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Income Plays a Role in Older Adults' Happiness, According to New AARP Foundation Study

Research by NORC at the University of Chicago Examines Characteristics, Risk of Loneliness in Senior Population

WASHINGTON, DC—In a new study funded by **AARP Foundation**, researchers from NORC at the University of Chicago found that nearly half of older adults (62 and older) in the United States experience some degree of loneliness. What's more, lonely adults are more likely to have lower income and fewer assets than their non-lonely peers.

The study is part of Connect2Affect, a collaborative effort spearheaded by AARP Foundation to learn more about the effects of isolation and loneliness in older adults. Using data obtained with support from the National Institute on Aging and the National Institutes of Health, the researchers examined the frequency of loneliness among older adults in the U.S. and identified the characteristics that indicate a high risk.

"The results of this study make it clear that income is a significant factor in social connectedness said Lisa Marsh Ryerson, president of AARP Foundation. "We need more research examining the effects of loneliness and social isolation on low-income older adults and other, often marginalized groups so that we can develop effective strategies to increase social connections."

Nearly half (48 percent) of the respondents feel some degree of loneliness. According to the study, 29 percent experience "occasional" loneliness while 19 percent define their level of loneliness as "frequent." Socioeconomic status stands out as a differentiator between non-lonely and lonely individuals. Lonely older adults are significantly more likely to have an annual household income of less than \$25,000 and assets less than \$10,000, and are more likely overall to be in the lowest income group.

Marital status is another strong indicator of loneliness. Both married and unmarried older adults can be lonely — but the lonely group is less likely to be married than the non-lonely group, and more likely to be divorced, separated or widowed. The data show that 14 percent of married older adults and 30 percent of unmarried older adults fall into the lonely group. Married women are at a higher risk of loneliness than married men, but unmarried women are at a lower risk of loneliness than unmarried men.

Marital quality further distinguishes between lonely and non-lonely married older adults. Those with more support and less strain in their marital relationship are at lower risk of loneliness.

The Connect2Affect website includes a searchable directory where users can find local resources to help them connect with their community. The site also includes a fast, easy self-assessment test to identify isolation risk.

For more information about social isolation, loneliness and the Connect2Affect platform, please visit connect2affect.org.

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About Connect2Affect

AARP Foundation is developing innovative ways to address social isolation through Connect2Affect, a platform to help end isolation and build the social connections older adults need to thrive. A collaborative effort, Connect2Affect (connect2affect.org) features research, tools and resources to help people evaluate isolation risk, reach out to others who may be feeling lonely and disengaged, and find practical ways to reconnect to the community.

About AARP Foundation

AARP Foundation works to ensure that low-income older adults have nutritious food, affordable housing, a steady income, and strong and sustaining bonds. We collaborate with individuals and organizations who share our commitment to innovation and our passion for problem-solving. Supported by vigorous legal advocacy, we create and advance effective solutions that help struggling older adults transform their lives. AARP Foundation is the affiliated charity of AARP.

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