



*Relationships Australia*

cua

Issues and concerns for Australian relationships today  
Relationships Indicators Survey 2011

## Acknowledgements

The 2011 Relationships Indicators Survey is a joint initiative of Relationships Australia and Credit Union Australia (CUA) based on data collected, analysed and reported by Woolcott Research Limited. The report is designed by Voodoo Creative.

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# About Relationships Australia

Relationships Australia is a federation of community based, not-for-profit organisations providing a wide range of relationship, community and family support services in each Australian state and territory. We are committed to social justice and inclusion, and respect the rights of all people, in all their diversity, to live life fully within their families and communities with dignity and safety, and to enjoy healthy relationships. We offer services from around 200 locations throughout the country.

The Relationships Indicators Survey has been undertaken on seven occasions since 1998, enabling a number of relationships trends around Australia to be tracked over time. We have been very pleased to have CUA as our sponsor partners in both the 2008 and 2011 Relationships Indicators Surveys.



## About CUA (Credit Union Australia)

CUA is Australia's largest customer-owned financial institution, with more than 400,000 members and 78 branches across Australia. We have been a key partner in the financial lives of our customers for many years.

“CUA is committed to working with the Australian community to achieve change for the better.”

CUA is committed to working with the Australian community to achieve change for the better. We have worked with Relationships Australia since 2008, and believe our investment has contributed to supporting the wellbeing of Australian families and communities. We are proud to be the sponsor of the 2011 Relationships Indicators Survey.



# Executive summary



*The 2011 Relationships Indicators Survey provides an opportunity to increase our understanding of relationships in Australia – intimate relationships, family relationships and connection with community.*

The overall objective of the research was to provide a statistically sound representative sample of feelings, attitudes and opinions about relationships within the Australian population.

The research focussed on a number of key areas, including:

- Connection with significant people in our lives;
- Partnering and marriage;
- Sexual relationships;
- Finances and their impact on partner relationships;
- Social networking and relationships;
- Community involvement;
- Loneliness; and
- Accessing help.

The results were compared with data collected in the 2008 Relationships Indicators Survey. This report highlights where there were statistically significant changes in responses or where new trends emerged.

This report has an additional section on loneliness – one of the significant trends identified in the results. An interesting correlation between use of social networking technology and loneliness became apparent, with those frequently feeling lonely more likely to use social networking, and in particular *Facebook*, than those who do not experience feelings of loneliness. Likewise, a proportion of those who frequently felt lonely met their partners online, compared with none of those never feeling lonely having met their partners online. Links between age and feelings of loneliness were also identified.

There were explorations of how people met their partners and challenges in finding partners. In most age groups, the main challenge was in meeting enough people. One trend emerging is the proportion of people in the younger age groups finding partners online, with 13% of those aged between 25 and 34 meeting their

together. Reasons for these responses were probed, as were the respondents' sense of optimism and pessimism about the likelihood of future improvement in their financial situations. Age had a significant influence on how responses were given, with those in the younger age brackets being more optimistic about their prospects.

The use of social networking to communicate was considered, with 27% saying it had a positive impact on their relationships and 16% saying it had a negative impact. More people in the younger age brackets believed there had been a positive impact, with 54% of those aged 18-24 believing it contributed to communication with friends and family.

Respondents were asked to identify community groups with which they were associated. Those aged 40-49 and those with school aged children were most actively

“This report has an additional section on loneliness – one of the significant trends identified in the results. An interesting correlation between use of social networking technology and loneliness became apparent, with those frequently feeling lonely more likely to use social networking...”

partners through that medium. A comparison with the next Relationships Indicators Survey may reveal an increasing trend in this respect.

The reasons for relationship break-downs were surveyed, with financial stress, communication difficulties, different expectations and values, and lack of trust being the four main reasons given. The magnitude of some of these responses differed from the 2008 findings.

Similar proportions of respondents said they were sexually active to those in the 2008 survey, although there has been a significant jump in the numbers of people aged 70 and above who are now sexually active. Those with a household income of \$80,000 and above were also more sexually active than those in other income brackets.

The impact of finances on couple relationships was explored, with 71% of respondents indicating that financial problems were more likely to push couples apart and 11% indicating they would keep couples

engaged. A large proportion of those aged over 70 felt they had sufficient support from others in their lives.

Finally, respondents were asked about how they access help at low points in their relationships. Many spoke with friends, talked things over with their partners and spoke with other family members. More females than males were likely to speak with friends. Age also impacted on the likelihood of speaking with friends. 22% said they had sought professional help with relationship issues.

Overall, the Relationships Indicators Survey revealed a sense of optimism about relationships, support available to individuals and the communities in which we live. The following report examines the findings in greater depth.



## Research method

The Relationships Indicators Survey used quantitative methodology comprising 1,204 interviews among the general population aged 18 and above.

The sample was taken across all Australian states and territories in proportion to ABS population figures and was also representative of age and gender mix. In order to reach a sufficient representative sample of those in the 18-29 age brackets who do not have landlines at home, the 2011 survey combined telephone interviews and a new online component.

The perspectives of people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds were not specifically sought in this research, although the sample covered a diverse range of cultural heritage.

Fieldwork was conducted between 27 February and 8 March 2011.



## Research findings



## Important people in our lives

**Question:** Which three of these would you say are the most important relationships to you?  
**Base:** All respondents.

Respondents were asked to identify the three most important relationships in their lives. In order, sons or daughters, then spouses, then parents were nominated overall as the three most important relationships. Young single people and those living with friends and peers nominated their parents, siblings and close or best friends as their three most important relationships. Predictably, older couples included grandchildren in their list of three. 65% of females nominated their son or daughter in their three most important relationships, compared with 54% of males.

“65% of females included their son or daughter in their three most important relationships, compared with 54% of males.”

How people met spouse/partner – by age

	18-24	25-34	35-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Through friends	32	31	38	29	32	25	26
At a social venue	14	10	17	18	23	25	31
At work	10	11	20	20	12	17	15
At school / university / other education	19	13	12	16	9	11	4
Through family	8	14	3	5	9	8	5
Online	6	13	2	3	1	1	0
At church / place of worship	3	3	8	1	5	0	4
On a holiday / while travelling	0	2	0	2	3	3	3
Lived in same area / neighbours	1	0	2	1	1	3	4
At a sporting activity / organisation	0	1	0	0	2	3	3
Just ran into them	0	1	0	1	1	1	2
Through an introductory agency	2	1	0	0	1	0	0
A newspaper personal column	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
At an organisation	0	0	0	0	1	2	1
Other	2	1	0	2	1	1	0
Don't know	2	1	0	0	0	0	2

## Partnering and marriage

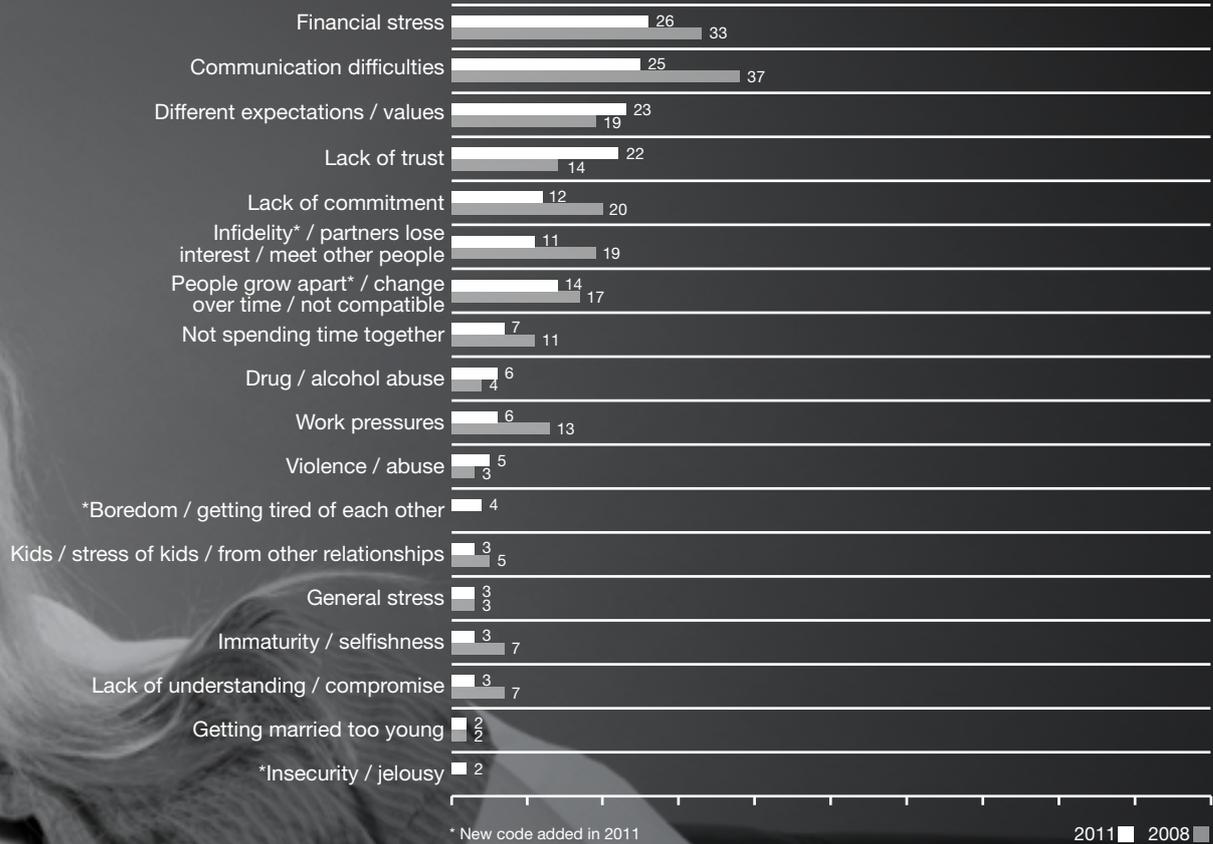
Overall – across all age groups, respondents met their partners principally through friends, at social occasions or at work. While 4% of all respondents met their partners online, 13% of those aged between 25 and 34 met their partners online, a trend likely to increase over coming years.

While the main challenge across most age groups in finding a partner was meeting enough people, a significant proportion of respondents aged in the two brackets between 18 and 34 cited ‘emotional issues’

as being another significant challenge. 12% of respondents with a household income over \$80,000 indicated that finding a compatible partner with the same interests was the main challenge, compared with 6% of respondents with a household income under \$60,000.

Love, companionship and signifying a life-long commitment were the three principal reasons given for respondents deciding to marry. One shift between the 2011 and 2008 surveys lay in the numbers of people

## Reasons why partner relationships break down



**Question:** How did you meet your spouse or partner? Base: All respondents with spouse / live in partner / de facto spouse (n=861).

**Question:** Either from your own experiences or those of family and friends, what do you think are the main reasons why partner relationships break down? Base: All respondents.

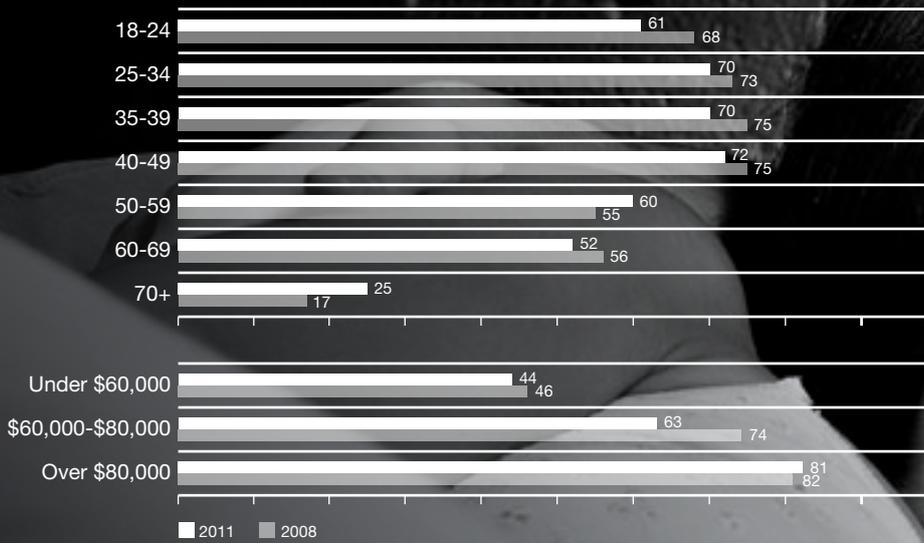
wanting to make a public commitment to each other, with a significant drop in this as a motivator in 2011 compared with three years ago.

When asked what factors had impacted negatively on partner relationships, respondents indicated that stress, work pressures and lack of time to spend together had the greatest impact.

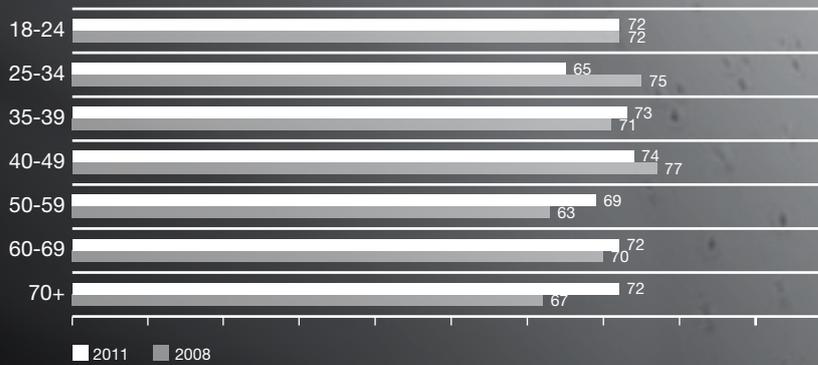
The four main reasons cited for relationship breakdown were financial stress, communication difficulties,

different expectations and values, and lack of trust. Compared with 2008 data, financial stress and communication difficulties are less problematic, and different expectations and values, and lack of trust are significantly increasing factors.

Sexual activity by age and household income



Satisfied with sexual activity by age



## Sexual relationships

60% of respondents indicated they were currently sexually active, compared with 30% who were not, and 10% who did not wish to disclose. These figures are similar to those noted in the 2008 survey. There are slightly more men and slightly fewer women who reported being sexually active compared with 2008 results.

The numbers of those who are currently sexually active are shown in the graph. They have been divided into age and household income brackets. There has been a significant jump since 2008 in

the numbers of people aged 70 and above who were currently sexually active. Also of note is the significant difference in sexual activity of those living in households earning more than \$80,000 per year when compared with sexual activity of those living in households in lower income brackets.

The graph above shows the percentage of respondents who indicated they were satisfied with their level of sexual activity compared with 2008 figures.



Importance of sex in maintaining a healthy partner relationship



**Question:** Would you consider yourself to be sexually active at the moment? Base: All respondents.

**Question:** And overall how satisfied are you with this aspect of your life? Base: All respondents.

**Question:** How important is sex to you in terms of maintaining a healthy partner relationship? Base: All respondents.

“Respondents aged 25-34 are least satisfied with this aspect of their life (65%), with respondents aged 40-49 most satisfied (74%). 70% of males and 71% of females say they are satisfied with this aspect of their life.”

When asked about how important sex is to maintaining a healthy partner relationship, 71% of all respondents indicated that sex was very important or quite important.

81% of those aged 40-49 indicated it was either very important or important, with 53% of those aged 70 and above indicating it was important or very important.

### Reasons why financial problems push couples apart



## Finances and their impact on partner relationships

Respondents were asked if financial problems were more likely to keep couples together or push them apart. 71% indicated they were more likely to push couples apart, and 11% indicated they were more likely to keep couples together. Significantly more respondents with household incomes over \$80,000 believed financial problems would push couples apart, compared with those with less income.

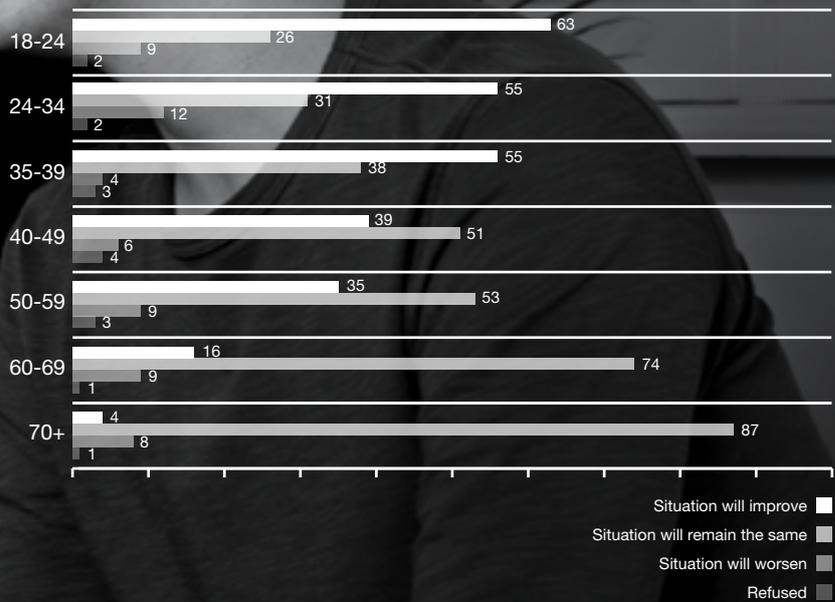
Of those who indicated that financial problems could help to keep couples together, 36% indicated this was because you could work together to sort out issues, 18% said such problems would increase the couple's commitment to each other, and 12% said it would mean a couple could not afford to break up.

Of those who indicated that financial problems would push couples apart, the top reasons were that there is too much stress in the relationship, financial problems cause fights, and that couples blame each other for their financial problems.

When questioned about their feelings about their likely future financial situation, 39% of respondents said they believed their finances would improve, 51% said they believed their financial situation would remain the same and 8% thought the situation would worsen. The household income of respondents affected responses to this question. While 32% of those with household incomes under \$60,000 believed their financial situation would improve, 49% of those with incomes over



Future financial situation – by age



**Question:** Why do you say that financial problems are more likely to help push couples apart? Base: Respondents who think financial problems push couples apart.

**Question:** Do you feel that your own financial situation is likely to improve, worsen or remain the same in the near future? Base: All respondents.

\$80,000 had the same view. The greatest optimism about the likelihood of improvement in their financial situation lay with those in the younger age brackets.

Those who believed their situation would improve believed they had good prospects at work, were studying and hoped to find a good job, or were currently looking for better employment. Those who thought their situation would worsen were concerned about the increased cost of living, were on a pension or fixed income, or thought that government action would cause deterioration in their financial situation.

There was a series of questions relating to partners having joint or individual bank accounts. In response

to a question asking why partners have only a joint account, the two most significant responses were that they share everything and have no secrets, and that it is convenient that way. Explaining why they have only individual accounts, respondents said they hadn't got around to changing things, it was the way they chose to live, and that they wanted to be independent.



## Social networking and relationships

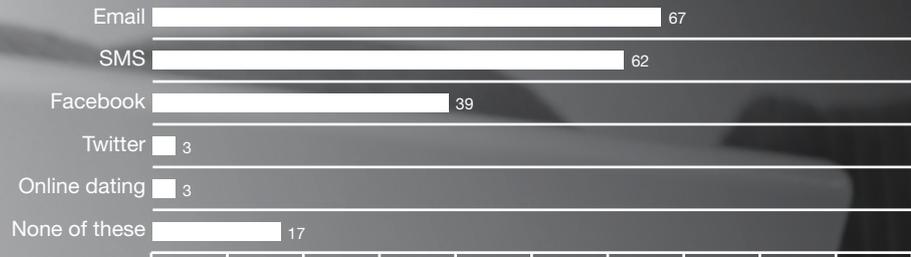
Respondents were asked whether social networking technology has had a positive or negative impact on relationships. 27% said it had a positive impact, 16% said it had a negative impact, and 57% said there had been no impact. The number of respondents who believed social networking had had a positive impact decreased as the age of the respondents increased. 54% of those aged 18-24 believed it had a positive impact, gradually decreasing to 14% of those aged 70 and over.

“The number of respondents who believed social networking technology had a positive impact decreased as the age of the respondent increased.”

### Impact of social networking technology on relationships



### Methods of communicating with friends / family / potential partners



**Question:** Over the last few years, there has been a rapid increase in the use of social networking technology. Would you say that this technology has had more of a positive or negative impact on your important relationships? Base: All respondents.

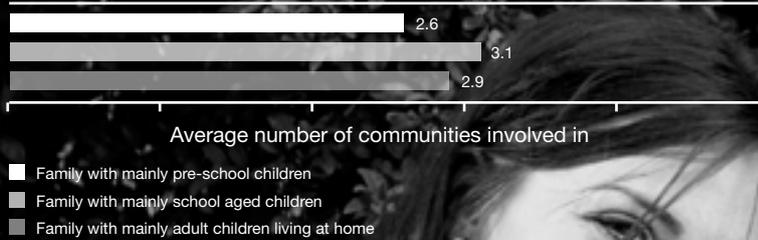
**Question:** Which of the following do you use regularly to communicate with friends/family/potential partners? Base: All respondents.

The three main reasons given for social networking having a positive impact were that it makes it easy to keep in touch with people, that we can keep in touch with friends and family where distance is a problem, and it had brought respondents back in touch with friends from school / years ago. The main reasons given for social networking having a negative impact were that there is less face to face contact / people forget how to communicate in person, people spend too much time on the computer at the expense of being together,

and that communication can be dishonest over social networking media as it is not the real world.

When asked which technological methods of communicating were most preferred, the responses were, in order: email, SMS, Facebook, Twitter and online dating sites. Email was the most popular response for respondents aged 40-49, with respondents aged 18-24 most likely to use both SMS (84%) and Facebook (80%).

### Community involvement amongst families with children



## Community involvement

Respondents were asked about communities with which they were regularly involved. The most common response was hobby or social interest groups. This was followed by connection with work colleagues / study groups, local neighbourhoods and sports clubs. Those aged between 40 and 49 were the most actively engaged in communities. Partnered respondents were also more involved in communities than those with non live-in partners or no partner at all.

Families with school-aged children were most involved with communities, followed by families with mainly adult children living at home. Families with mainly pre-school aged children were less likely to be involved in community activities.

The issue of support from others was raised in the survey. The graph sets out responses by age bracket. 91% of those aged 70 and more felt they had enough support from others in their lives, whereas only 76% of those aged 25-34 felt this.



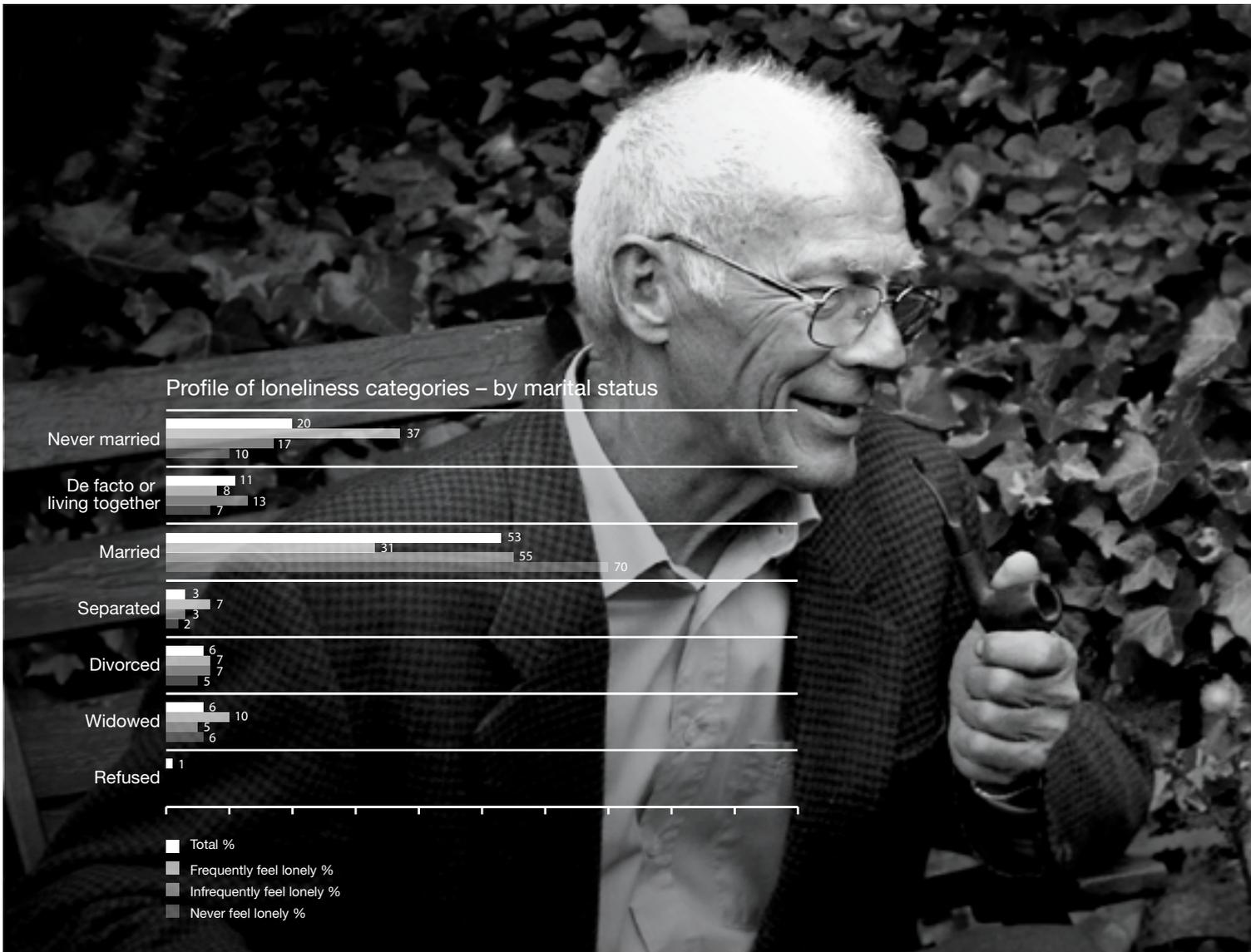
Support from others – % feel they have enough support



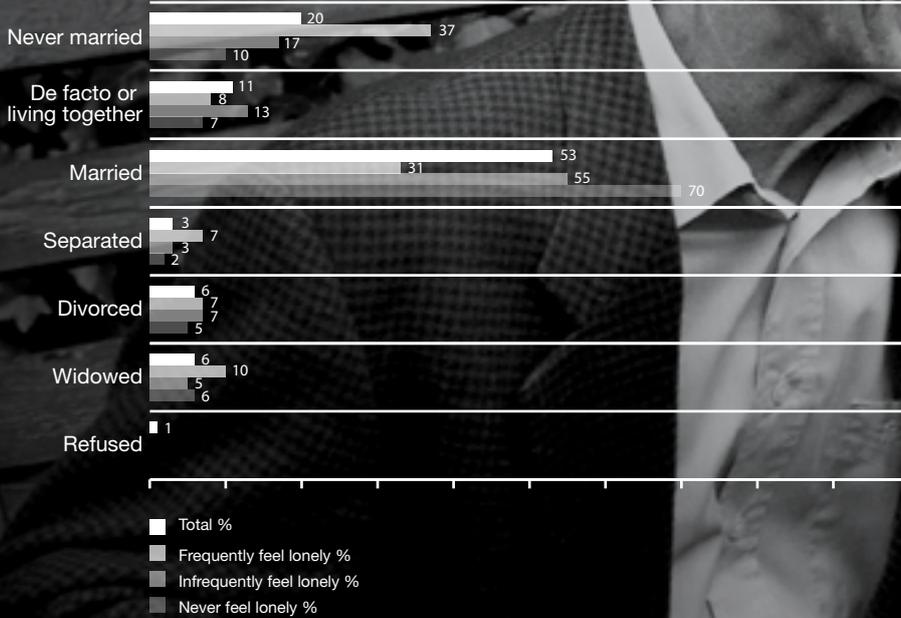
**Question:** Which of the following communities are you regularly involved with? Base: All respondents.

**Question:** Do you feel that you have enough support from others in your life? Base: All respondents.

“On average among those with children, respondents with mainly pre-school children were involved in the fewest number of communities, with respondents with mainly school aged children involved in the most number of communities.”



Profile of loneliness categories – by marital status



# Loneliness

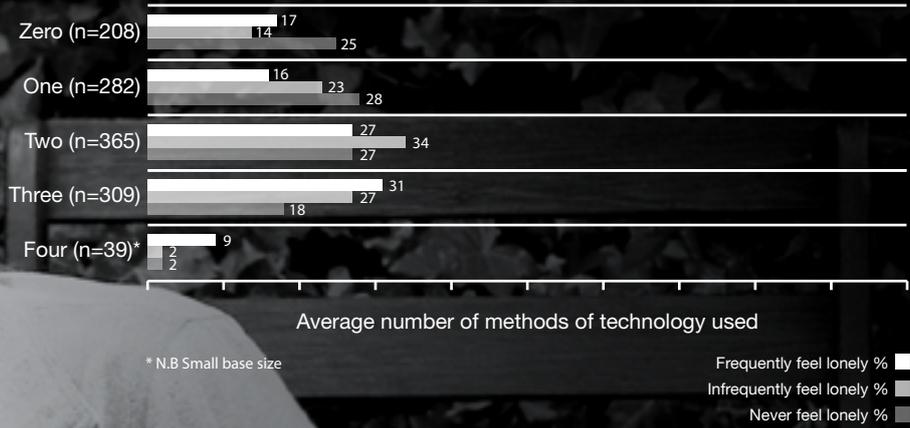
A number of questions were asked about loneliness. When analysed against the numbers of current relationships respondents have with others, those who indicated frequently feeling lonely had fewer relationships (5.6) than those who infrequently felt lonely (6.7) and fewer still than those who never felt lonely (6.8). In particular, those frequently feeling lonely were less likely to have a close friend, partner or child. Older single people living alone and friends or peers living together were more likely to frequently feel lonely. Those who had never married were significantly more likely to frequently feel lonely compared with married people, who were most likely to never feel lonely.

“The proportion of respondents indicating they felt lonely increased as the number of methods of technology used increased.”

13% of respondents who reported frequently feeling lonely met their partners online. None of those who reported never feeling lonely had met their partners online. Interestingly, the more methods of technology respondents used to communicate, the more likely they



### Profile of loneliness categories – by technology usage



### Profile of loneliness categories – by age



were to frequently feel lonely. Particularly, respondents indicating they frequently felt lonely were more likely to use *Facebook* to communicate with friends, family and potential partners (54%) than respondents who infrequently (39%) and respondents who never (28%) felt lonely.

Those who reported frequently feeling lonely were more likely to feel that the main challenges to meeting a partner lay in not meeting enough people and in having emotional issues. They were also more likely to cite a lack of trust, jealousy and insecurity as having an impact on partner relationships.

Those aged 25-34 were most likely to frequently feel lonely, with those aged 35-39 least likely. Those aged 18-24 were least likely to never feel lonely, compared with those aged 40-49 who were most likely to never feel lonely.



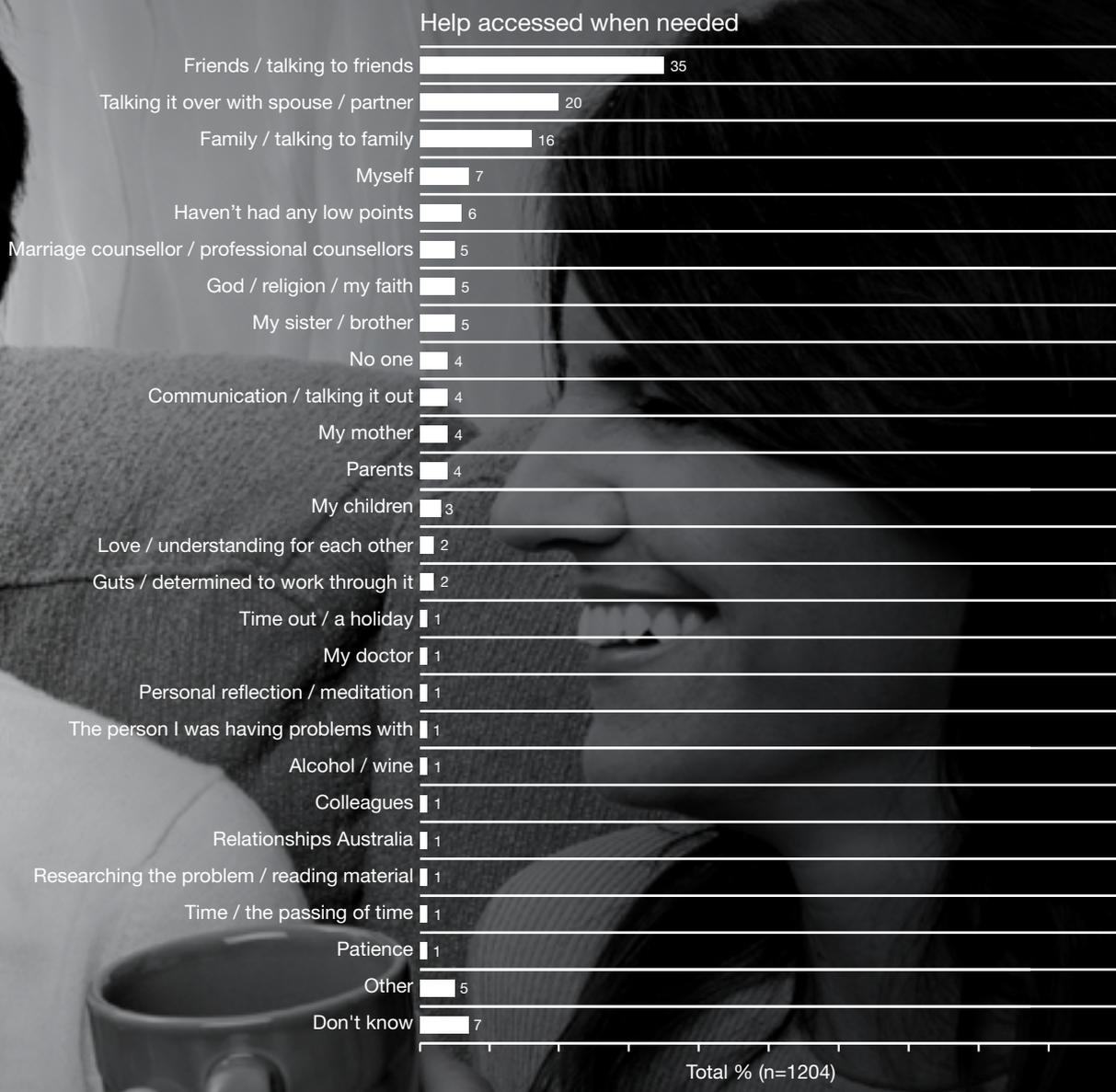
## Accessing help

Respondents were asked a number of questions relating to how they responded to low points in their relationships, and whether they seek help from others. The top three responses were:

- 35% spoke with friends about the issues;
- 20% talked things over with their partner; and
- 16% spoke with others in their family.

The research found that females were significantly more likely to talk to friends (43%) than males (28%). 45% of those aged 18-24 indicated they spoke with friends to get through low points, compared with 18% of those aged 70 and over.

22% of respondents had sought professional help when relationship issues emerged.



**Question:** Most relationships go through highs and lows. Who or what has ever helped you get through any low points in relationships you've had? Base: All respondents.

“Females are much more likely to talk to friends (43%) compared to males (28%). 45% of respondents aged 18-24 indicated they have talked to friends to get through low points, compared with 18% of those aged over 70.”





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