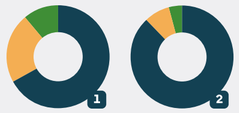
Loneliness in America

Social media: a problem?

In the USA, people believe that social media is related to feelings of loneliness by 3 to 1.

SOURCE: APA PUBLIC OPINION POLL, ANNUAL MEETING 2019



The proportion of people who agree with the statements...

1. *The amount of social media activity among children and teens is concerning.*
2. *Social media usage is related to feelings of loneliness or social isolation.*

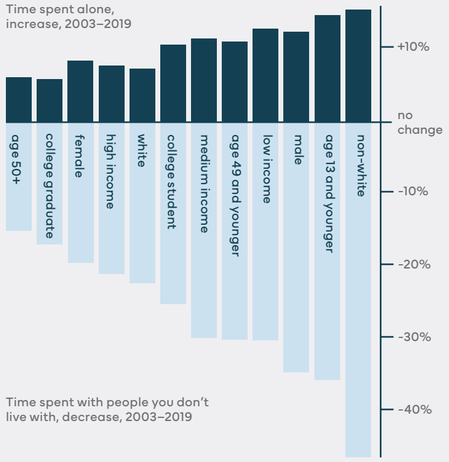
Becoming more lonely

Decrease/increase of time spent with other family members/alone, 2003–2019

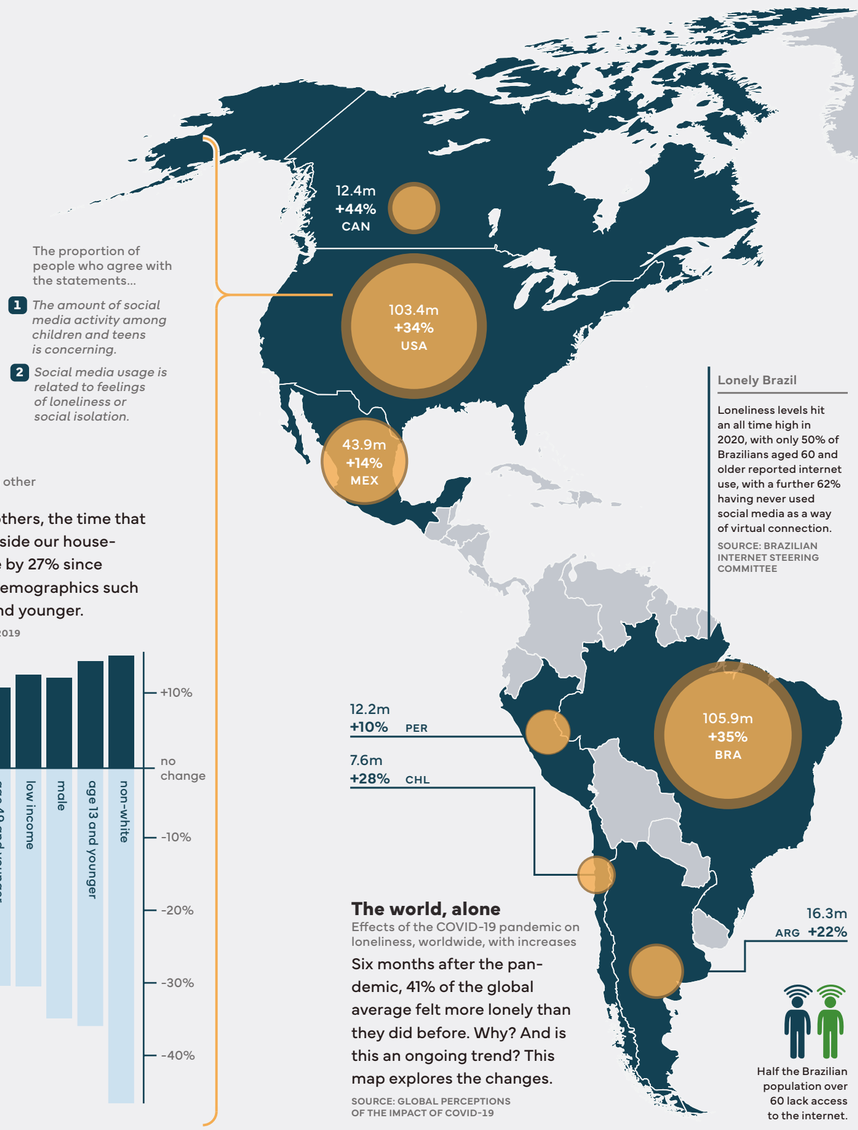
With fewer people living with others, the time that we spend with others from outside our household has decreased on average by 27% since 2003. The drop is alarming in demographics such as non-white and children 13 and younger.

SOURCE: AMERICAN TIME USE SURVEY, 2003–2019

Time spent alone, increase, 2003–2019



Time spent with people you don't live with, decrease, 2003–2019



Lonely Brazil

Loneliness levels hit an all time high in 2020, with only 50% of Brazilians aged 60 and older reported internet use, with a further 62% having never used social media as a way of virtual connection.

SOURCE: BRAZILIAN INTERNET STEERING COMMITTEE

The world, alone

Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on loneliness, worldwide, with increases

Six months after the pandemic, 41% of the global average felt more lonely than they did before. Why? And is this an ongoing trend? This map explores the changes.

SOURCE: GLOBAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Half the Brazilian population over 60 lack access to the internet.

India's epidemic

Research has showed that in India's care homes – particularly affected by COVID – residents' loneliness and social isolation creates poor psychological health. 92% of these residents will be diagnosed with poor psychological health.

SOURCE: BMC GERIATRICS, MISHRA ET AL

Orange: loneliness increase

Orange bubbles link to increased loneliness. The area is proportional to the lonely population, whilst the outer edge is proportional to the increase.



Green: loneliness decrease

Green bubbles link to decreased loneliness. The area is proportional to the lonely population, whilst the outer edge is proportional to the decrease.



Data available

Data unavailable

LONELINESS A GLOBAL EPIDEMIC

From 2003 to 2019, time spent by Americans with people they don't live with went down by 27%. Time spent alone increased by 11%. This trend was repeated across the globe, affecting younger children and non-white people disproportionally, leading to a minister for loneliness being appointed in the UK and Japan.

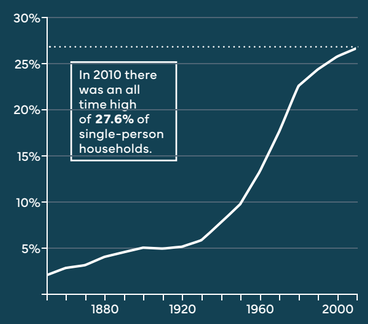
The 'loneliness epidemic', as the American Surgeon General described it in 2023, is because of a number of causes. Among them is the rise in single-person households, the rise of social media leading to fewer physical interactions, and a choice to stay alone instead of go out. The solution – as studies have shown – is to recognise and actively seek out human interaction. But people don't.

And then came COVID. Countries already used to a high rate of loneliness experienced an enormous surge. Places like Brazil and India saw their loneliness rate increase by 35% and 13%, respectively and the only major country that saw a decrease in loneliness was China. Why?

Ethan Nunn, Malak Ramadan, Izzy Nesbitt-Parry, Harry Herd

The rise of single-person households

In the US, data from 1850–2010



The rise of single person households in the United States is well-documented. Living alone leads to greater feelings of loneliness. →

SOURCE: IPUMS 1850–2000, US CENSUS (2010)

Safety in solitude, but no pleasure

Results of research showing people are happier having connected with someone else, even if instructed to do so



Socialising not only makes us feel better, but we need it too – even if we're made to do it. In tests, levels of three of the five main personality traits see a significant increase when socialising, even when 'instructed' to do so – sometimes even more than when socialising is by choice.

SOURCE: MISTAKENLY SEEKING SOLITUDE? (EPLEY AND SCHROEDER), AUTHOR ANALYSIS