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PRESS RELEASE FROM THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
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Family breakdown wreaks emotional havoc at Christmas for the elderly

Nearly a quarter of a million people aged 75 and over in the UK will spend Christmas Day alone, an independent opinion poll for the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) and Independent Age reveals today.

And 40 per cent of those home alone on the biggest day of the year have children living in the UK.

The scale of the loneliness problem in the UK is illustrated by the fact that the 246,000 elderly people who will be friendless on Christmas Day is equivalent to the population of a city the size of Brighton.

Worse, an even larger group may see someone on Christmas day, but for the rest of the year have no contact whatsoever with other human beings. About 370,000 over 75s spend 'zero hours' with other people on a typical day; nearly a fifth of older people living alone.

The poll shines a spotlight on the devastating effects of family breakdown upon older people.

'Today's findings are heart-wrenching,' said CSJ Executive Director Gavin Poole. 'We know about the tragic impact of family breakdown on the youngest members of our society. But now we're seeing the consequences for older people. For so many to spend Christmas day alone while their family celebrates elsewhere is a modern tragedy.'

Janet Morrison, Chief Executive of Independent Age, commented: 'Sadly the figures suggest being alone, and being alone on Christmas Day, is more prevalent amongst older people than many of us would like to believe or should be prepared to accept.'

As well as an increasing number of divorcees arriving at retirement age, family breakdown has also led to more and more younger people becoming estranged from their ageing parents.

Today's poll of 2000 elderly people, conducted by Survation by telephone, one of the largest of its kind, has exposed the real extent of the isolation epidemic among older people in the UK.

Many who responded reduced pollsters to tears. 'I'm 88 and I have nobody at all. I'm on my own', said one person.

One 90 year-old woman from Yorkshire, when asked how much time she spends with other people, replied, 'Does the TV count? I see people on the TV all day.'

Another said, 'Some days the only person I speak to is the boy in the shop when I pick up my paper.'

The findings confirm extensive research and evidence gathering published earlier this year. The CSJ's groundbreaking report, *Age of Opportunity*, argued that any strategy to transform the lives of the poorest older people in Britain begins with combating social isolation.

But the CSJ report also concentrated on solutions. For if the bad news is the huge number of isolated elderly, the good news is that, in many cases, those people are known to someone.

Whether police officers on the beat, fire officers conducting home safety checks or GPs and social workers – many agencies see isolation first-hand. What is desperately needed is for them to connect those people to local voluntary groups who can provide the kind of companionship the state cannot.

The poll was conducted by telephone by Survation between 16th-21st December 2011. The population sample was 2003 single-occupancy households where the resident's age was 75 years and over.

It found that 12 per cent of the age group were spending Christmas Day alone – of these people 40 per cent had children living in the UK. In addition, 18 per cent had no human contact on a typical day – of these 66 per cent had children living in the UK.

FURTHER DETAILS ON METHODOLOGY

Sampling Method: A random sample of telephone numbers of single occupancy households where the resident's age was 75 years and over was drawn from the BT database of domestic telephone numbers.

Data Weighting: Data were weighted to the profile of single occupancy households where the resident's was 75 years and over using the best available data to set the weighting targets. Data were weighted by gender, age, socio-economic group and region.

Weighting targets for age and region were calculated from the Office of National Statistics Neighbourhood Statistics website, which provides demographic statistics derived from the 2001 UK Census. Weighting targets for gender and socio-economic group were derived from proprietary data.

FACTS AND FIGURES

People 65 and over in the UK: 10.2 million

People 75 and over in the UK: 4.9 million

People 85 and over in the UK: 1.4 million

Single occupants in the UK: 7.5 million
Single occupants 65 and over: 3.4 million
Single occupants 75 and over: 2 million

Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS), ONS
Produced by Fertility and Family Analysis Unit, ONS Centre for
Demography

LONELINESS

Half of all older people cite the television as their main form of company

Help the Aged, Isolation and Loneliness Policy Statement, Help the Aged, 2008, p6

Over a million people 65 and over who are often and always lonely

Age Concern and Help the Aged, 2009

For media inquiries, please contact Nick Wood of Media Intelligence Partners Ltd on 07889 617003 or 0203 008 8146 or Alistair Thompson on 07970 162225 or 0203 008 8145.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The Centre for Social Justice is an independent think tank established, by Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP in 2004, to seek effective solutions to the poverty that blights parts of Britain.

In July 2007 the group published Breakthrough Britain. Ending the Costs of Social Breakdown. The paper presented over 190 policy proposals aimed at ending the growing social divide in Britain.

Subsequent reports have put forward proposals for reform of the police, prisons, social housing, the asylum system and family law. Other reports have dealt with street gangs and early intervention to help families with young children.