

# Living alone, in poverty and loneliness – challenges for pensioners wishing to be cared for and die at home in England

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1963 in England 9% of males and 18% of females died aged 85 years or older. In 2014 it was 30% and 48%<sup>1</sup>. More people living for longer means that there are likely to be more people living with disability and or frailty. Surveys indicate that people would prefer to be cared for and die in their own home. Studies<sup>3,4</sup> have shown that people are more likely to die at home if they live with a partner or spouse have close family nearby and financial resources. Living alone not only presents care challenges but also loneliness which impacts on people's wellbeing especially at the end of their life. Age UK<sup>5</sup> identify loneliness as a major factor older people worry about and the effect of loneliness has been recognised by the Red Cross and others.<sup>6,7</sup> Public health (pauper) funerals and funeral poverty in England is increasing.<sup>8,9</sup>

## AIM and METHODS

### Aim

To evaluate the magnitude of the challenges faced by older people from living alone, in poverty and from loneliness and consider the implications for End of Life Care.

### Methods

Descriptive analysis of routine data from the England and Wales Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2001 & 2011 Census and data from the ONS Personal wellbeing dataset and Opinions and Life-style Survey, Together with an ad-hoc request to ONS.

## RESULTS

- People aged 65 years or older living in couples (married/civil/cohabiting) households increased from 52% in 2001 to 56% in 2011.<sup>10</sup>
- The proportion living in single person households fell from 34% to 31% in the same period<sup>10</sup>. The proportion of people aged 65 living alone in 2011 varies across England from 11.4 to 63.3%<sup>10</sup>, illustrated in Figure 2.
- 16.2% of older people (aged 60 and older) live with income deprivation. Levels vary across the 152 Upper Tier Local Authorities ranging from 6.6 to 49.7%, see Figure 2.
- People who live on their own are more than 2 times as likely to report feeling lonely (30.8% compared to 12.6%).<sup>12</sup>
- Long term limiting illness is associated with higher loneliness<sup>12</sup>, see Figure 3.

- People in rented or social housing felt higher levels of loneliness than those owning their home. 15.3% vs. 11.7%.<sup>13</sup>
- Single people are less likely to die at home, in hospital or in a hospice and more likely to die in a care home compared to those in a couple<sup>14</sup> (Figure 4).
- High loneliness rating was associated with low feelings of worth (10.5% vs. 1.1%) and feeling unhappy (18.8% compared to 5.6%) than low ratings.<sup>15</sup>

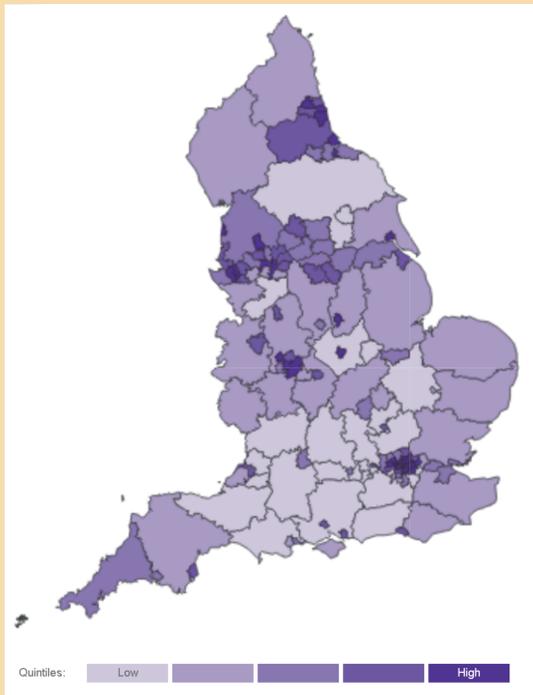


Figure 1. Percentage of older people living with poverty (Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Index) (equal number of areas in each quintile)<sup>11,12</sup>

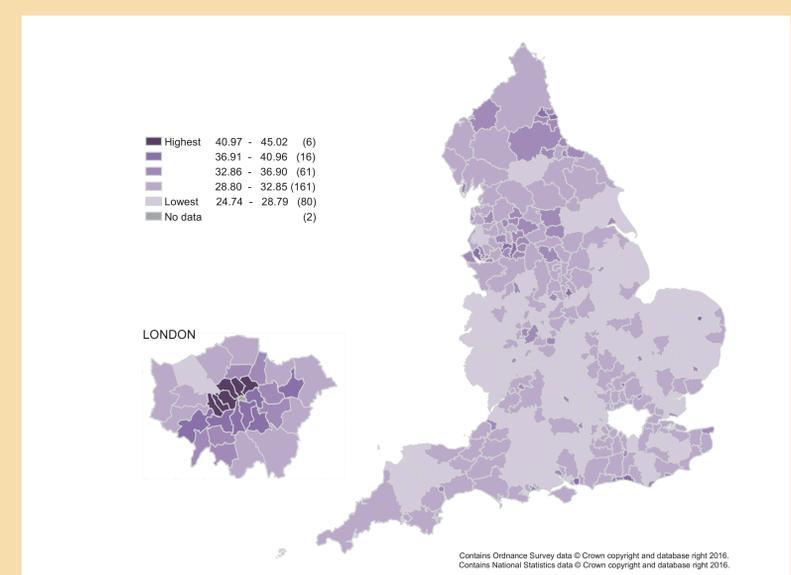


Figure 2. Percentage of elderly (65 and older) and living alone.<sup>13</sup>

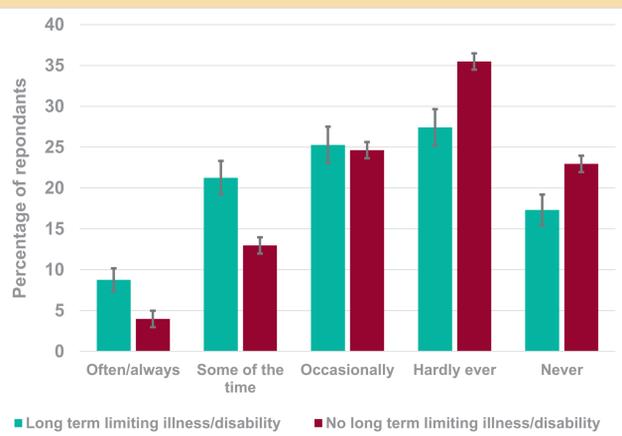


Figure 3. Reported frequency of loneliness by presence of a long-term limiting illness or disability; England<sup>12</sup>

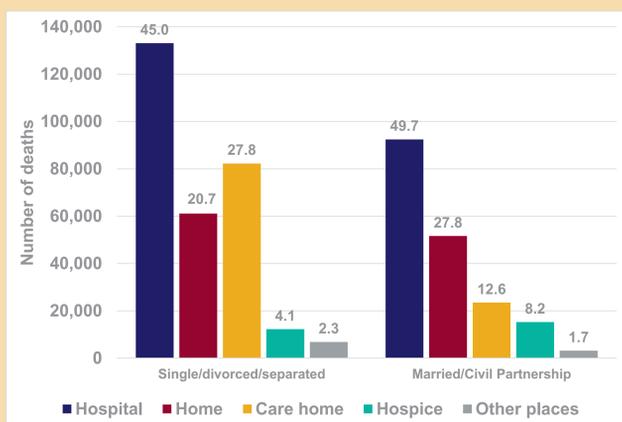


Figure 4. Number of deaths by place of death and marital status including percentage of deaths in each place within marital status, England 2016<sup>14</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

There are significant social challenges for some older adults approaching the end of life. These challenges vary between different geographic areas; often being a function of factors such as income deprivation, population structure, local services and rurality. Life expectancy is increasing faster in men than in women; another factor that may explain the increase in people living in couple households.

Ambition Six 'Each Community is prepared to help' of the Ambitions for Palliative and End of Life Care: A National Framework for Local Action 2015-2020<sup>16</sup> outlines options for action as do Compassionate Communities.<sup>17</sup>

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