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"How do different lifestyles and status bring loneliness and social isolation in youth?"

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I. Introduction

Social isolation "is a state or process in which persons, groups, or cultures lose or do not have communication or cooperation with one another, often resulting in open conflict" (dictionary.com, no date).

As indicated by a 2018 national survey in the US by Cigna, depression levels have arrived at an unequalled high, with nearly half of 20,000 U.S. citizens from the age of 18 to 27 detailing that they feel alone often. 40% of overview members additionally detailed they feel that their connections are not significant and that they feel segregated. Most of this is directly linked to peer pressure and people living unhealthy lifestyles and those who have toxic influences. Many individuals, however, disagree and believe that social isolation is created by a person himself and consider it a 'mental illness'. (APA, May 2019)

With different viewpoints on the topic, this report examines the perspectives about the topic "How does different lifestyle and status bring loneliness and social isolation in youth?" global, national and local level. The report will conclude by considering the possible future scenarios with course of action to be followed along with my personal opinion on the research question.

Causes of social isolation and loneliness

Young people experience many transitions between the ages of 16 to 24. Moving schools or going away to university puts strain on existing relationships and isolates people from their immediate support network, which can result in feelings of loneliness.

Social isolation and loneliness can be aggravated further by excessive use of the internet. A research conducted in Mumbai, Maharashtra in January 2016 suggested that youth who are addicted to the internet are at a higher chance of being lonely (Sharma, Payal, et al.*Natl J Community Med* 7.1 2016)

Consequences of social isolation and loneliness

Long-run social isolation is closely associated with loneliness and physiological health problems, and the way it affects healthy development of the brain. Young disabled adults are especially vulnerable to loneliness. (APA, May 2019)

Russell et al. (1978) developed "The UCLA Loneliness Scale." The scale has been empirically tested over 239 students, and Cronbach's α was found to be 0.96. Few of the comments were "I am unhappy doing so many things alone," "I have nobody to talk to," "I cannot tolerate being alone," "I lack companionship," "I am unable to reach out and communicate with those around me," "I am unhappy being so withdrawn." (Social Isolation: development and validation of measures: Sushant Ranjan, Rama Shankar Yadav,2019)

Studies show that youth with divorced or estranged parents and family members are more largely affected by Social isolation. Children who have working parents may also have fewer social interactions which may cause isolation.They can also struggle with body dysmorphia, anxiety and depression as they are influenced by others in society.

Global Perspectives

A research conducted in March of 2019 said that a staggering 47% of Americans often feel alone, left out and lacking meaningful connection with others. The data and study, published in the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, are from nationally representative surveys of 8.2 million U.S. adolescents between 1976 and 2017.

Research out last year from Cigna found teens reported being loneliest, but it wasn't clear whether that was due to age or being from a different generation.

Across countries, views vary as to whether loneliness is more of a public health problem or more of an individual problem. In the U.K., and to a lesser extent Japan, more say it is more of a public health problem than

say it is more of an individual problem (66 percent vs. 27 percent in the U.K. and 52 percent vs. 41 percent in Japan), whereas Americans are divided (47 percent vs. 45 percent).

Japan has unique terms for two specific conditions related to loneliness. One is Hikikomori, or the acute social withdrawal of adolescents and young adults, and the other is Kodokishi, which refers to the concept of dying alone. Those reporting loneliness in Japan are more likely than others to say Hikikomori and Kodokishi are "very" serious problem (KFF,2018)

According to another survey by UK government, 1,800 per 100,000 people of the working class are stressed and have anxiety. (HSE UK ,30th October 2018). As stated by the Office for National Statistics in the UK, 90,871 couples opted for divorce in England and Wales (refer to appendix 1.2) An average full-time employee in UK earns 30.35 thousand British pounds (Statista, no date). At the end of 2017, the UK government reported that 9 million Britons suffer from loneliness; 14% of the population. The UK government implemented many strategies to get over this such as telephoning and group befriending.

However, in an underdeveloped country such as Ethiopia, according to a research conducted by the WHO in 2015, 8.9% of all Ethiopian men smoke.5.8% of the population drink alcohol daily (WHO.int,2016). The prevalence of stress among male and female is 0.6% and 6.3 %, respectively(Ayele Mamo Abebe, 2018). Ethiopia has the per capita income of 611.62 pounds (World Bank, Sep 26, 2019). Prevalence of loneliness was 49.5% according to a survey conducted in the University of Gondar in 2019. Ethiopian Government has made no reported amendments to help reduce poverty.

National perspectives

India is going through a major sociodemographic change. There is a rapid increase in elderly population. Furthermore, there was an erosion of the joint families and them moving toward nuclear families.

As of April 11th 2019, 40 per cent of Mumbai's youth aged between 20-30 admit to being depressed and lonely. (Times of India, 2019) Even though Mumbai is one of the most densely populated cities in the world, its depression due to loneliness is very high.

Reasons for loneliness and social isolation in youth

"Loneliness can be caused by various reasons such as when people change schools or jobs, work from home, move to a new city, end a relationship or live alone for the first time" (Healthline, no date)

According to a research in 2011(Premchand Dommaraju, June 2015) only 3.7% of total population lived alone, so the total number of lonely people has relatively been less due to morals and values taught to people at an early age; studies have shown Indians are rather close to their families and the culture of nuclear families has not been adopted fully yet.

Due to this cultural difference, fewer Indians are lonely because they have loved ones that they trust and can talk to.

Consequences of social isolation in the youth

In 2004, the National Sample Survey Office reported that "4.91 million people in India were living alone and suffered from loneliness." More recently, the National Mental Health Survey of India (2015-16) reported that high suicidal risk is an increasing concern in India; that children and adolescents are vulnerable to mental disorders; and it affects nearly 10 per cent of the population. Loneliness can lead to long-term "fight-or-flight" stress signalling, which negatively affects immune system functioning.(*PNAS*, Vol. 112, No. 49, 2015).

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has made loneliness and social isolation worse due to lockdowns in major places in India.Bengaluru based Suicide Prevention India Foundation conducted a survey during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The rates of relapse amongst people with mental health issues increased by 30% (Times of India, Jul 25, 2020) and they observed a 73% rise in loneliness. There have been cases of suicidesdue to high stress levels in students during remote learning (The Hindu, 2020). Considering the COVID-19 related extreme psychological impact on individuals, there emerges a need for extensive mental health services. This can be implemented through services like Tele-mental health care, where the mental health professionals are required to play an essential role in facilitating psychological and emotional well–being, enhancing problem-solving and health promoting behaviours in service users (Mamun and Griffiths, 2020; Sahoo et al., 2020)

Course of action

Across countries, majority of people say individuals and families should play a major role in helping to reduce loneliness and social isolation in society today. However, 27% Americans and 62% in Japan see a major role for the government. More Americans see a major role for churches and other religious institutions (61 percent) than in Japan (16 percent).Loneliness Lab is an NGO founded October 2018, London (refer to appendix 1.1).Vandrevala Foundationis another organisation that helps people cope with anxiety due to loneliness and offer online help too. Friends for Good, an Australian NGO offers a telephone hotline and online chat for anyone who is lonely, regardless of age.

The United Kingdom has made reducing loneliness a national priority including creation of a nongovernmental Commission on Loneliness in 2016 to study the problem and make recommendations. In 2018, Prime Minister Theresa May appointed a new Minister of Loneliness to design and implement a strategy to combat social isolation and loneliness across the U.K.; she has made promising progress. Other models have evolved to include telephone and group befriending.

According to a survey I conducted, among my friends and family in my locality in Mumbai (137 respondents), 29.2% of respondentssaid they have developed clinical anxiety due to loneliness, 27.7% alluded to insecurity,16.8% were diagnosed with depression; 22.6% had physical impacts due to disruption in sleep and 10.9% had body dysmorphia.In my opinion, the government needs to conduct more research about loneliness rates in the country. This issue is important since loneliness can affect employees productivity in the workplace (Forbes, Feb 14 2020). Next, the government should focus on providing good facilities similar to the policies adopted by UK. People could be encouraged to get professional help using campaigns.

Personal Perspectives and Conclusion

I have successfully achieved the objectives of this paper as, I examined both global and local perspectives about loneliness and social isolation due to different lifestyles- as indicated by analysis on statistics, consequences, and courses of action in UK, Ethiopia, India, Japan and USA.

According to the research I have conducted, I conclude that loneliness affects people of all social strata. However, different lifestyles widely affect future decisions people make such as suicide and drug abuse which can further lead to loneliness. I have also seen, through the course of this research that divorcees and their children have a higher chance to be lonely and that lonely people were diagnosed with either clinical depression or general anxiety disorder (Medical News Today, October 26 2017),(Mora-Gallegos and Fornaguera, 2019) in early stages.

Prior to research, I believed that different lifestyles and statuses did not have such a large impact on loneliness and mental health in general. However, after research, the wider picture suggested that this was not the case – millions of people are affected by loneliness and social isolation every year and about 90% of these cases are due to pressure given by society and poor lifestyle.

To conclude, different lifestyles such as having an unhealthy diet, being in the lower disposable income strata of the society, being stressed, being divorced can lead to loneliness and social isolation (Kaplan, Lazarus, Cohen, & Leu, 1991; Locher et al., 2005; Shankar et al., 2011; Weyers et al., 2010a).Different statuses also cause social isolation due to higher responsibility, or lack of basic resources. In my opinion, different statuses and lifestyles do cause social isolation and loneliness in the youth.

I believe governments worldwide should introduce protocols to help with this spiralling issue, such as better facilities and care for patients, phone a friend services, suicide hotlines where the youth can discuss problems with a psychologist. The government could also help by reducing prices of basic mental health services such as group counselling.**"**For far too many, loneliness is a sad reality of modern life. I want us all to confront this and take action to address loneliness endured by the elderly, by carers, those who have lost loved ones — those with no one to talk to or share their thoughts and experiences with," Prime Minister Theresa May(Twitter, 2018)

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Appendix

Appendix 1.1 [Loneliness lab]

About the Lab

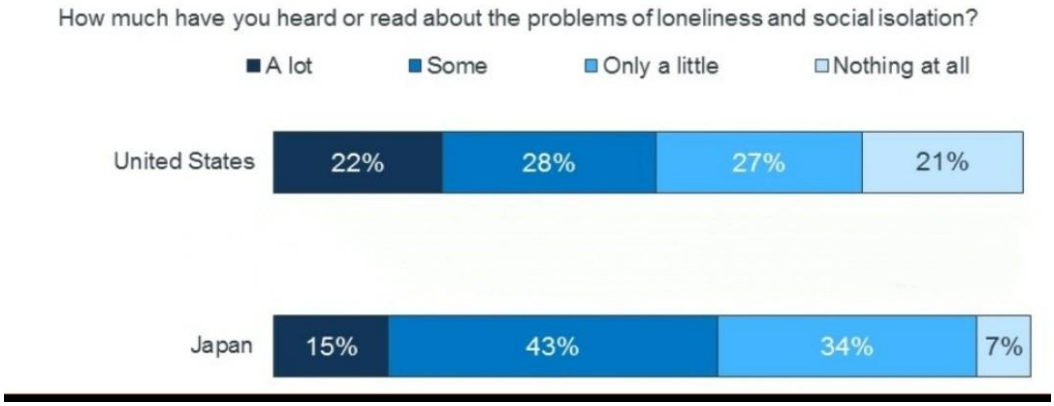
The Loneliness Lab is an 18-month project to accelerate action towards making London a less lonely city to live in for many people.

We want to know what it takes to create places and spaces that give the people who live, work and play in our cities the connection they need to lead a happy and healthy life.

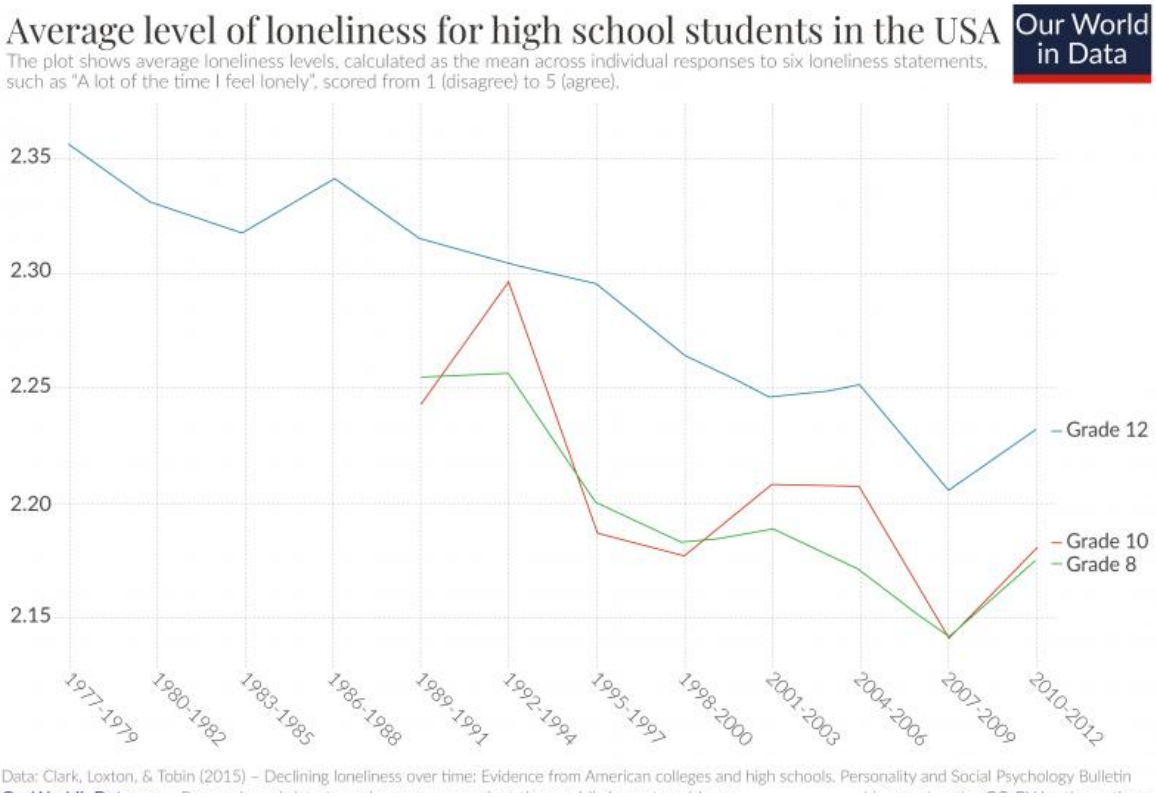
Starting in October 2018, with a week-long innovation 'sprint' we are identifying, developing and testing solutions that tackle loneliness and isolation in our cities.

Over 100 people from 40 organisations have been part of the Loneliness Lab so far, including community groups, NGOs, Local Authorities, businesses, designers, artists, and importantly people experiencing loneliness.

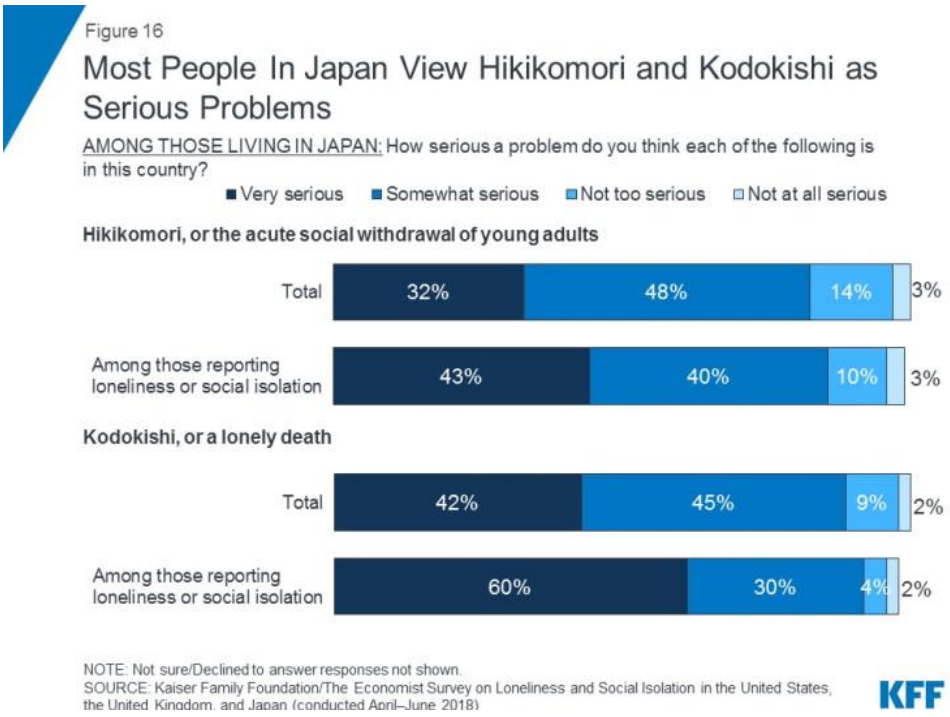
Appendix 1.2 [Source: KFF]



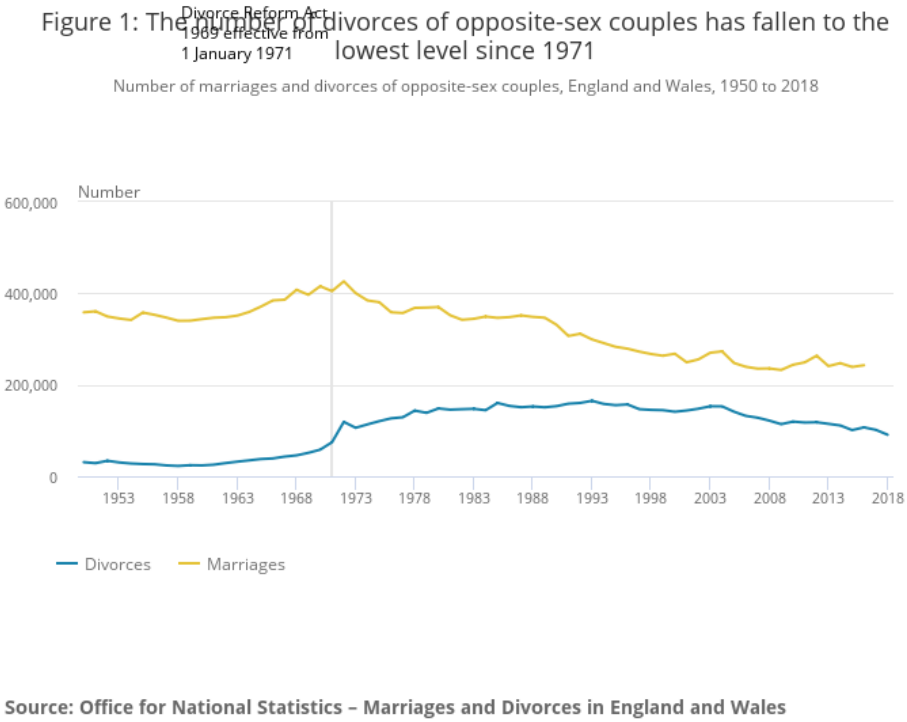
Appendix 1.3 [Source: OurWorldInData.org]



Appendix 1.4[Source: KFF]

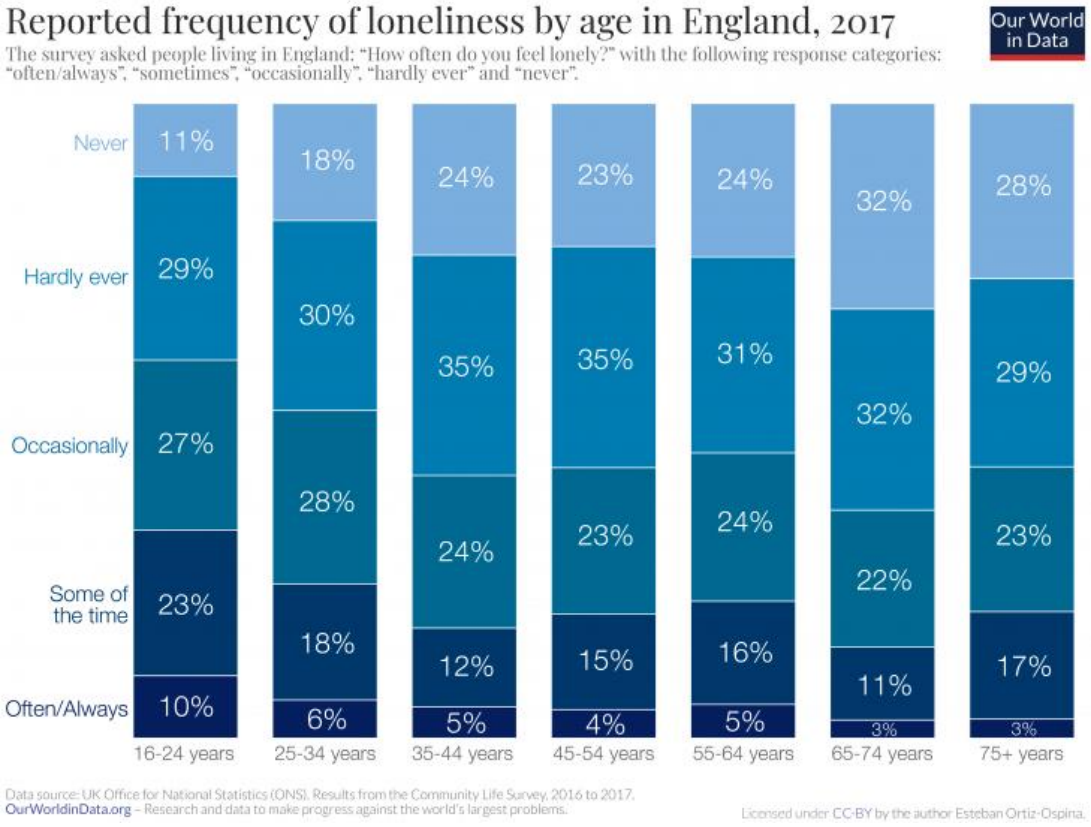


Appendix 1.5 [Source: Office for National Statistics (England and Wales)]

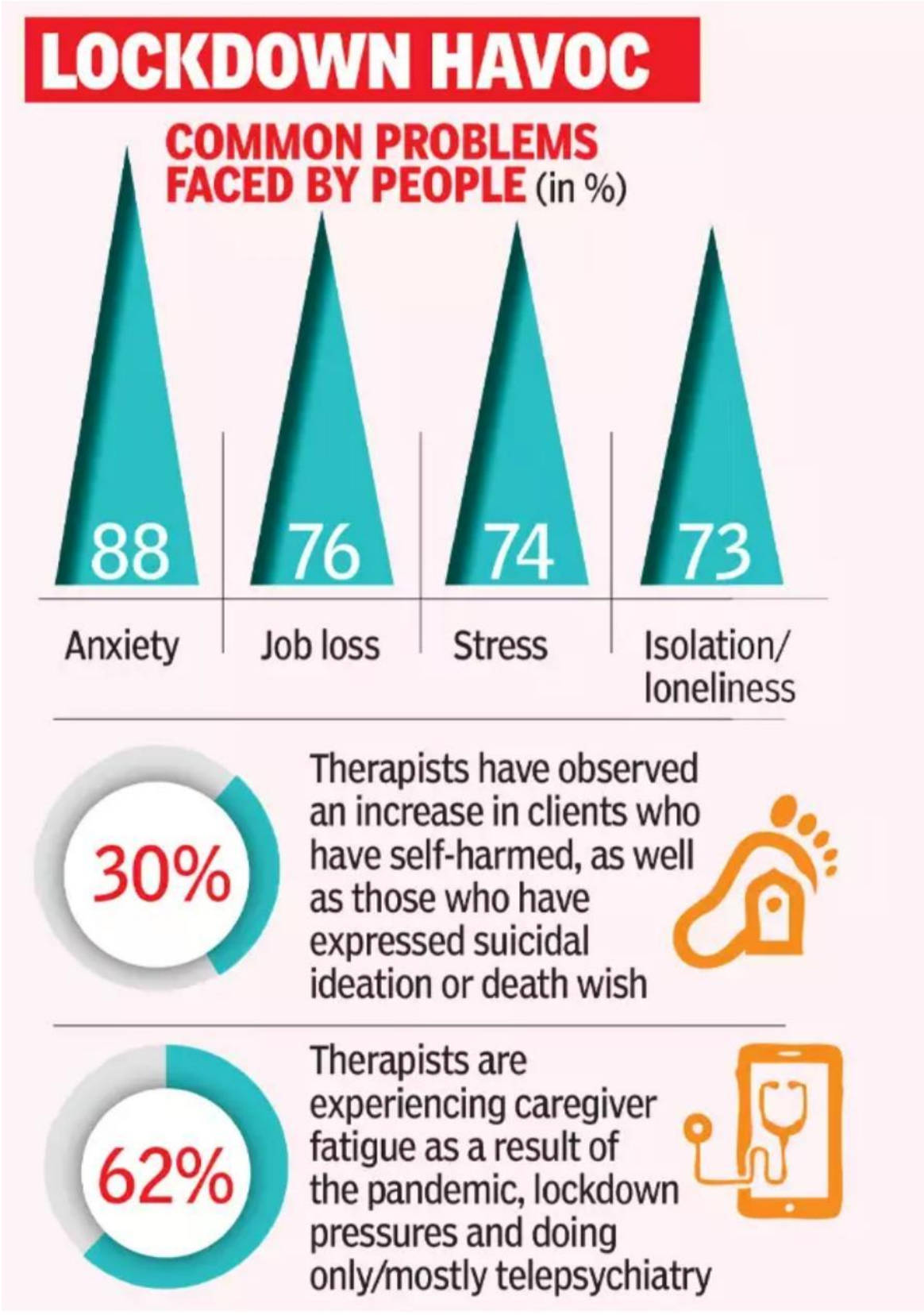
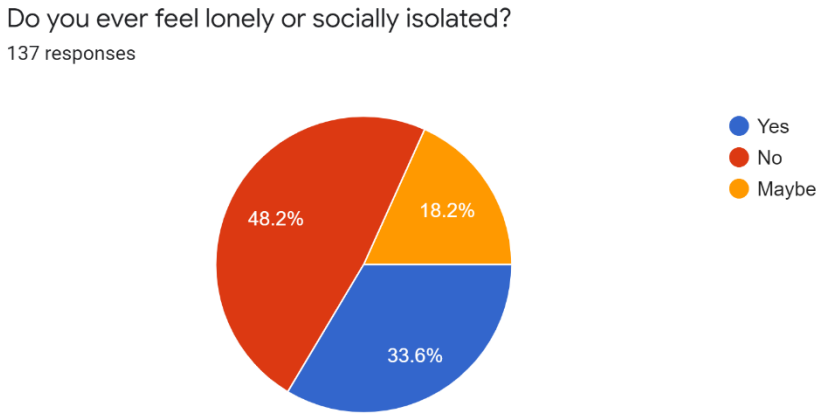
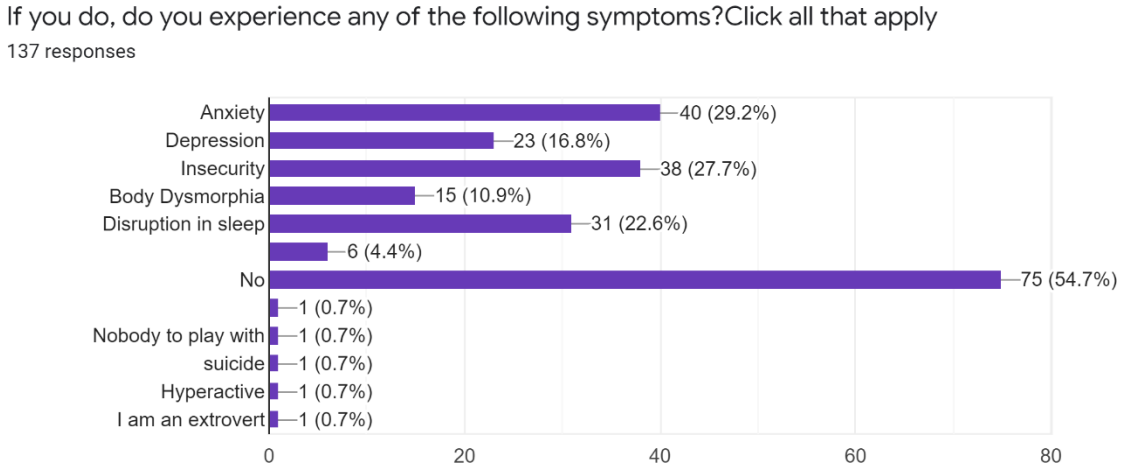
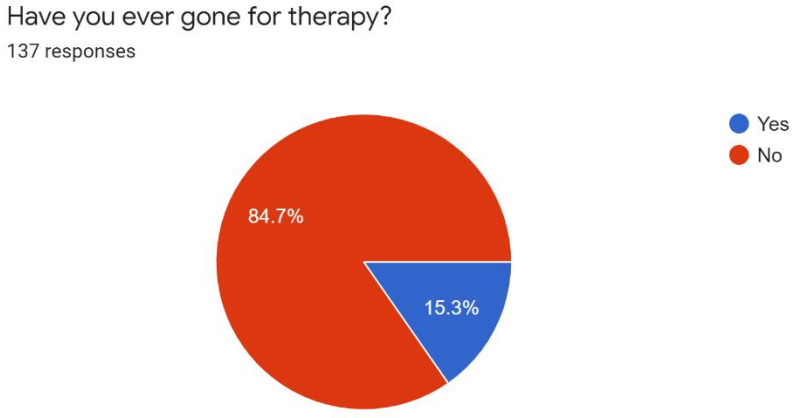


Source: Office for National Statistics – Marriages and Divorces in England and Wales

Appendix 1.6 [Source: OurWorldInData.org]



Appendix 1.7 [Source: Times of India]



Appendix 1.81, 1.82, 1.83 [Source: Social Isolation and Loneliness Survey I conducted]