26.1 |
| | Female | 83.7 | 59.6 | 34.9 |
| Lone parent with children under 15 | Male | 72.6 | 47.1 | 28.0 |
| | Female | 77.2 | 58.0 | 33.7 |
| Lone parent with children 15+ | Male | 71.0 | 47.5 | 29.5 |
| | Female | 80.0 | 61.7 | 24.1 |
| Group household | Male | 79.0 | 65.7 | 34.7 |
| | Female | 97.0 | 79.6 | 62.7 |

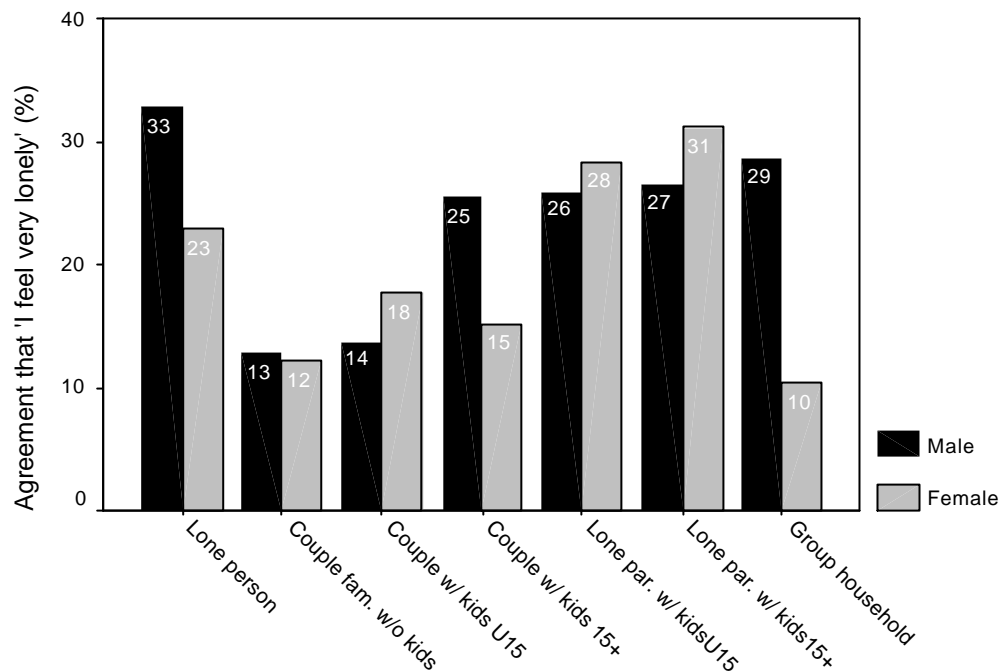
The HILDA survey includes a question asking respondents about the degree to which they ‘often feel very lonely’, a direct, single-item measure said to tap the emotional dimensions of loneliness rather than the social ones (Koropecj-Cox 1998, p. S307). Using this measure rather than the summed Index of Social Support, it was found that men living by themselves are the most likely of all men to report that they ‘often feel very lonely’, followed by lone fathers with children (both young and old). About one-third of men living alone agree that they ‘often feel very lonely’, as do one-quarter of lone fathers with children. This compares with the 13 per cent of men in childless couple families who say they often feel very lonely (see Figure 7).

The pattern among women is somewhat similar in that single mothers with children report the highest levels of emotional loneliness, followed by women living alone. As Figure 7 shows, close to one-third of single mothers with older children and over one-quarter of single mothers with younger children agree that they ‘often feel very lonely’.

Among both men and women, it is single adults who report feeling the loneliest in response to this single-item measure thus lending support to the view that the measure assesses the degree to which individuals are conscious of the absence of a reliable attachment figure such as an intimate partner (van Baarsen *et al.* 2001, p. 120). While some studies propose that emotional loneliness results from the loss or lack of an intimate bond with a partner *or* parent *or* child (Green *et al.* 2001, p. 281), the fact that single parents in our study display high levels of agreement about ‘feeling very lonely’ suggests that a sense of emotional loneliness is shaped particularly by the absence of a spouse or partner. However, the levels of emotional loneliness among two groups do not support this view. Fathers in couple families with older children report relatively high levels of loneliness, almost as high as those of lone fathers. And single women in group

households report low levels of emotional loneliness, the lowest of women in all household types. The latter may reflect the fact that women are less reliant than men on spouses or partners for their emotional needs and have close relationships with a greater number of people in their primary social networks, in this case their group housemates.

Figure 7 Agreement with the statement, ‘I often feel very lonely’ by household type, men and women aged 25 to 44



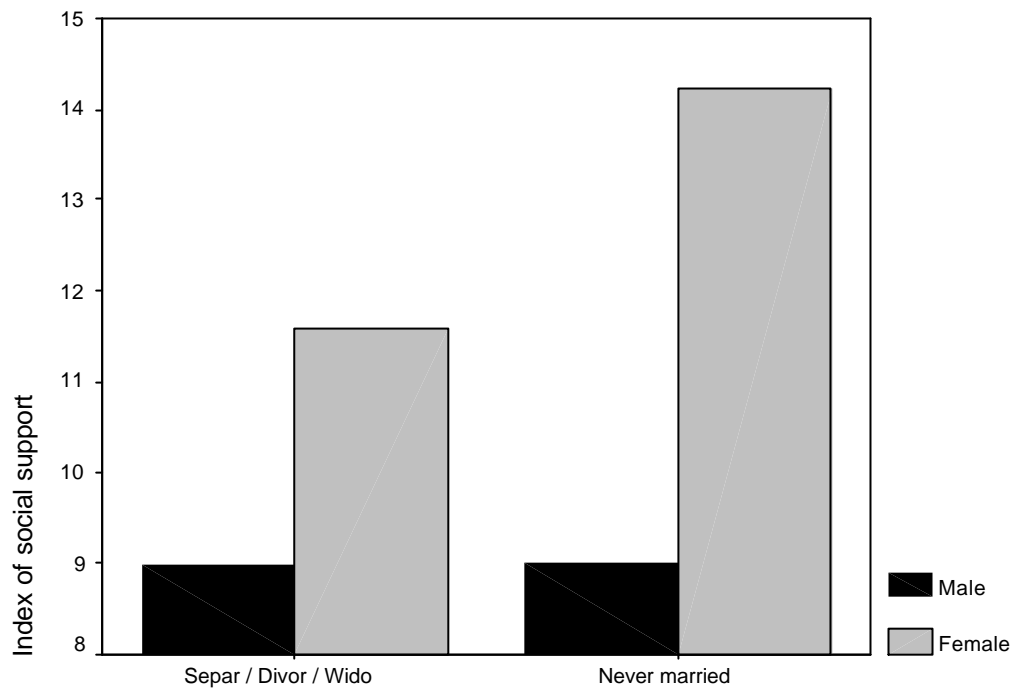
Tables A2 and A3 in the Appendix give further details on responses to the statement, ‘I often feel very lonely,’ in terms of the seven-point scale from ‘Strongly disagree’ to ‘Strongly agree’.

The effects of separation and divorce may explain the greater levels of loneliness and social isolation experienced by lone men and lone fathers. In going through the dissolution of their marriages or de facto relationships, these men also find that their social networks and circles of support diminish or disintegrate. Certainly earlier Australian research has found that men and women who are separated or divorced exhibit poorer mental and physical health (Rogers 1995, pp. 108-9). Poor health can lead to divorce, divorce can lead to poor health, and both can be a consequence of other factors such as marital conflict or poor socio-economic circumstances (Rogers 1995, p. 110). Although women are more likely than men to suffer financial hardship after divorce, some men also experience hardship and the most disadvantaged men are those who live alone or as sole fathers (Smyth 2003, p. 18). Living alone also emerges as the major predictor of problems associated with separation in Jordan’s (1998, p. 9) study of men who separated in the mid-1980s and mid-1990s.

However, our data do not support the view that the lack of support and friendship reported by these men is a direct result of their separation and divorce. Figure 8 focuses on men and women either living alone or as single parents and compares those who

have been through a separation or divorce with those who have never married.⁸ Men seem to have similarly low levels of support whether they have been separated or divorced or not (although, as we point out below, *recent* experiences of separation and divorce are associated with lower levels of support). Among women there *is* a contrast, in that levels of support are higher among those who have never experienced marital dissolution.

Figure 8 Personal support among 25 to 44 year-old people living alone or as single parents who are either separated/divorced/widowed or never married



Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

This suggests that men are more likely to be socially isolated if they live in households without other adult company as the most isolated men live alone or just with their children, while the least isolated men live with an intimate partner or other adults. For men in particular, living with other adults sustains their social support system, while living without other adults threatens it.

Having said that the high levels of social isolation among single men and single fathers are not the *direct* result of separation and divorce, we should note, however, that separation and divorce do have an indirect effect on social isolation among men. International research finds that men have a narrower range of sources of emotional support than women. They tend to have fewer close persons in their primary social networks and are more likely to nominate their spouse or partner as the person to whom they feel closest, as British research among 5800 civil servants aged 35 to 55 has found (Fuhrer and Stansfeld 2002, pp. 813-817). Hence, in couple households men are likely to rely both on the direct support of their female (or male) partners and on the greater

⁸ The latter category is constructed from those individuals in the HILDA survey categorised as ‘Never legally married and not living with someone in a (de facto) relationship’, but none of the individuals here is de facto given that all either live alone or with their children only.

social networks maintained by them.⁹ But if they separate or divorce, men's social support status returns to the low levels experienced by their single counterparts. In this sense, separation and divorce are a factor in men's social isolation mainly because a source of social support on which many men depend, their romantic relationships, are thus removed.

While our Index of Social Support is an aggregate measure of social isolation or social loneliness, one of the ten items on which it is based focuses on emotional loneliness by asking respondents about the degree to which they 'often feel very lonely'. If emotional loneliness is a consequence of the absence of an intimate partner, then one might expect that separated and divorced individuals will agree more strongly with the item than never-married individuals. Our analysis finds only very small differences here. Among men who have separated, divorced or been widowed, 28 per cent agree that they 'often feel very lonely', compared to 25 per cent of men who have never married. Among women, the figures are 24 per cent and 23 per cent respectively.

4.2 Talking over the back fence

Another measure of social support is to be found in people's perceptions of neighbourhood sociability and cooperation. The HILDA survey asks respondents about the extent to which neighbours help each other out and do things together.¹⁰ Table 4 shows our comparison of such perceptions among men and women in different household types.

Among men in households comprising either a sole adult or couple with or without children,¹¹ single fathers with older children form the group most likely to perceive low levels of social interaction in their neighbourhoods closely followed by men living by themselves, with about 30 per cent of each group reporting that neighbourhood interactions happen only rarely or never. Next come lone fathers living with children under 15, 40 per cent of whom rarely or never experience neighbourhood interactions compared to around 20 per cent of men living in couple families with children.

Among women, the pattern looks slightly different. The women most likely to perceive neighbourhood interactions to be rare are single mothers living with children aged 15 and over, with close to half (47 per cent) reporting that these events are rare or non-existent. As Table 4 shows, single mothers with older children report the lowest levels of neighbourhood sociability of both women and men in all household types and these households are the only ones where women report lower levels of interaction than men. Perhaps these lone mothers see less neighbourhood interaction because they spend more time than their male counterparts at work as a slightly higher proportion are in paid employment (80 per cent versus 70 per cent of men). Or perhaps these women's reports of infrequent neighbourhood sociability are influenced by their levels of socialising with friends and relatives which tend to be lower than those of their male counterparts. Among both men and women, individuals living in couple households with children

⁹ The vast majority of married and de facto couples recorded in the HILDA survey are heterosexual, but a small number is comprised of same-sex couples in a de facto relationship.

¹⁰ Drawing on analysis by Shields and Wooden (2003, pp. 18-19), we summed two of these measures ('neighbours helping each other out' and 'neighbours doing things together') and treat the resulting variable as an indicator of the degree of social interaction in the neighbourhood. Using the original scale for both of the two items, the data have been divided by two and recoded into a range of values from one to five.

¹¹ This excludes group households, multi-family households and 'other related families'.

under 15 are the group most likely to report that it is 'fairly' or 'very' common for neighbours to help each other out and to do things together.

Table 4 Perceptions of neighbourhood social interaction among 25 to 44 year-old men and women, by household type

| | | Rare/never | Fairly/very common |
|--------------------------------------|--------|------------|--------------------|
| Lone person | Male | 30 | 38 |
| | Female | 27 | 49 |
| Couple family without children | Male | 22 | 47 |
| | Female | 23 | 53 |
| Couple family with children under 15 | Male | 19 | 52 |
| | Female | 16 | 59 |
| Couple family with children 15+ | Male | 20 | 50 |
| | Female | 23 | 46 |
| Lone parent with children under 15 | Male | 41 | 43 |
| | Female | 26 | 53 |
| Lone parent with children 15+ | Male | 31 | 38 |
| | Female | 47 | 24 |
| Group household | Male | 23 | 35 |
| | Female | 29 | 38 |

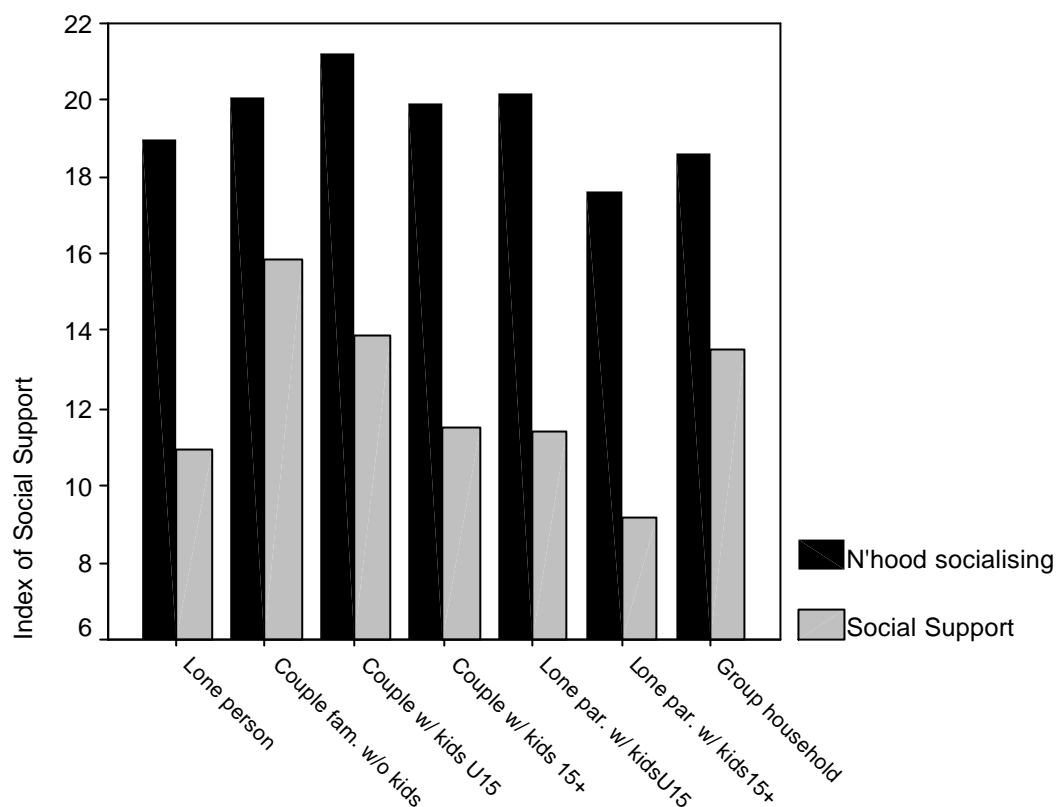
Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

Is there any relationship between people's opinions about their own access to support and friendship and their perceptions of the extent to which neighbours socialise and cooperate? Again focusing on households comprised of either a sole adult or couple with or without children, those households indicating higher levels of personal support and friendship also tend to be the households which report higher degrees of neighbourhood sociability and assistance. In other words, there is a correlation between perceptions of personal support and friendship and perceptions of social interaction in the neighbourhood, although the relationship is weak.¹² Figure 9 shows averages of both variables for individuals in different household types. (The variable assessing perceptions of neighbourhood sociability and assistance had values ranging from one to five, but these have been multiplied by six to create a scale visible on the graph.)

Among men, single fathers with children, and especially those with younger children, perceive relatively low levels of both personal support and neighbourhood interaction. Among women, single parents with children again fare the worst, but in contrast to single male parents it is single mothers with older children who report the least personal support and neighbourhood sociability. Among both men and women, individuals in couple households with younger children report the most neighbourhood cooperation but individuals in couple households without any children report more personal support and friendship.

¹² To investigate this, Cramer's *V* was used and finds a weak association ($V = .177, N = 3,683, p < .001$).

Figure 9 Personal support and friendship and neighbourhood sociability/assistance by household type among 25 to 44 year-olds



Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

The fact that people's perceptions of personal support and friendship tend to correlate with their estimations of the level of social interaction in their neighbourhoods is not particularly surprising. Individuals who report that 'I have no one to lean on in times of trouble' or 'I often need help from other people but can't get it' are likely to consider that they rarely experience 'neighbours helping each other out' and 'neighbours doing things together'. It is also possible that an individual might report feeling very lonely because they have been excluded by a neighbourhood they perceive as otherwise supportive and friendly. However, given that our Index of Social Support combines a number of measures focused on the availability of assistance (as well as items focused more on access to friendship and intimacy), higher or lower ratings on this index will tend to be matched by ratings on the scale of neighbourhood cooperation.

4.3 Health and support

There are further health-related indicators that single fathers living with their children experience poorer wellbeing than others in the community.¹³ Among men aged 25 to 44, single fathers report poorer physical functioning and general health than men in most other household situations, scoring ten per cent lower than average for physical

¹³ The HILDA survey uses the SF-36, a standardised and widely used measure of health. The survey transforms raw scores into a series of scales (0-100) for derived variables that are considered in this section: physical functioning, general health, role-emotional and mental health. There are also scales for role-physical, bodily pain, vitality and social functioning.

functioning.¹⁴ Their average physical functioning is significantly less than men who live alone and men in couple households without children or with young children (under 15 years of age). By comparison there are no significant differences on the scale of physical functioning between women in various household types. Lone fathers also score five per cent lower than the average on a scale of general health which measures the extent to which people agree that their 'health is excellent' and they are 'as healthy as anybody I know' as well as whether they 'get sick a little easier than other people' and 'expect my health to get worse'. Men in couple households without children score significantly higher on the general health scale than single fathers, men in lone households and men in couple households with older children.

When we consider emotional health, however, it is men living alone who fare the worst.¹⁵ They score significantly lower on this measure than men in couple households without children and men who live with a partner and young children. In addition, men who live alone score five per cent lower than the average for mental health among males aged 25 to 44 years of age and they are more likely to agree that they feel 'down in the dumps', nervous and unhappy. On the scale of mental health, their scores are lower than men in couple households without children and men who live with a partner and young children. While single fathers report slightly lower than average scores on this scale, they are not significantly different from men in other household situations.

4.4 Dumped, broke or sacked

Recent separation and divorce, a worsening financial situation or losing a job are all associated with lower levels of personal support and friendship among men aged 25 to 44 living alone or living just with a child or children. Close to 20 per cent of this group had undergone a separation or divorce in the previous 12 months, and these men reported a lower level of support than men in similar household types who had not been through a separation or divorce in the last year. While a divorce or separation at some time in the past does not seem to have an association with lower levels of support, *recent* separation or divorce does. Seven per cent of men aged 25 to 44 reported that their financial situation had worsened over the past year and they perceived less social support than men whose situations had remained stable or improved. Six per cent of all men aged 25 to 44 had been fired from their jobs during the previous 12 months and they described lower levels of support than men who had not been fired.

Similar comparisons among women living alone or living just with a child or children reveal that individuals who have been fired or whose finances have worsened in the past 12 months experience lower levels of support and friendship. However, women who have separated in the last year indicate levels of support that are virtually identical to those of women who have not been through this.

¹⁴ The physical functioning scale comprises elements such as levels of activity, ability to bend, kneel, walk certain distances, bathe and dress.

¹⁵ The emotional scale scores whether, because of emotional problems (such as feeling depressed or anxious), people recently cut down the amount of time spent on work or other activities; accomplished less than they would like; or did not work and do other activities as carefully as usual.

These patterns suggest that several factors are influencing levels of perceived support and friendship: gender, household type, and parenting involvements. Broadly speaking, the factors associated with *higher* levels of social support include being:

- female;
- the parent of a younger child in a couple household; and
- living in a household with another adult or adults such as a couple household without children.

In contrast, the factors associated with *lower* levels of social support include being:

- male;
- the single parent of a younger child; and
- living alone.

Not surprisingly, both men and women face a greater risk of social and emotional isolation if their financial situation has deteriorated or they have lost their jobs, while men in particular are vulnerable if they have recently separated or divorced.

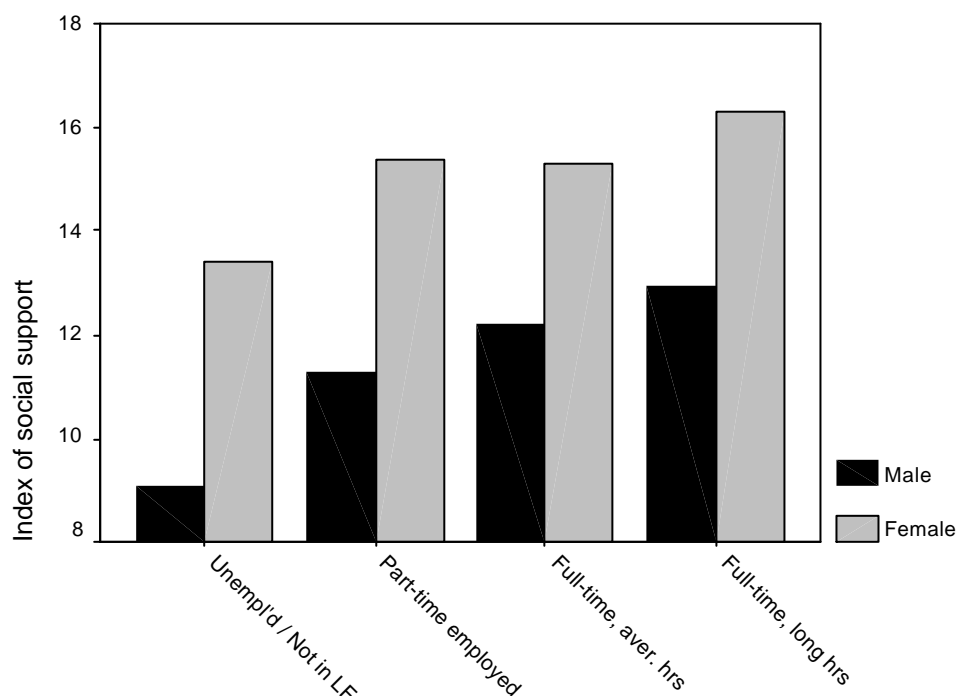
5. Social engagement and community participation

The research described in Section 1 suggests that social engagement and social integration exert a powerful influence on the wellbeing of those who live alone. Having already examined patterns of loneliness and social support among Australia's young adults, this paper now explores the relationship between these patterns and social engagement and community participation. We look first at aspects of social integration based on formal or semi-formal engagement in paid work, caring for others, and clubs and sporting groups and then examine some of the more informal facets of community participation such as socialising with friends and relatives.

5.1 Around the water cooler: Paid work and social support

Among our target age group of 25 to 44 year-olds, there are significant differences in the levels of support available to individuals with different degrees of participation in the labour market. Using the Index of Social Support, people who are unemployed have lower levels of support and friendship than those in either part-time or full-time employment.¹⁶ In other words, they experience greater levels of loneliness and isolation. Figure 10 illustrates these contrasts. This figure is arranged such that columns further to the right indicate a greater degree of participation in paid employment, as measured by work hours per week. 'Long' work hours are defined here as 45 or more hours of paid employment per week (Weston *et al.* 2004, p. 1), while part-time hours may be anywhere from one to 34 hours of paid employment per week.

Figure 10 Personal support and friendship by employment status among 25 to 44 year-old men and women



Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

¹⁶ To investigate this, a chi-square statistic was used, and this does find significant differences among people who are in full-time employment, part-time employment, or unemployed/not in the labour force ($\chi^2 = 47.05$, $df = 10$, $N = 4,263$, $p < .001$).

Figure 10 shows a steady rise in levels of support and friendship among men as their level of participation in paid employment increases. Among women on the other hand, there is little difference in perceptions of support among those in part-time employment and those working full-time on average hours, although the highest levels of support are found among female employees with the longest work hours.

The most obvious explanation for these findings is that the workplace provides an important source of interpersonal contact and support. By participating in paid employment, individuals are able to build and sustain friendships with colleagues, relieve loneliness, find others to lean on or confide in, and participate in social networks and communities which extend beyond the workplace. On the other hand, individuals who are unemployed have less access to such networks and communities. This explanation is consistent with Pocock's claim that work has increasingly become a source of social interaction, leaving less space for social interaction and social attachment in relation to the home and through non-work activities such as leisure, voluntary work and sport (Pocock 2003, p. 58). At the same time, there is no evidence from this data that long work hours are constraining men's or women's levels of perceived support and friendship.

It is also possible that further factors are influential here. Those individuals in paid employment may also be the kinds of people who have greater access to social resources, 'bridging' social capital, social networks that provide contact with diverse others, varied opportunities and external assets (Putnam 2000, p. 22; Stone *et al.* 2003, p. 4). These resources facilitate both their entry into and progress through paid work *and* their sense of social support and engagement.

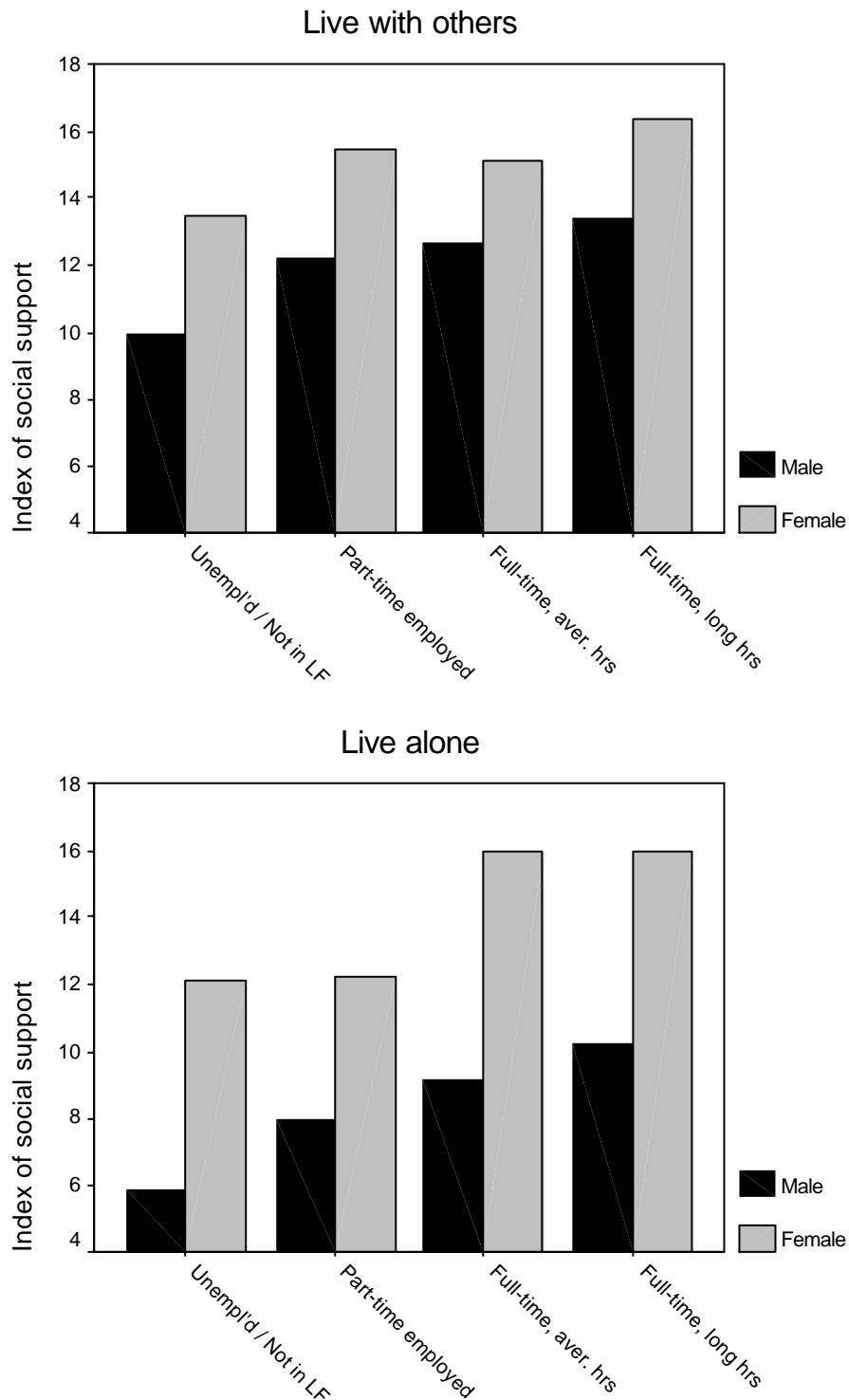
Is the association between social support and paid employment influenced by whether or not an individual lives alone or with others? It remains true that people with greater degrees of involvement in paid work also report higher levels of personal support and friendship whether they live alone or with others, although the contrast is stronger among people who live alone.¹⁷ However, because of gender differences, it is simplistic to compare individuals in different living situations as to their involvement in paid work and their levels of social support. Combining data for men and women distorts the findings in three ways:

1. More men than women live alone;
2. Women report systematically higher levels of personal support and friendship than men; and
3. Women are far more likely than men to be in part-time paid employment, while men are more likely than women to be in full-time employment and working long hours.

¹⁷ Among people who live with others, those who are unemployed or not in the labour force again have lower levels of support than those in employment. To investigate this, Cramer's *V* was used, and this does find significant differences ($V = .135, N = 3,765, p < .05$). Among people living alone, the contrast in perceptions of personal support and friendship between people with different degrees of participation in paid employment is also significant and stronger. Cramer's *V* again finds significant differences ($V = .363, N = 496, p < .001$). (Calculations using the chi-square statistic could not be performed once the sample was split into those who live with others and those who live alone, because for the latter group more than 20 per cent of cells had expected frequencies of less than five (Morgan *et al.* 2004, p. 103)).

It means that the overall levels of perceived support among those who work long full-time hours are pulled down by men's lower perceptions of support and their over-representation in this employment category, while levels of support among those who work part-time and live with others are pulled up by women's over-representation in part-time work. The following figure splits these findings by sex.

Figure 11 Personal support and friendship, by employment status and living situation among 25 to 44 year-old men and women



Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

Figure 11 shows that for men, whether they live alone or with others, their levels of support and friendship increase as their hours of paid employment increase. This suggests that contact with others through paid work is an especially important source of personal support and friendship for men. For women, the picture is a little more complex. Women who live alone perceive similar levels of support whether they are unemployed, not in the labour force or in part-time employment, while those working average hours or long full-time hours indicate higher, but again similar, levels of support. For women who live with others however, levels of support are, in fact, slightly lower among full-time workers on average hours than among part-time workers.

These patterns suggest that men rely far more than women on paid employment as an important source of their personal support and friendship, while women enjoy a greater variety of sources. However, for women living alone in particular, participation in full-time employment is associated with higher perceived levels of support and friendship. A British study of a cohort of 11000 33-year-olds found similar results. Employed women reported greater levels of support than women outside the paid workforce, but the levels were similar whether they worked part-time or full-time (Matthews *et al.* 1999, p. 136). This suggests that for women participation in the paid labour market is sufficient to provide opportunities for support, regardless of the number of hours worked.

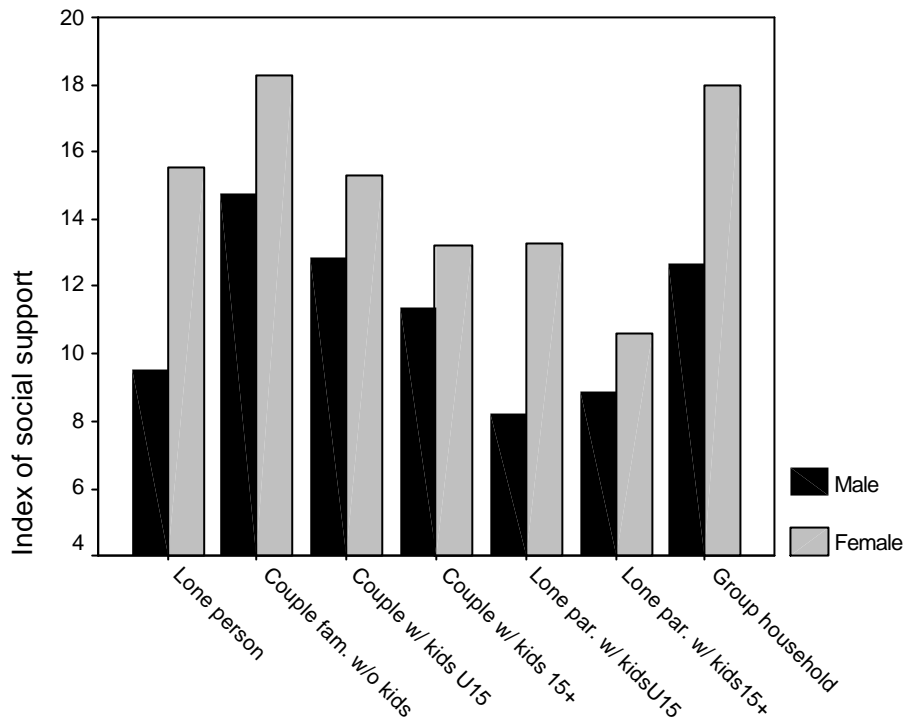
Looking only at people in some kind of paid employment, whether full-time or part-time, we find significant differences in the levels of social support experienced by employed people in different household types.¹⁸ Figure 12 illustrates these contrasts. They are similar to those for the sample overall, and this is not surprising given that close to 80 per cent of the sample are in paid employment. Again, it is lone parents living with children 15 years and older who experience the lowest levels of support and friendship, followed by individuals living by themselves. The highest levels of support are among people in couple families without children.

If we look only at people who are unemployed or not in the labour force, again there are significant differences in social support among people in different household types.¹⁹ The lowest levels of support and friendship are evident among people living alone and individuals in couple families with children 15 years and over. In contrast, the highest levels are among couple families either with younger children or without children. Figure 13 depicts these findings by sex. Note that among individuals who are unemployed or not in the labour force, in general women continue to report higher levels of support than men, and this gender gap is particularly large for people living by themselves and even larger for people in group households.

¹⁸ Cramer's *V* was used, and did find significant differences ($V = .159, N = 3301, p < .001$).

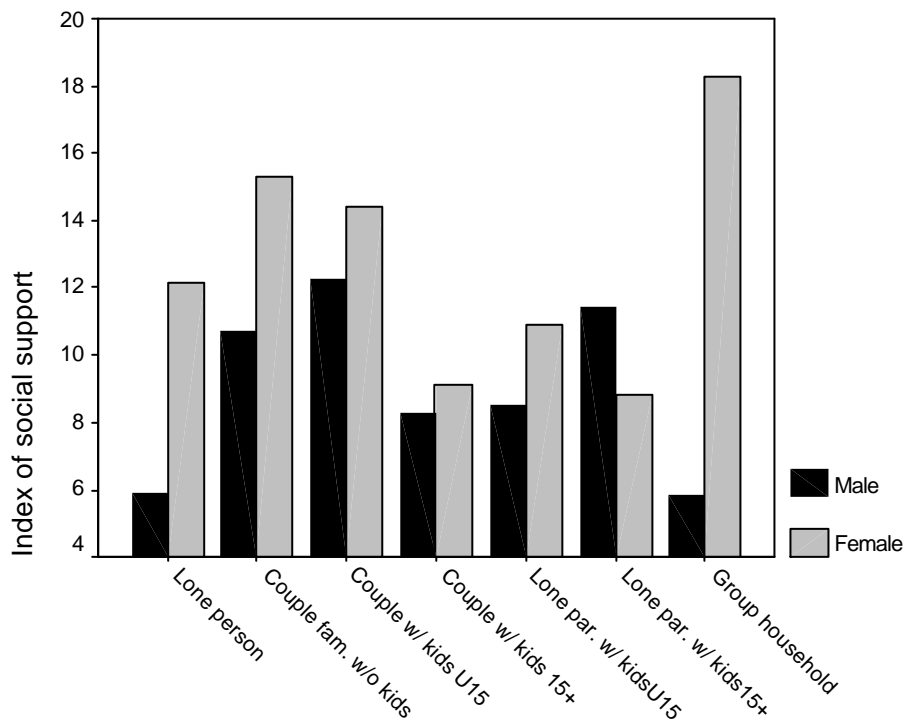
¹⁹ Cramer's *V* was used, and did find significant differences ($V = .277, N = 913, p < .001$).

Figure 12 Personal support and friendship, by household type, among 25 to 44 year-old men and women who are employed



Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

Figure 13 Personal support and friendship, by household type, among 25 to 44 year-old men and women who are unemployed or not in the labour force



Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

Comparing Figures 12 and 13, employed men and women generally identify higher levels of social support than those who are unemployed or not in the labour force. However, participation in paid work appears to make more difference to men's levels of social support than women's. Between employed and unemployed individuals, the differences are greatest for men who live in group households, in childless couple families or by themselves and for women who live in couple households with older children, by themselves or in childless couple families.

5.2 Caring for others

If it is true that social engagement and social integration exercise a powerful positive effect on people's experience of loneliness, then participation in volunteering, caring for others and similar community activities should make a difference. This section begins with a brief outline of patterns of involvement in voluntary and caring work among young adults aged 25 to 44, before going on to assess the association between participation in such activities and loneliness.

The Appendix provides two tables which map the participation in different forms of care of individuals from different household types and in different employment situations. People's involvement in voluntary, charity and caring work is shaped by their parenting commitments, household type and participation in paid employment. As one might expect, today's 'singletons' spend less time each week caring for others, doing voluntary work and involving themselves in the sorts of activities that sustain community and neighbourhood relations than do their counterparts who live with family or friends. People living alone are less likely than people who live in couples and families to care for the children of others or for disabled or elderly relatives. Few individuals in any household do any of this work, but a slightly lower proportion of those who live alone participate in these activities and they are also less likely to engage in volunteer and charity work. (See Table A4 in the Appendix for more detail.)

Individuals in a couple household with children under 15 pull more than their weight when it comes to voluntary and charity work. They represent under half (47 per cent) of all adults aged 25 to 44, but over two-thirds (64 per cent) of those who engage in this kind of work. Parents, in both couple and single-adult households, are also over-represented among the people who care for disabled or elderly relatives.

For two of the three activities being considered here, looking after other people's children and caring for disabled or elderly relatives, there is generally an inverse relationship between people's involvement in paid work and their involvement in these services. However, people employed part-time engage in voluntary or charity work in far greater proportions than those in either of the other two categories of employment.²⁰

What is the relationship between a formal or semi-formal engagement in caring or volunteering for others and feelings of loneliness or social support? A simple comparison of people's perceptions of personal support and friendship and their

²⁰ See Table A5 in the Appendix for more detail.

involvement in each of the three forms of voluntary and caring work finds only weak relationships between them.²¹ If we compare people who spend some time each week engaged in one of the three caring activities and people who spend no time, the resulting patterns are complex when broken down by household type. People who spend time each week looking after others' children and dwell in households comprised of a couple family with children or a lone parent household with a child under 15 report higher levels of support than non-carers in such households. Among those who care for a disabled or elderly relative, people in households comprised of a lone person, a lone parent with a child under 15 or another household,²² describe higher levels of support and friendship than the people in such households who do not spend any time involved in this care, while carers in couple households with younger or older children in fact describe lower levels of support than non-carers.

The only consistent pattern here is for people engaged in voluntary or charity work. Across all five household types, people who spend at least some time each week doing this work report higher levels of personal support and friendship than people who do none. The same is also true for people who are active members of sporting, hobby or community groups, as discussed below.

5.3 Participation in clubs and sports and loneliness

Among young Australian adults aged 25 to 44, about one third are members of a sporting, hobby or community-based association. Thirty eight per cent of men and 40 per cent of women who live alone are members of such groups, compared to 33 per cent of men and 31 per cent of women who live with others. Greater proportions of men than women in most household types are involved, due to the greater participation by men in sport and physical activities, including activities organised by a club, association or other organisation (ABS 2002, pp. 3-4). However, among individuals living alone, in single-parent households with younger children or in group households, women are more likely than men to be members of sporting, hobby or community-based associations. The biggest gender gap is in couple families with older children, where far more men than women are members. Table 5 compares these findings.

²¹ Because the variable regarding personal support and friendship is normally distributed while the three variables regarding voluntary and caring work are nominal, the statistic Eta was used to investigate the relationship between them. For 'Looking after other people's children', Eta = .1. For 'Caring for a disabled or elderly relative', Eta = .1. For 'Voluntary or charity work', Eta = .12. These are considered to be smaller than typical effect sizes (Morgan *et al.* 2004, p. 91).

²² These household types include lone parents with children 15 and over, group households, multi-family households and 'other related family' households.

Table 5 Active membership of sporting, hobby or community-based associations among 25 to 44 year-old men and women

| Household type | Currently an active member of a sporting/hobby/community based association (%) | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| | Male | Female |
| Lone person | 33 | 40 |
| Couple family without children | 38 | 29 |
| Couple family with children under 15 | 37 | 34 |
| Couple family with children 15+ | 48 | 29 |
| Lone parent with children under 15 | 24 | 26 |
| Lone parent with children 15+ | 30 | 24 |
| Group household | 26 | 37 |
| Total | 37 | 32 |

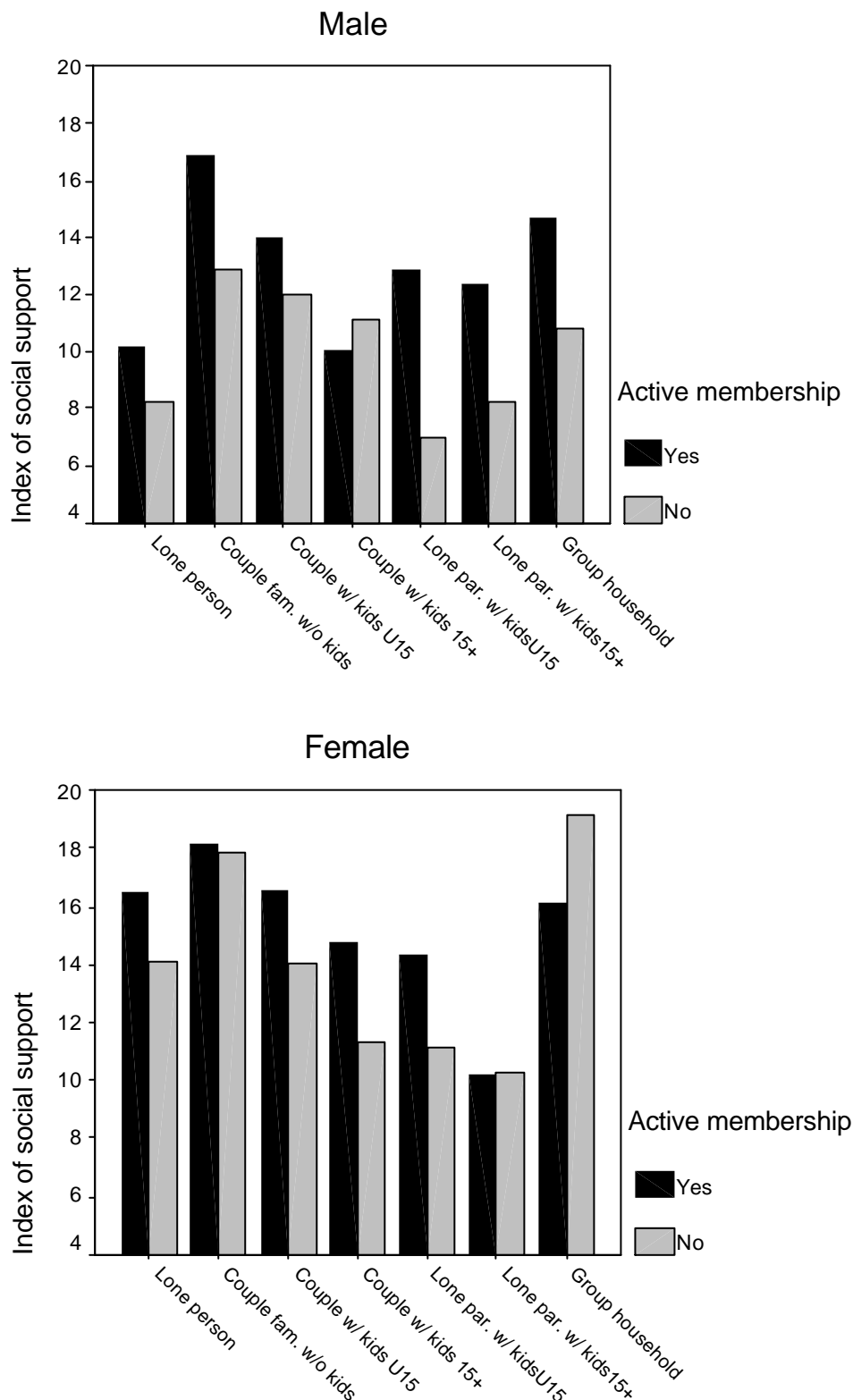
Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

People who are active members of sporting groups or community organisations perceive a higher level of support and friendship than people who are not members, but the relationship between these two variables is moderate only.²³

If we break down these variables by household type, we do see contrasts between members and non-members of sporting groups or community associations in their perceptions of personal support and friendship. Across every household type, individuals who are active members of such groups also describe higher levels of support. The gap in support is largest for lone parents with children under 15 and people living by themselves, but it is also evident for individuals in other household types. Figure 14 below splits these findings by sex. While this pattern holds for both men and women, the greatest gap in support between active members and non-members is evident among lone fathers with children.

²³ The statistic Eta was used (Eta = .11). This is considered to be a smaller than typical effect size (Morgan *et al.* 2004, p. 91).

Figure 14 Personal support and friendship, by household type and membership of community groups, among 25 to 44 year-old men and women



Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

Given how few individuals aged 25 to 44 in any household type participate in any of the three activities of voluntary work and care investigated in this paper, it is difficult to

make comparisons with much statistical certainty between people who spend time engaged in such activities and people who do not. Nevertheless, it does appear that there are two forms of community involvement consistently associated with higher levels of personal support and friendship: voluntary or charity work, and active membership of sporting groups and community organisations.

It is probably no coincidence that these two activities are both public and collective, focusing on work or interaction with others in public spaces such as school canteens, the offices of charities and community organisations, playing fields and so on. Wilkinson and Bittman (2003) make the point that involvement in voluntary and caring work outside the home allows people to make social and civic connections with others, encouraging a sense of reciprocity and solidarity among strangers, confidence in the good conduct of others and generalised trust (Wilkinson and Bittman 2003, pp. 7-8, 18-19). This helps explain the elevated perception of personal and social support among those people in our study who engage in voluntary and charity work or participate in sporting and community groups. They are more likely to report that they *do* have someone to lean on or confide in and they *can* get help from other people when they need it.

The relationship between these attitudes probably works both ways. Because they participate in sporting and community groups or do voluntary work, people develop the friendships and social networks that give them a sense of personal and social connection and support. Because they have friends and people to rely on or confide in, people join sporting and community groups with and through these friends or feel more socially supported to participate in such activities. In addition, both variables may be shaped by a third factor, personal levels of confidence, social skills and happiness, in that people who are socially confident and happy also generate friendships and participate in socially-orientated activities such as sports and community organisations.

Caring for other people's children does not have the same qualities of public and collective interaction but it does represent involvement in reciprocal relations of support and exchange, again across households, in this case among parents. Thus one might expect that participation in this activity would also be associated with an increased perception of personal support and this is the case. For all of the major household types in which there are children present, people who spend any time each week looking after other people's children also describe higher levels of personal support and friendship than people who do not spend any time in this activity. This is the case for couple families with children under 15, with older children, lone parents with children under 15, and lone parents with older children. The greatest gaps in support are among people in households with children 15 and older, both lone parent and couple households. Among people living in other kinds of households, very few spend any time looking after other people's children, making comparisons difficult.

5.4 Informal social networks: Socialising with friends and relatives

Today's 'singletons' have as much, if not more, contact with friends and relatives as other adults living in couple or family households. The HILDA survey includes data on how often people socialise with friends and relatives who do not live with them. Table 6 illustrates that people in group households show the highest frequencies of socialising. Singletons too see friends and relatives relatively often: 72 per cent report that they socialise with friends and relatives living elsewhere at least once a week, compared to

61 per cent of people living with others. This is not surprising. People who live with family members, relatives and others have a readily accessible source of social contact and interaction, while people who live alone must take more active steps to make social contact. The proportion of lone parents with older children who see friends and relatives every day is greater than for individuals in any other household type. However, this proportion drops where lone parents socialise at lower frequencies, for example once a week, and they are overtaken by lone parents with younger children and by individuals in childless couples. The least socialising of all is done by individuals in couple families with younger children.

Table 6 Cumulative frequency of socialising with friends and relatives, by household type, among 25 to 44 year-old men and women (%)

| | | Every day | Several times a week | About once a week | 2 or 3 times a month | About once a month |
|--------------------------------------|--------|-----------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Lone person | Male | 6 | 40 | 71 | 85 | 92 |
| | Female | 5 | 45 | 76 | 87 | 92 |
| | All | 5 | 42 | 72 | 86 | 92 |
| Couple family without children | Male | 1 | 27 | 64 | 82 | 91 |
| | Female | 1 | 28 | 63 | 86 | 93 |
| | All | 1 | 27 | 64 | 84 | 92 |
| Couple family with children under 15 | Male | 2 | 18 | 54 | 76 | 89 |
| | Female | 4 | 30 | 60 | 79 | 90 |
| | All | 3 | 24 | 57 | 78 | 90 |
| Couple family with children 15+ | Male | 6 | 34 | 65 | 75 | 89 |
| | Female | 3 | 23 | 57 | 80 | 91 |
| | All | 5 | 29 | 61 | 77 | 90 |
| Lone parent with children under 15 | Male | 8 | 31 | 57 | 83 | 94 |
| | Female | 7 | 34 | 70 | 83 | 93 |
| | All | 7 | 33 | 68 | 83 | 93 |
| Lone parent with children 15+ | Male | 15 | 40 | 64 | 71 | 83 |
| | Female | 1 | 27 | 50 | 73 | 81 |
| | All | 8 | 34 | 58 | 72 | 82 |
| Group household | Male | 4 | 47 | 82 | 94 | 98 |
| | Female | 1 | 62 | 83 | 91 | 93 |
| | All | 3 | 54 | 82 | 93 | 96 |

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

Among individuals aged 25 to 44, both men and women who live alone socialise more frequently than those who live with others. Among men, 40 per cent of those living by themselves see friends and relatives several times a week or more. Single fathers with older children are the same, and men in group households have even more active social lives. Men in couple families with young children do the least socialising, with only 18 per cent of these men seeing see friends and relatives several times a week or more.

Among women, again singletons and women in group houses have the highest frequencies of socialising, but single mothers with older children do less than most other groups. Men and women in the same living situations show similar levels of socialising overall, although women report slightly higher frequencies in five of the seven household types categorised here.

Lone fathers with children show frequencies of socialising comparable to those of men in couple households, with 31 per cent of single fathers with younger children and 40 per cent of those with older children seeing friends and relatives at least several times a week. However, for lone fathers, getting together with friends and relatives does not appear to compensate for a sense of social isolation, given that men in these household situations experience such low levels of access to personal support and friendship. There are at least two possible explanations for this. As discussed earlier, there is evidence that for men it is the absence of an intimate partner or other adult company that makes the most significant difference to their levels of social support. Many men rely on the direct support of their female partners and the social networks they maintain or on the social support offered by other adults, for example in group households. But where men live alone or with only their children, such support is not available. As a result, despite lone fathers and men in other household situations reporting similar levels of socialising with friends and relatives, these activities are not enough to assuage the sense of emotional isolation experienced by single fathers.

It is also possible that the quality of this socialising makes a difference. There is growing evidence that it is not simply the size of an individual's social networks, but also the quality, that makes a difference to the likelihood of experiencing loneliness (Victor *et al.* 2000, p. 412). While lone fathers socialise with friends and relatives as much as other men, perhaps the quality of their social networks is poorer. Support for this hypothesis comes from our earlier finding that among men in all household situations, single fathers with children are the group most likely to describe low levels of social interaction in their neighbourhoods. Nearly half report that neighbours 'rarely' or 'never' help each other out or do things together, while men in other household situations report a greater degree of community interaction. For intimacy or mutual aid, lone fathers may be relying on informal networks characterised by relatively weak norms of trust and reciprocity and thin resources.

The factors associated with lower levels of perceived support and friendship include being male, being the single parent of a younger child, and living alone. From the preceding discussion, we can now add the factor of being unemployed or out of the labour force which makes a difference to levels of support for individuals in various household situations but exerts the strongest influence on people who live alone. Three other factors include engagement in voluntary or charity work, active membership of a sporting, hobby or community group and, in households where children are present, participation in looking after other people's children.

6. Conclusion

In an age where technological developments have meant that it has never been easier to reach out and contact someone, many Australians feel lonely and isolated. They have no one to confide in or assist them, and they lack the friendships and social connections they desire. People's feelings of loneliness and their perceptions of their access to personal support and friendship are useful indicators of the health of personal relationships and communities. This research has shown that there are significant differences among the Australian population in social support and that particular groups in the community experience considerable levels of loneliness and social isolation.

Among young adults aged 25 to 44 in Australia, the most important risk factor for loneliness among men and, to a lesser extent among women, is living alone. Women who live alone and women who live with others indicate similar levels of support and friendship, while men living alone describe significantly lower levels than other men. If people are asked about the extent to which they 'often feel very lonely', it is the individuals, both men and women, living in single-adult households who feel the loneliest. Among men, the loneliest are those who live alone (representing 16 per cent of all men aged 25 to 44), followed by lone fathers living with children (representing five per cent). Among women, it is lone mothers living with children who are loneliest (representing 13 per cent of all women aged 25 to 44), followed by women living alone (representing eight per cent).

Living without other adults present puts men at greater risk of social isolation. Using a composite Index of Social Support, the lowest levels of support and friendship are experienced by lone fathers with children and lone men. This risk is less for women, given that women who live alone report levels of support and friendship higher than those among single mothers with children and at least as high as those of women in couple households with younger children.

For both men and women, being a single parent living with children is a further risk factor for social loneliness. This emphasises the fact that single parenting is hard and time-consuming work which can easily isolate parents from potential sources of support and friendship and make access to them difficult. There are gender differences here too. Among men, single fathers with younger children have less support than single fathers with older children, while among women it is the single mothers with older children who are worse off.

In fact, this research shows a gender gap in loneliness that persists across all ages and all household types. Men are consistently lonelier than women, from early adulthood right through to old age, regardless of the types of households in which they live. Among young adults aged 25 to 44, single fathers living with children and men living alone are the loneliest of all: they are more likely to report low levels of social interaction in their neighbourhoods, and to experience poorer levels of physical, emotional and mental health than men in other household situations. In other words, these men's experiences of social isolation are exacerbated by poorer health.

The persistent gender gap in personal support and friendship is likely to be shaped by both the structure and the quality of men's and women's social networks. Structural aspects of social networks include the frequency of social contacts, their density and

size, composition and homogeneity, geographic dispersion, the strength of ties, and so on (Stone 2001, p. 7). While the HILDA data are limited with respect to these aspects of social networks, our analysis reveals that women engage in only slightly more socialising than men in most household types. However, while men and women socialise with friends and relatives at similar frequencies, women may be doing other things that add to their sense of support and friendship, things either neglected or done less often by men. First, women may put more time and energy into activities which sustain informal social connections. Putnam (2000, p. 95) notes American evidence that women make more long-distance calls to family and friends than men, send far more greeting cards and gifts, write far more personal letters, spend more time visiting with friends, and are more likely to use computers for e-mail rather than games. In short, women are 'more avid social capitalists than men'.

In addition, as other research documents, women tend to have more extensive and supportive social relations than men:

Women, as opposed to men, are more likely to have larger and more varied networks, as well as more likely to report having a close confidante and that the confidante is someone other than their spouse... Women also provide and receive more support and have a wider "net of concern" than men, that is to say, they spend more time involved in responding to requests and support from other people... Furthermore, women can more readily mobilise support when in need... and men tend to have fewer emotionally intimate relationships than women. (Fuhrer and Stansfeld 2002, p. 812)

Men have a narrower range of sources of emotional support than women, and tend to be more reliant on their spouses or partners to meet their needs for closeness and intimacy. This also means that they are left at greater vulnerability to loneliness and isolation than women if they are separated or divorced. And even where men do have other adults for company, for example in group households, they report lower levels of social support than women in such households.

As is clear from our analysis of the HILDA data, the gender gap in support and friendship also reflects the differing quality of men's and women's social networks. Men consistently report less access than women to personal and social support and friendship, even though they socialise with friends and relatives at rates close to those of women. Men are more likely than women to agree that 'People don't come to visit me as often as I'd like', 'I don't have anyone I can confide in', or 'I have no one to lean on in times of trouble'. And men are less likely than women to agree that 'I seem to have a lot of friends', 'There is someone who can always cheer me up when I'm down', 'When I need someone to help me out, I can usually find someone', and so on.

Our findings are similar to those in two large-scale British studies, both documenting that women receive greater degrees of confiding or emotional support than men (Fuhrer and Stansfeld 2002; Matthews *et al.* 1999). Matthews *et al.* (1999, p. 136) note that particularly large gender differences showed up in situations where people felt down or distressed and needed someone to talk to (distress support), or were sick and needed someone to help around the house or with shopping for example (domestic help). On the other hand, men tended to receive more practical or instrumental support than

women (Fuhrer and Stansfeld 2002, p. 819), a type of support which is not assessed in the HILDA survey.

Various studies on same-sex friendships have found that friendships among women involve more intimacy, attachment, caring, self-disclosure and trust and provide more emotional support than friendships among men (Oswald *et al.* 2004, p. 416). Women rate their same-sex friendships as more intimate, enjoyable and nurturing than their cross-sex friendships, while the reverse is true for men with cross-sex friendships being, in general, more supportive than male friendships (Oswald *et al.* 2004, pp. 417, 436). Among boys and young men in Australia research shows that such patterns begin at an early age. Some boys distinguish between ‘mates’ and ‘friends’. With mates, one shares activities like drinking or smoking, having fun and behaving like ‘yobs’ or ‘lads’, but not talking about problems or offering support. In contrast, friendship involves a deeper sharing of emotions, support and intimacy (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003, p. 62).

Wider norms of gender shape such patterns. Many men have been taught to be stoic and emotionally inexpressive, to avoid and denigrate stereotypically feminine qualities such as love and compassion which leave a person open and vulnerable to others, and to be psychologically and emotionally isolated (Doyle 1989, pp. 148-160). Among boys and young men, homophobia is an important barrier to closer friendships with other boys (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003, p. 66). Among adults, men with more traditional attitudes towards masculinity and higher scores on scales of emotional restraint and homophobia also report fewer intimate friendships with other men (Bank and Hansford 2000) and fewer cross-sex friendships than other men (Reeder 2003). Men living alone, lone fathers with children and other men may be relying on social networks that offer not only less emotional support and connection than those available to women, but are also marked by negative interactions with others including ‘unwanted or aversive contacts, ineffective support and social pressure to adopt or maintain unhealthy behaviours’ (Fuhrer and Stansfeld 2002, p. 813). These too have a detrimental impact on physical and emotional wellbeing.

This research documents that social engagement and social integration do make a difference to people’s perceptions of loneliness and support. People are more likely to report that personal support and friendship are available to them if they participate in paid employment, contribute some of their time each week to voluntary and charity work, are parents looking after other people’s children, or actively participate in sporting, hobby or community-based associations. There is an association between an elevated perception of personal support and participation in public, collective forms of volunteerism and charity work and it is likely that the relationship is reinforced by both behaviours. Individuals who experience greater levels of support and friendship are more likely to spend time in voluntary and charity work, while individuals doing this work find that it intensifies their sense of social solidarity and community.

Given that longitudinal data on people’s perceptions of loneliness and social connection are not yet available, this paper cannot assess whether interpersonal relationships and informal social connections are declining as others have argued, for example with respect to the US (Putman 2000, pp. 93-114). Nevertheless, it is clear that in Australia there are groups for whom loneliness is routine and social isolation a way of life.

This study makes clear that for young adults, living alone does not mean being alone, at least in the case of women. For men on the other hand, living alone intensifies the lower

levels of personal and social support which men in general experience. Men who live by themselves or as single fathers with only their children are vulnerable to emotional and social isolation and although they appear to socialise with others as often as women do, they are far more likely to feel lonely and without access to support. And even men in group households experience relatively high levels of loneliness. One in six men aged 25 to 44 now lives alone, and one in 20 is a single father living with his children. The numbers of lone adult and single-parent households have increased significantly over the past 30 years. As this trend continues, lone men and single fathers face real risks of growing social isolation and marginalisation.

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Appendix

Given that other studies have distinguished between social and emotional loneliness (Green *et al.* 2001, pp. 281-282), is it possible to use this same division in assessing responses to the ten statements on loneliness and support in the HILDA survey? We used two methods to determine this, a content analysis of the items themselves and a principal axis factor analysis of responses to the items.

Using the content analysis modelled in a similar exercise by van Baarsen *et al.* (2001), these items can be divided into categories referring to emotional and social loneliness. Emotional items refer to qualitative aspects of relationships and include words such as *feel, miss* and *experience*. Social items are more directed to quantitative aspects of relationships and include words such as *enough people, plenty of people* and *always someone* (van Baarsen *et al.* 2001, p. 123). The following figure applies these classifications to the items in the HILDA questionnaire.

Figure A1 Items on social and emotional loneliness in the HILDA questionnaire

| |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Social loneliness</p> <p>(1) People don't come to visit me as often as I'd like</p> <p>(2) I often need help from other people but can't get it</p> <p>(3) I seem to have a lot of friends</p> <p>(4) I don't have anyone I can confide in</p> <p>(5) I have no one to lean on in times of trouble</p> <p>(6) There is someone who can always cheer me up when I'm down</p> <p>(10) When I need someone to help me out, I can usually find someone</p> |
| <p>Emotional loneliness</p> <p>(7) I often feel very lonely</p> <p>(8) I enjoy the time I spend with the people who are important to me</p> <p>(9) When something's on my mind, just talking with the people I know can make me feel better</p> |

However, the division between some of these items is not clear cut. For example, item (8) refers to the qualitative aspect of relationships in emphasising *enjoying* time and suggesting the emotional dimensions of loneliness, but agreement with the item also depends on being able to 'spend time with people'. Item (9) is similar. Item (6) focuses on the availability of people who can offer personal support, connoting the social dimensions of loneliness, but agreement with the item also depends on feeling 'down'.

In order to investigate further the possible existence of an underlying clustering in responses to the ten items on the HILDA questionnaire on perceptions of personal support and friendship, we used a principal axis factor analysis with varimax rotation. Two factors were requested on the basis that the items may cluster into two underlying constructs focused on social loneliness and emotional loneliness. Our analysis incorporated the reversed scores for the five negatively-phrased statements. Table A1 below shows the results. In the list of items, the text '(SL)' or '(EL)' after each item denotes whether it had been categorised as referring to social loneliness or emotional loneliness respectively.

Table A1 Factor loadings for the rotated factors, items on social and emotional loneliness

| Item | Factor loading | | Communality |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------|-------------|
| | 1 | 2 | |
| I have no one to lean on in times of trouble. (SL) | .71 | | .56 |
| I don't have anyone I can confide in. (SL) | .70 | | .55 |
| I often feel very lonely. (EL) | .62 | | .32 |
| I often need help from other people but can't get it. (SL) | .55 | | .29 |
| People don't come to visit me as often as I'd like. (SL) | .51 | | .24 |
| I seem to have a lot of friends. (SL) | .37 | | .22 |
| When something's on my mind, just talking with the people I know can make me feel better. (EL) | | .74 | .38 |
| I enjoy the time I spend with the people who are important to me. (EL) | | .66 | .32 |
| When I need someone to help me out, I can usually find someone. (SL) | .42 | .64 | .48 |
| There is someone who can always cheer me up when I'm down. (SL) | | .45 | .26 |
| Eigenvalues | 2.35 | 1.84 | |
| % of variance | 23.51 | 18.4 | |

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

Note: Loadings < .3 are omitted.

On the basis of this factor analysis, responses to the ten HILDA statements do not cluster into two underlying constructs focused on social loneliness and emotional loneliness. In fact, clustering of items appears to be organised by whether the statements are phrased in the positive or negative. The first five of the six items under the first factor are phrased as negative statements, while all four of the items under the second factor are phrased as positive statements. This suggests that responses to these items in the HILDA survey are being biased by the phrasing of the statements.

Table A2 Agreement among 25 to 44 year-old men with the statement, 'I often feel very lonely,' by household type, on a 7-point scale

| Household type | | 1- Strongly disagree | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7- Strongly agree |
|-----------------------------------------|-------|----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------------------|
| Lone person | Row % | 15.0 | 22.2 | 13.9 | 16.1 | 13.5 | 13.5 | 5.9 |
| Couple family without children | Row % | 42.6 | 26.8 | 10.4 | 7.4 | 4.8 | 5.4 | 2.6 |
| Couple family with children under 15 | Row % | 36.8 | 27.4 | 10.6 | 11.4 | 7.6 | 3.8 | 2.4 |
| Couple family with children 15 and over | Row % | 24.7 | 21.0 | 12.8 | 16.0 | 8.1 | 10.5 | 6.9 |
| Lone parent with children under 15 | Row % | 14.6 | 35.8 | 8.8 | 14.8 | 3.4 | 11.6 | 11.0 |
| Lone parent with children 15 and over | Row % | 16.7 | 27.9 | 10.1 | 18.7 | 15.6 | 5.4 | 5.6 |
| Group household | Row % | 11.9 | 41.4 | 10.4 | 7.7 | 15.9 | 6.6 | 6.2 |

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

Table A3 Agreement among 25 to 44 year-old women with the statement, 'I often feel very lonely,' by household type, on a 7-point scale

| Household type | | 1- Strongly disagree | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7- Strongly agree |
|-----------------------------------------|-------|----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------------------|
| Lone person | Row % | 24.1 | 27.6 | 13.7 | 11.6 | 9.6 | 9.4 | 3.9 |
| Couple family without children | Row % | 41.6 | 23.8 | 11.6 | 10.8 | 5.1 | 4.3 | 2.8 |
| Couple family with children under 15 | Row % | 35.1 | 26.2 | 10.2 | 10.8 | 8.3 | 5.9 | 3.5 |
| Couple family with children 15 and over | Row % | 27.3 | 21.9 | 19.8 | 15.8 | 4.1 | 2.9 | 8.3 |
| Lone parent with children under 15 | Row % | 20.5 | 15.9 | 18.2 | 17.0 | 9.8 | 8.8 | 9.8 |
| Lone parent with children 15 and over | Row % | 19.8 | 22.2 | 12.8 | 14.1 | 12.5 | 11.9 | 6.8 |
| Group household | Row % | 21.4 | 31.2 | 27.9 | 9.0 | 3.2 | 7.2 | 0.0 |

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

Table A4 maps individual participation in three forms of voluntary and caring work by household type. The columns identify the proportion of all individuals from each household type who engage in each form of care, the proportion of these individuals according to each household type, and the proportion of all caring hours contributed by individuals from each household type. In other words, for each type of care, the first column shows proportions of individuals, the second shows proportions of carers, and the third shows proportions of caring hours.

Table A4 Contributions to care among individuals aged 25 to 44 from different household types

| Individual's household type | Prop'n of pop'n | Looking after other people's children | | | Caring for a disabled or elderly relative | | | Voluntary or charity work | | |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| | | Proportion of this HH type who do any of this care | Proportion of all carers who are from this HH type | Contrib'n to all care hours performed (%) | Proportion of this HH type who do any of this care | Proportion of all carers who are from this HH type | Contrib'n to all care hours performed (%) | Proportion of this HH type who do any of this care | Proportion of all carers who are from this HH type | Contrib'n to all care hours performed (%) |
| Lone person | 11.9 | 8.3 | 9.0 | 7.7 | 3.0 | 7.0 | 2.3 | 13.8 | 8.1 | 7.9 |
| Couple family without children | 19.3 | 4.2 | 7.7 | 4.8 | 3.6 | 13.5 | 11.0 | 9.8 | 10.2 | 10.4 |
| Couple family with children under 15 | 47.3 | 12.6 | 57.8 | 55.4 | 5.3 | 50.5 | 50.7 | 23.7 | 64.1 | 59.2 |
| Couple family with children 15 and over | 7.6 | 5.6 | 3.9 | 4.1 | 7.6 | 11.0 | 20.1 | 14.8 | 6.0 | 6.9 |
| Lone parent with children under 15 | 6.5 | 23.5 | 13.9 | 19.9 | 7.5 | 9.1 | 6.6 | 19.2 | 6.7 | 5.9 |
| Lone parent with children 15 and over | 2.7 | 12.0 | 2.6 | 2.5 | 11.2 | 4.8 | 5.1 | 16.3 | 2.2 | 3.5 |
| Group household | 2.5 | 11.2 | 2.4 | 1.9 | 3.4 | 1.6 | 0.3 | 11.4 | 1.4 | 4.5 |

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2

Table A5 maps individual participation in three forms of voluntary and caring work by employment situation and household type. Data in the table refer to the proportion of individuals from each household type/employment situation engaging in *any* of this type of care. (For each activity, data on the amount of time contributed by individuals and on the overall contribution made by individuals from different household types and employment situations are not included.)

Table A5 Contributions to care among individuals aged 25 to 44 from different household types and with differing levels of participation in paid work

| Individual's household type | Looking after other people's children | | | Caring for a disabled or elderly relative | | | Voluntary or charity work | | |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | Full-time employed | Part-time employed | Unemployed or not in the labour force | Full-time employed | Part-time employed | Unemployed or not in the labour force | Full-time employed | Part-time employed | Unemployed or not in the labour force |
| Lone person | 7.6 | 11.5 | 9.8 | 2.7 | 2.9 | 5.2 | 13.6 | 12.7 | 10.0 |
| Couple family with no children under 15 | 4.0 | 6.7 | 6.2 | 3.1 | 4.3 | 13.7 | 8.1 | 20.9 | 17.2 |
| Couple family with children under 15 | 8.6 | 16.4 | 17.3 | 4.4 | 5.7 | 6.8 | 16.6 | 35.0 | 27.2 |
| Lone parent with children under 15 | 10.2 | 38.4 | 20.5 | 2.1 | 8.8 | 8.8 | 6.5 | 27.6 | 19.9 |
| Other household | 10.5 | 18.0 | 16.7 | 7.1 | 14.0 | .8 | 11.5 | 22.0 | 13.2 |
| Total | 7.1 | 16.3 | 15.3 | 3.9 | 6.0 | 7.8 | 12.7 | 29.5 | 22.4 |

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 2



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