

19 June 2002

Coverage

Great Britain

Theme

Social and Welfare

Neighbourhood and community involvement

Nearly three-quarters of people believe neighbours in their area look out for each other and 87 per cent enjoy living in their local area according to a special report from the Office for National Statistics prepared for the Health Development Agency (HDA) and published today.

It is one of the first national surveys designed to measure different aspects of social capital and was commissioned by the HDA to improve understanding of social capital and its links to health. The questions were asked as part of the General Household Survey 2000/01.

Five aspects of social capital were investigated in the survey:

- civic engagement;
- neighbourliness;
- social networks;
- social support;
- perception of the local area.

Civic engagement

More than half of people felt well informed about local affairs (59 per cent) and that communities could influence decisions (56 per cent), but only a minority felt they personally could influence decisions in the area (26 per cent), were involved in a local organisation (21 per cent) or had taken action to solve a local problem (27 per cent).

Eighteen per cent of respondents 'felt civically engaged'; that is they felt well informed, believed they could influence decisions and agreed or strongly agreed that local people could affect decisions relating to the neighbourhood.

People's perceptions of their neighbourhood and community involvement – TSO £35. ISBN 0 11 6215518

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Neighbourliness

Around three-quarters of people believed that neighbours in their area looked out for each other (73 per cent), and similar proportions had done a favour for a neighbour (74 per cent) or had received a favour from a neighbour (72 per cent) during the last six months. Just over half (53 per cent) answered yes to all three of these questions.

Just under half of respondents (46 per cent) said they knew most or many people in the neighbourhood, while more than half (58 per cent) felt they could trust most or many of the people in their neighbourhood. This suggests that some people have a 'generalised trust' of others, that is they are trusting of people even if they do not know them personally.

Social networks

People were more likely to have a number of close friends living nearby than relatives. Thirty per cent had at least five close friends living nearby compared with 16 per cent with at least five close relatives nearby and 27 per cent had no close friends living in their local area, whereas 44 per cent had no relatives they felt close to living nearby.

Two-thirds (66 per cent) had a 'satisfactory friendship network', that is they saw or spoke to friends at least once a week and had at least one close friend who lived nearby. Just over half (52 per cent) had a 'satisfactory relatives network', (based on similar criteria for relatives). Twenty per cent of people had neither.

Social support

More than half of respondents had at least five people they could turn to in a serious personal crisis (58 per cent), 18 per cent had less than three people they could turn to. One in fifty (2 per cent) said they had nobody to turn to. Of those who had support, the majority reported that they had at least one person they could turn to living nearby (90 per cent).

Perceptions of the local area

Eighty-seven per cent of people enjoyed living in their local area. Many also had a positive view of the local facilities; 77 per cent felt that rubbish collection was good or very good, 71 per cent rated local health services as good or very good and 60 per cent said that the area had good local transport.

The speed or volume of road traffic and parking in residential streets were the items most likely to be seen as a problem (60 per cent and 46 per cent respectively). Teenagers hanging around on the streets and alcohol and drug use were both seen as problems by 30 per cent of respondents. Level of noise, at 15 per cent, was least likely to be mentioned as a problem.

The majority of people felt either very safe (60 per cent) or fairly safe (33 per cent) walking alone during the day-time. Around a quarter (26 per cent) felt a unsafe walking alone after dark and one in five (20 per cent) said they never went out alone after dark.

Variations by socio-demographic factors

Age was closely associated with the majority of the social capital indicators. Younger people tended to be less likely than older people to exhibit the positive indicators of social capital and more likely to exhibit the negative indicators.

- People aged 16 to 29 were the least likely to feel civically engaged, 12 per cent compared with between 18 per cent and 22 per cent of other age groups.
- Doing a favour for a neighbour was lowest for the youngest age group; 57 per cent compared with around four fifths of those aged 30 to 69.

Regional differences

Differences across the regions occurred in each of the relationships found, but the only consistent finding was that people living in London tended to be at the lower end of the range for the positive indicators. For example:

- People living in London were the least neighbourly, being at the lower end of the range across the regions for each indicator of neighbourliness.
- The North East, North West and South West were found to be the most neighbourly areas, each being at the upper end of the range for all the indicators of neighbourliness.

- People in the North East were the most likely to speak to their neighbours daily (40 per cent), people in the North West and South West were the most likely to trust their neighbours (60 per cent and 65 per cent respectively) and those in the South West were most likely to have received a favour from a neighbour (79 per cent); for the whole of England these were 27 per cent, 56 per cent and 72 per cent.

Other factors

People who had lived in their area for less than five years were twice as likely to have no close friends or relatives living nearby compared with those who had lived in the area for twenty or more years (63 per cent compared with 30 per cent for relatives and 41 per cent compared with 20 per cent for friends).

Twenty-seven per cent of people living in social sector housing had fewer than three people they could turn to in a personal crisis compared with 16 per cent of those in owner-occupied accommodation.

People in social sector housing were less likely than those with other forms of tenure to enjoy living in their local area (77 per cent compared with 84 per cent of people in private rented accommodation and 89 per cent of people in owner occupied accommodation), and the most likely to perceive the local facilities to be poor and to report high levels of local problems.

People in households with dependent children were more likely to give and receive favours from neighbours than those in households without dependent children.

People in lone parent or single person households had lower levels of social support than those living in households containing a couple. Around a quarter of those in lone parent households and those living alone had fewer than three people they could turn to in a personal crisis compared with between 15 per cent and 17 per cent of those in couple households.

Lone-parents with dependent children were less likely to enjoy living in their area than people in other types of households and were more likely to report high levels of local problems.

Forty-seven per cent of lone-parents with dependent children perceived their area to have a high level of local problems compared with 34 per cent of people in households comprising a couple with dependent children and 30 per cent of people who lived alone.

Women were more likely than men to speak on the phone frequently (particularly to relatives) and to see relatives, but men were more likely to report a large number of close friends living nearby.

- Forty-four per cent of women spoke on the phone to relatives at least five times a week compared with 25 per cent of men.
- A third of men (34 per cent) reported having at least five close friends living nearby compared with around one in five women (27 per cent).

A third (32 per cent) of women said they felt unsafe walking in their local area after dark compared with less than one in five men (18 per cent) and 31 per cent of women said they never went out alone after dark compared with 8 per cent of men.

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. The Health Development Agency www.HDA-online.org.uk identifies what works to improve people's health and reduce health inequalities. It gathers evidence and produces advice for professionals, working alongside them to get that evidence into practice. Press Office contact: Tonya Gillis 020 7061 3117.
2. While definitions vary widely, the main indicators of social capital tend to include: social relationships and social support; formal and informal social networks; group memberships; community and civic engagement; norms and values; reciprocal activities (for example, child care arrangements); and levels of trust in others.
3. One aim of the GHS module was to develop a new set of national indicators relating to the social environment in which people live. The module was developed to encourage the collection of a standard set of information on social capital which would allow comparisons to be made between different local studies and corresponding national indicators.
4. The General Household Survey (GHS) is a multi-purpose continuous survey carried out by the Social Survey Division of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) which collects information on a range of topics from people living in private households in Great Britain. The survey started in 1971 and has been carried out continuously since then, except for breaks in 1997/98 (when the survey was reviewed) and 1999/2000 when the survey was re-developed.
5. The social capital module was asked of one randomly selected individual aged 16 or over in each household. Of the 8221 households interviewed for the GHS, social capital modules were achieved with 7857 respondents.
6. The HDA social capital module was included in the General Household Survey because it facilitated analysis of the data with respect to a wide range of socio-demographic characteristics and health measures. Topics of particular interest for this investigation of social capital were: demographic information; household and family information; housing tenure; employment; and education.
7. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
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