Loneliness and quality of life among older UK residents under covid-19– The role of digital exclusion and income

*Lancaster Town and Gown Event, 07 October 2021*
Study Aims

- To explore associations between low income, financial worries & digital exclusion
- How common is digital exclusion among the British older population under covid-19?
- Explore links between digital exclusion and life satisfaction, loneliness & quality of relationships
Social contact is important for wellbeing

Well established link between lack of social contact, loneliness, reduced wellbeing and poor mental health (Wenger et al 1996; Victor, Scambler & Bond 2009)

Access to digital technologies can be important to enable contact (Olphert et al 2005, Musselwhite 2018)

Digital inclusion is important especially under covid-19: 26% were self-isolating at some point pre June 2020, and 15% were self-isolating in April and May)
Data & Methods

- ELSA Covid-19 Study (April 2020) linked to financial variables from ELSA wave 9 (2019)
- N= 7,040 completed interviews (5,825 core members, 1,189 partners and 26 (sample type na)
- Crosstabulations by age (5 year & 10 year age bands)
- OLS and Logistic Regression and mediation modelling
Dependent Variables

Lacking relationships:

How often do you feel:
- Lack of companionship
- Left out
- Isolated from others
- Lonely

Life satisfaction:

How satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
Likert-scale 0-10

- CES-D Deprivation index:
- Please tell me if each of the following was true for you much
Change in Life satisfaction and loneliness over time:

46% of respondents aged 65 plus experienced a decline in their overall life satisfaction between 2019 (pre-pandemic) and 2020 (2nd wave of the pandemic)

30% experienced an increase in loneliness & an increase in a sense of a general lack in of relationships since 2019.

The percentage who reported feeling lonely “often during the week” has increased between 2019 and 2020 by 7%

12% of the ELSA covid-study respondents were not lonely in 2019 (ELSA wave 9), but were lonely in 2020.
Change in Life satisfaction and loneliness over time:

Of those who had no internet access during the pandemic, **25%** often felt lonely (but hadn’t before the pandemic), compared to **13%** among those who have internet access.

**40%** of those with no internet access saw a decrease in the quality of their relationships during the pandemic.
Internet frequency use since the coronavirus outbreak by Age Bands

- Never
- Less than monthly
- At least once a month (but not every week)
- At least once a week (but not every day)
- Every day, or almost every day
- More than once a day
Reasons for not using the internet more:

- Lack of IT skills: 56%
- Don’t trust the internet: 33.1%
- No reason to increase use: 26.1%
- Lack of access to equipment: 17%
- Lack of broadband access: 15.4%
- Time consuming: 15.2%
- Poor vision or equipment: 6%
- Don't know: 4.6%
- Health problems: 4.1%
- None of the above: 1.2%
Percent who never used the internet by income quintile

Income Quintiles

1 2 3 4 5

Never uses the internet
Communicating with family via different media in the past month (aged 65+)

- Speak on the Phone:
  - Less than once a week: 16%
  - Once or twice a week: 32%
  - 3 to 6 times a week: 24%
  - Daily: 29%

- Video Call:
  - Less than once a week: 60%
  - Once or twice a week: 25%
  - 3 to 6 times a week: 9%
  - Daily: 6%

- Write or Email:
  - Less than once a week: 64%
  - Once or twice a week: 20%
  - 3 to 6 times a week: 9%
  - Daily: 7%

- Text messages:
  - Less than once a week: 38%
  - Once or twice a week: 20%
  - 3 to 6 times a week: 17%
  - Daily: 25%
Regression Analysis: Lacking relationships on digital exclusion & controls
Regression Analysis: Life satisfaction on digital exclusion & controls

![Regression Analysis Diagram]
Mediation: Income (T), digital contact (M) & life satisfaction (Y)

Direct effect: No
Indirect effect: No
Mediation effect: 15%

Note: The model controls for gender, age, rural residence, BAME status, and chronic illness.
Summary

- Lacking contact to family & friends via the internet, phone and digital devices (digital exclusion):
  - Was very common under covid
  - Is strongly linked to low income and perceived financial struggles
  - Strong direct effects of both on self perceived lacking relationships to others, low life
Thank you for listening!