

# On Aging: Longitudinal Survey Findings on Socialization and Disasters

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## Background

Aging populations are a trend currently seen in the United States, Europe, East Asia, and many other countries. These demographic shifts have profound implications on disaster planning due to the differing needs of older adults who themselves are not a monolithic group. Inspection of long running and large-scale datasets covering older adults in different countries can give insight into factors tying together loneliness, social isolation, and disaster outcomes for older adults.

## Methods

The following datasets were used for this analysis:

European Loneliness Survey (2022)

National Social Life, Health and Aging Project (NSHAP): 2015-2016

English Longitudinal Survey of Ageing (ELSA): 2020

Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE): Wave 8 2019-2020 and Wave 9 2021-2022

STATA software version 17.0 was used to assess the datasets. All versions used were publicly available and do not contain any personally identifiable information.

## Research Questions

How are loneliness and social isolation measured in older adults in longitudinal surveys?

What findings from the metrics regarding longitudinal measures of social isolation and loneliness directly impact older adult outcomes from disasters?

How do the European Union, England, and the United States compare regarding these statistical findings?

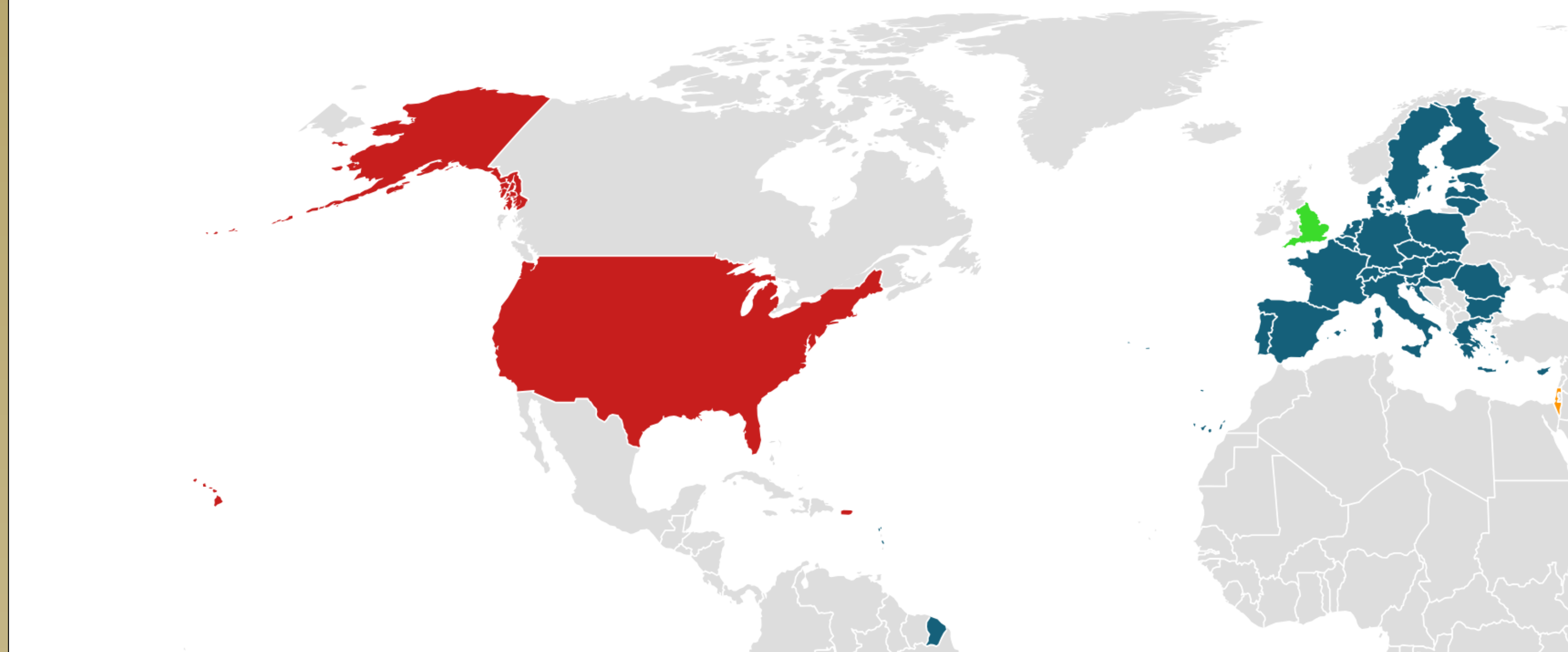
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https://www.icpsr.org/

Map made using <https://app.datawrapper.de>

## Longitudinal Survey Respondents

■ ELSA ■ NSHAP ■ SHARE only ■ SHARE and EU Loneliness Survey



## Key Findings Related to Disasters

- *EU Loneliness*: **29.18%** have limited or no support if bedridden
- *NSHAP*: **21.9%** relied on others for everyday tasks
- *ELSA*: **34.23%** reported worrying too much about different things while **25.01%** reported uncontrollable worrying
- *SHARE*: Increased risk-taking behavior, increased planning, reduced trust in others over time

## Discussion

EU Loneliness Survey

49.28% of older adults reported few or nobody to rely on if bedridden. What happens during a disaster if these respondents suffer negative consequences and their primary support systems are now unavailable as well?

NSHAP

74.6% of respondents received about the same amount of support as they had since the beginning of COVID. However, as populations continue to age, how likely is it that older adults will continue to receive sustaining levels of support should another pandemic or crisis occur in the future?

ELSA

The 34.23% and 25.01% reporting substantial levels of worrying point to potential challenges regarding mental health of older adults in the community, regardless of whether they are directly impacted by a disaster. This finding suggest increased attention is needed for mental health resources for older adults in disaster settings.

SHARE

Comparing Wave 8 and Wave 9, we see increased tendencies towards isolation, loneliness, risk taking, and planning while trust in others decreased slightly. Should this trend hold true, does this mean that people will take more steps to independently prepare for disasters but also be less likely both help others and listen to advice or instructions from authorities regarding disasters?

## Practical Applications

Integrate a different instrument for social isolation into these surveys. Currently the use of both the De Jong Gierveld and the UCLA Loneliness surveys in the EU Loneliness Survey is helpful; however, a dedicated instrument such as the Lubben Social Network Scale or the Litwin Support Network could help to capture further nuances for social isolation.

Findings from this poster's research can help to support planning for areas with aging populations. Since this trend is observed in a large share of countries across North America, Eastern Asia, and Europe, the implications are quite broad as are the potential hazards faced.

All levels of government should consider disaster planning implications for larger numbers of older adults living alone, even as these populations are themselves subject to changes over time.

Issues of technical literacy and trust in institutions may vary over time and in geographic areas for older adults living alone, with direct consequences for the efficacy of evacuation planning and warning systems, for instance.

Further studies should analyze voluntary relocations of older adults tied to life cycle changes such as retirement, which can also invalidate pre-existing community plans as retirees opt to relocate and thereby disrupt their existing social connections and support networks.