

Strictly embargoed until: 00.01 Wednesday 3 May 2017

LONELINESS WIDESPREAD AMONGST MEN – YOUNG AND OLD

- *New research suggests millions of men are experiencing loneliness but suffering in silence*
- *Cross-party Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness launches month-long campaign to spur public, government and business to become the solution*
- *New film from Prudential UK captures how men are conquering loneliness in later life*
<http://bit.ly/JoCoxCommission>

Millions of men across the UK are hiding feelings of loneliness, according to new research (1) out today.

Published to mark the launch of the cross-party Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness spotlight on men month (3rd May – 4th June 2017), the study finds an estimated eight million (35 per cent) men feel lonely at least once a week, whilst for nearly three million (11 per cent) it's a daily occurrence. More than one in 10 men also say they are lonely, but would not admit it to anyone.

The month-long campaign will be launched today by Rachel Reeves (Lab) and Seema Kennedy (Cons) and will shine a spotlight on male loneliness and explore practical solutions to addressing it.

The research, conducted for the Commission by Royal Voluntary Service, also reveals triggers to loneliness. Those who have felt or feel lonely said the situations that made them feel that way were moving away from friends and family (18 per cent), going through a break up (17 per cent), being unemployed (17 per cent) and following the death of a family member (17 per cent). Over a quarter of men aged 65-69 said retiring had made them feel lonely.

The cross-party Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, launched in January, is supported by thirteen organisations (2) and aims to act as a call to action. Under the slogan 'Start a Conversation', the Commission wants to mobilise the public to help themselves and others around them – educating people on how they can become part of the solution.

Other key findings from the research include:

- 26 is the age that men think they had the largest group of friends and 38 when they had the smallest.
- Of the men that had experienced or are experiencing loneliness the average age to feel most lonely was 35.
- Over one in 20 men (7 per cent) say they have no friends, and of those that do, nearly one in 10 (8 per cent) have no close friends
- Just under three in 10 (28 per cent) see and speak to friends/family regularly
- Nearly one in 10 men (9 per cent) do not see anyone on a regular basis
- Men who are, or have been lonely, say it makes them feel isolated (39 per cent), depressed (35 per cent) and less confident (27 per cent)

Co-chair of the Commission, Rachel Reeves said: “Loneliness is a silent epidemic hidden inside every family and community in the UK and can affect any one of us and at any time. For the next month, we will explore how and why men experience loneliness and most importantly shine a light on the practical steps that can be taken to combat it. Now is the time to break the silence – and Start a Conversation.”

Co-chair of the Commission, Seema Kennedy said: “Many men may be reluctant to accept they need support to address loneliness, which is why projects such as the Men’s Sheds movement, as well as many others across the country, are so vital. Today we are calling on the public, businesses and government to consider what more could be done in their communities to tackle the problem – from starting their own men’s activity to simply making time to chat to those around them.”

Choreographer, dancer and Royal Voluntary Service Ambassador, Wayne Sleep OBE shares his experiences of loneliness "I won one of two scholarships to the Royal Ballet Boarding School in London out of 300 auditionees at 12 years of age. This was my first experience of loneliness, away from my mum who I missed very much. My second experience was at 40 years old having achieved everything I set out to do in the dance world, touring with my company DASH had stopped and there was only the occasional concert tour. I felt totally isolated and one day cried into my pillow and suddenly the reason why hit me – I was lonely! It’s a feeling I wouldn’t wish on anyone as loneliness can be overwhelming, it can be hard to reach out and do something about because it’s not an emotion people tend to talk about.

“We are all susceptible to loneliness and you never know when it is going to strike. The Commission is doing great work to raise awareness of the issue and I hope this will help people to become more open on the subject and encourage the nation to talk more.”

Previous research has also flagged that older men are particularly vulnerable to loneliness as they are less likely to try and make new friends or join clubs and activities. As a result they are far more likely to be socially isolated than women. Sadly, this problem is only set to grow, with the country’s changing demographic resulting in an increasing number of older men living alone. Indeed, it’s projected that by 2030 1.5m older men will be living alone in England in Wales – a huge increase of 65% on 2014 levels (3).

In support of the spotlight month, Prudential UK, a partner company of Royal Voluntary Service, has produced a film to raise awareness of the issue and conveying the importance of building networks and connections. It follows three older men who have all faced loneliness and conquered it through the support of their communities:

<http://bit.ly/JoCoxCommission>

One of the stars of the film, Ken Stanyer, 88 from Stoke-on-Trent said: "I've always been a social person but when my wife passed away, it knocked me for six. I wouldn't see anyone for days and found myself feeling incredibly lonely. I decided to do something about it and asked people where I could go to learn to dance and to socialise. They told me about the dance club the Royal Voluntary Service runs at Hanley Community Centre and it's made a huge difference to me - Mondays are now one of the high points of the week!"

David McCullough, chief executive of older people’s charity Royal Voluntary Service and founder member of the Campaign to End Loneliness said: “These are stark findings but given the stigma attached to loneliness it’s likely there are many more men who are yet to voice their feelings. We have long been providing support within local communities to help older men stay socially active and combat loneliness. Whether it’s learning a new skill, practicing an old one or just keeping fit and talking, there are activities and groups run across the country to suit all tastes and which offer a great way for older men to build their social networks. Unfortunately, for some, the prospect of joining a new group may be daunting and we’d encourage those with older male friends and relatives to help them overcome these fears – perhaps by offering to take them or even joining in with them the first few times.”

Janet Morrison, Chief Executive of Independent Age and a founder member of the Campaign to End Loneliness said: “We know older men can particularly experience

loneliness and isolation after losing a partner and we all need to do more to help men prepare for, and manage, the inevitable setbacks and challenges later life can throw their way. We would welcome more people taking up the opportunity to connect with older men in their communities or reaching out through charity friendship services.”

Research by the charity Stonewall has also identified that being part of an ethnic or other minority social group, for example LGBT individuals, can make men more vulnerable to loneliness. Some studies suggest older gay and bisexual men are more likely to be single, more likely to live alone and less likely to see a biological family member on a regular basis. Less than a quarter of older gay people see a family member once a week, compared to more than half of heterosexual people (4)

To support the Commission’s men campaign, people are also being encouraged to post #happytochat on their Twitter and Facebook posts to create online chatter around loneliness and raise awareness of just how many of us it can affect.

To find out more about the Commission and to how to get involved in tackling loneliness in your community visit www.jocoxloneliness.org.

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- (1) Research was conducted online and over the phone by Censuswide amongst UK male adults between 10 and 17 March 2017. Figures have been weighted in line with ONS population estimates from June 2016.
- (2) The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness is working with the following partners – Action for Children, Age UK, Alzheimer’s Society, The British Red Cross, Campaign to End Loneliness, Carers UK, The Co-op, Eden Project Communities, Independent Age, Refugee Action, Royal Voluntary Service, Sense and The Silver Line.
- (3) Independent Age and the International Longevity Centre UK (ILC-UK) 2014
- (4) [Stonewall & YouGov, 2010 and 2011, *Lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Later Life*].

Notes to editors:

Passionate about tackling loneliness, Jo Cox set up the Commission before her murder in June 2016. In her memory the cross-party Commission is being taken forward by MPs Rachel Reeves (Labour) and Seema Kennedy (Conservative), supported by Jo’s family.

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Throughout 2017 the Commission will focus on loneliness as it affects different members of society including older people, men, people with disabilities, carers, refugees, children and parents.

For more information visit www.jocoxloneliness.org or Start a Conversation on Twitter: @JoCoxLoneliness/ #HappyToChat