

Loneliness and Social Media in the United States

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Filling the need for trusted information on national health issues.

KFF/Economist Survey on Loneliness and Social Isolation

- KFF/The Economist conducted a dual-frame RDD telephone survey on loneliness/social isolation in the United States, United Kingdom, and Japan in Spring 2018
- Why do this survey?
 - Attention to issue:
 - U.K. appointed a Minister for Loneliness in January 2018
 - “Lonely death” phenomenon noted in Japan
 - Former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy warned of “loneliness epidemic” in U.S.
 - Health, economic, and societal implications:
 - Loneliness = obesity + smoking?
 - Discussion about the role of disconnectedness and social media use in other public health issues, such as increasing suicide and depression rates, and shortening life spans
 - Complex, multifaceted issue with many confounding factors:
 - Challenging for policymakers and health care professionals working to address it

Survey Methods Overview

- Dual-frame RDD telephone survey conducted in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan
- Oversample of those who qualified as feeling lonely or socially isolated
- Multi-stage translation
- Multi-stage weighting process in each of the three countries
- Conducted several data validation processes in order to ensure high quality data
- This presentation will focus on the U.S. results

Country	Field Dates	Language	Total Sample Size (Unweighted) & M.O.S.E	Total reporting loneliness & M.O.S.E	Cell phone sample	LL sample
United States	April 18-May 23, 2018	English, Spanish	1,003 ±3 percentage points	276 ±7 percentage points	720	283

Defining “Loneliness”

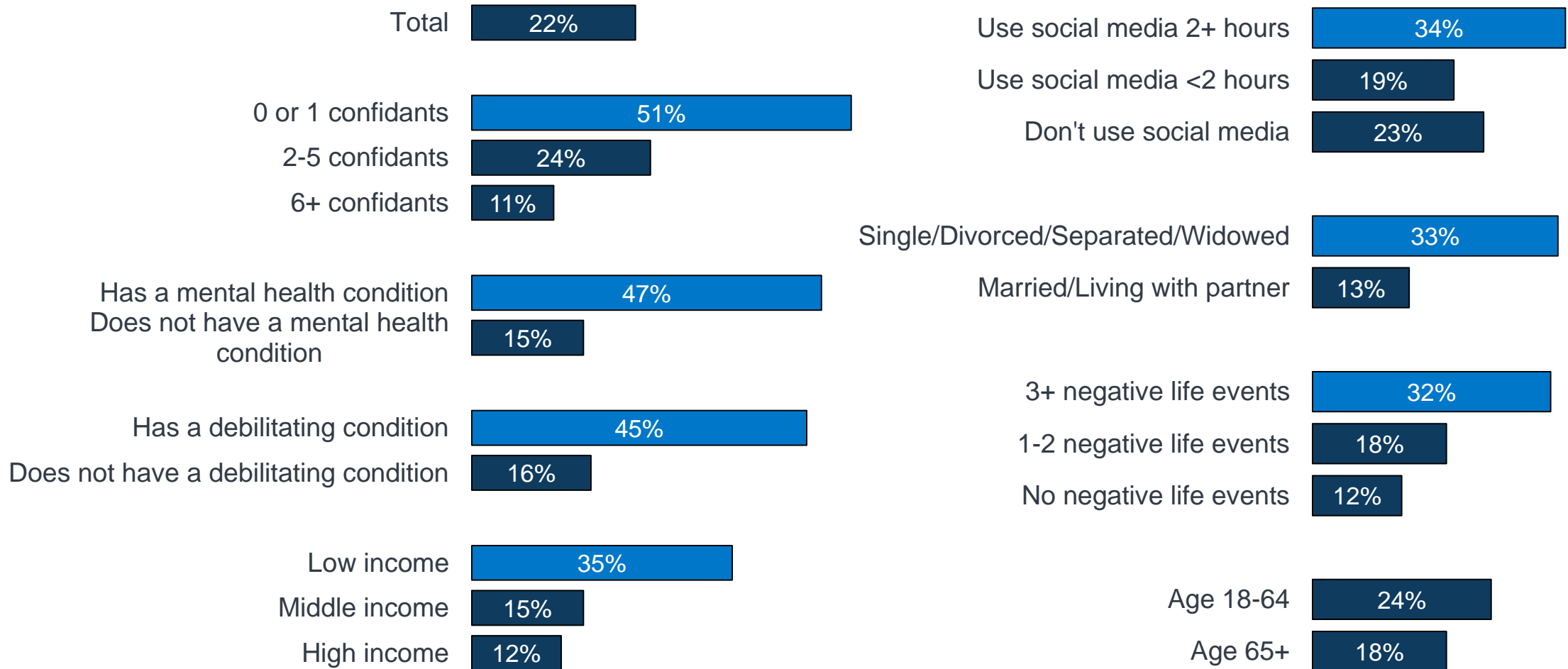
- Our survey defined people as lonely if they said they “always” or “often” feel **at least one** of the following:
 - Lonely
 - That they lack companionship
 - Left out
 - Isolated from others
- This definition is a conglomerate of several different definitions, notably the UCLA Loneliness Scale, which is one of the most widely used instruments when assessing loneliness
- In our survey, the prevalence of loneliness was 22% in the U.S. (N=276).

Why study relationship between social media use and loneliness?

- Literature Review
 - Social media fosters several shallow relationships, weakening social networks (Parigi & Henson, 2012)
 - More time spent on social media (specifically more than 2 hours per day) correlated to stronger feelings of perceived social isolation compared to people who spend 30 minutes or less on social media (Primack et al., 2017)
- Research questions:
 - What is the relationship between social media and loneliness, and what other factors contribute to this relationship?
 - Does this relationship exist when we control for other variables?
 - How do those experiencing loneliness feel about their use of social media, it's impact on their social network and their own feelings of loneliness?

Reports Of Loneliness And Social Isolation Highest Among Those With Few Confidants, Mental Health Conditions, Low Income

Percent who say they always or often feel lonely, left out, isolated, or that they lack companionship:



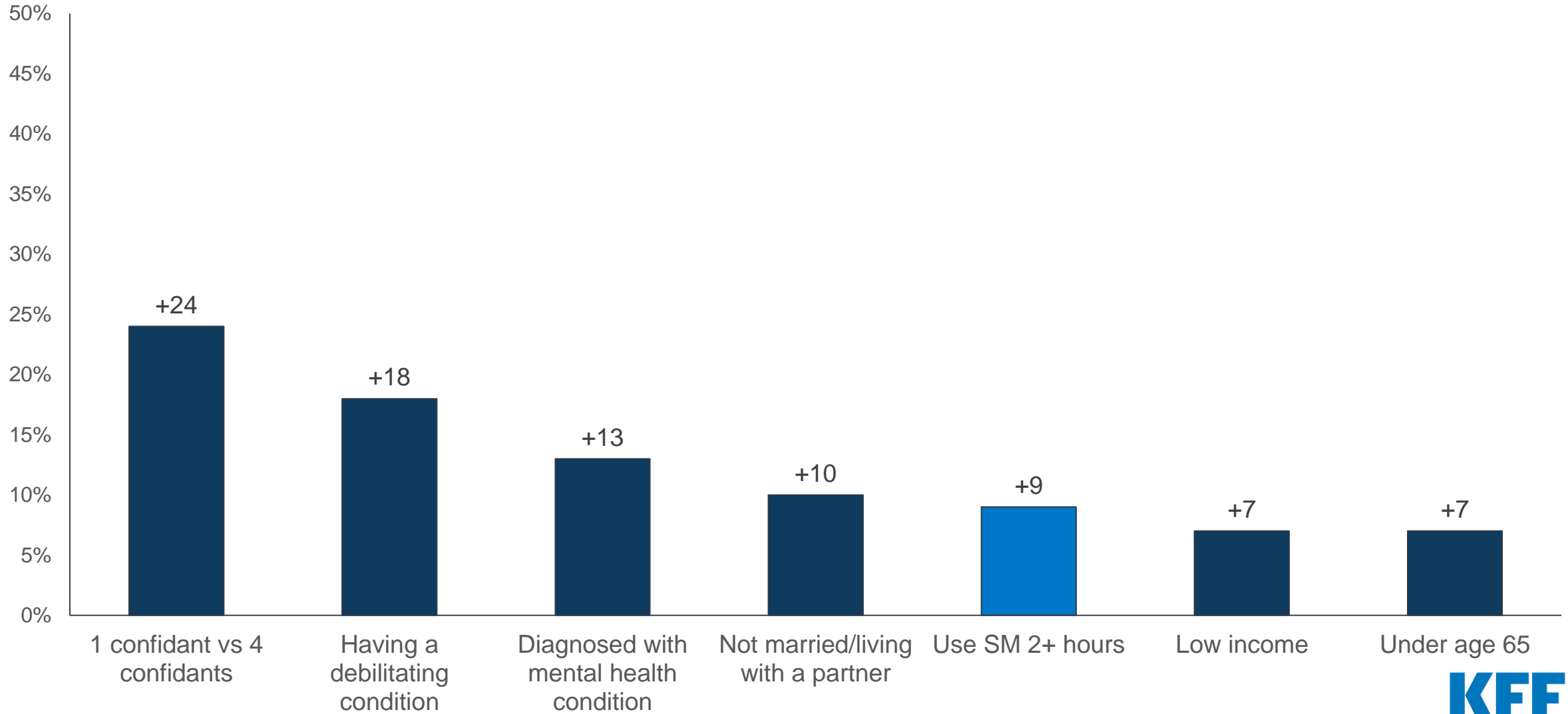
SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation/The Economist Survey on Loneliness and Social Isolation in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan (conducted April–June 2018)

Heavy Social Media Use Is A Predictor Of Loneliness

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Female	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Rural	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Low income	***	***	***
Not married or living with partner	***	***	***
Age 65+	***	***	**
Social Media Use 2+ hours per day		**	**
Debilitating condition			***
Mental health condition			***
Negative life event			n.s.
Number of confidants			***

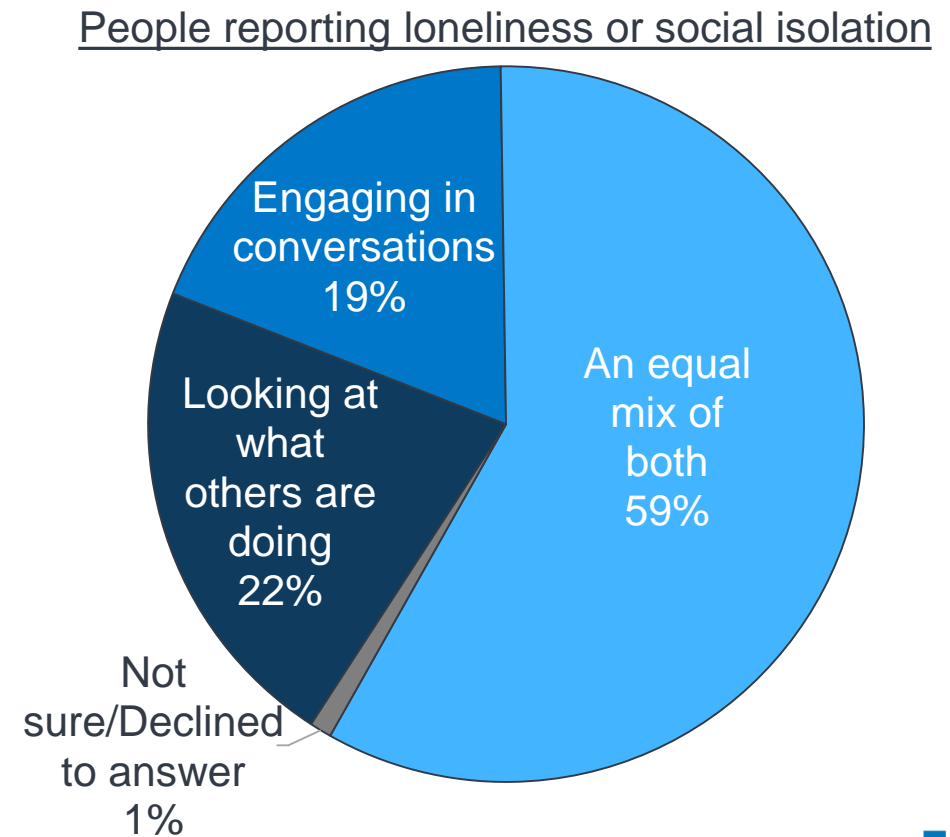
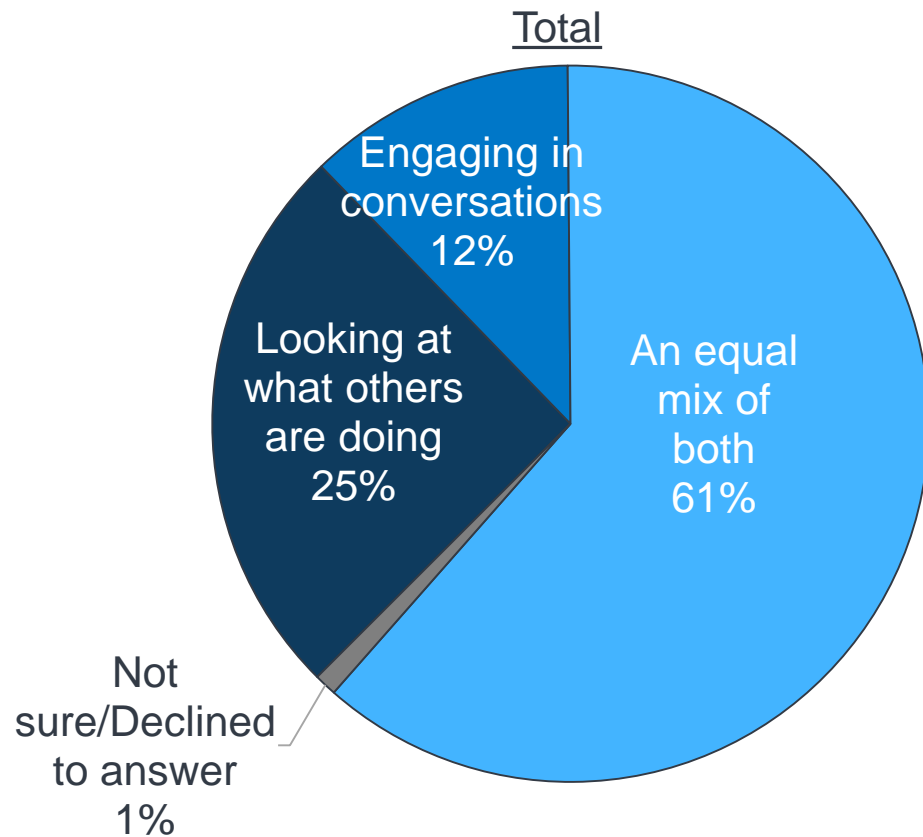
n.s.= not significant **=significant at p=0.05 ***=significant at p=0.01

Effect Of Different Characteristics On Predicted Probability Of Loneliness And Social Isolation



People Reporting Loneliness Say They Use Social Media To Both Engage In Conversation And Look At Other Posts

AMONG THOSE WHO USE SOCIAL MEDIA: Is the time you spend on social media mostly spent looking at what other people are doing, mostly spent engaging in conversations with other people, or an equal mix of both?

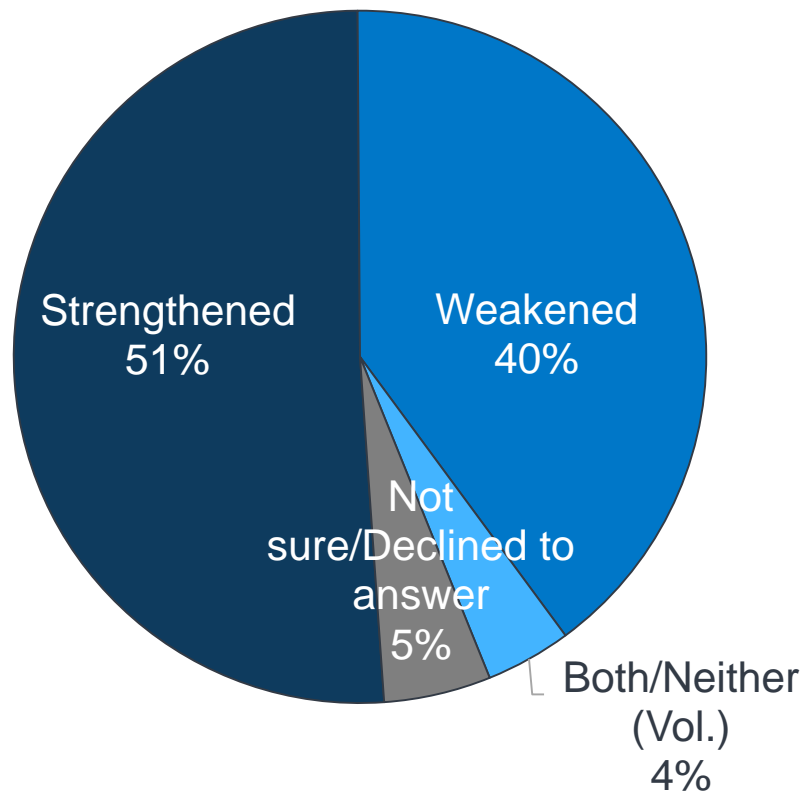


SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation/The Economist Survey on Loneliness and Social Isolation in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan (conducted April–June 2018)

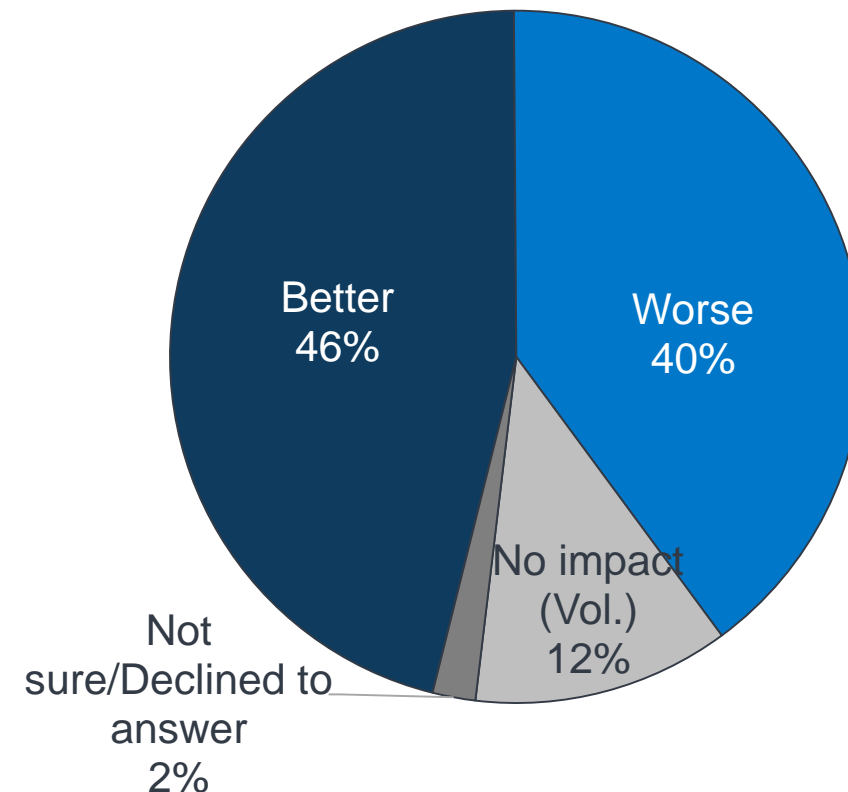
Those Reporting Loneliness Split On Effects Of Social Media

AMONG THOSE REPORTING LONELINESS OR SOCIAL ISOLATION:

Do you think your ability to connect with others in a meaningful way is strengthened or weakened by social media?



Do you think your own feelings of loneliness are made better or worse by social media?

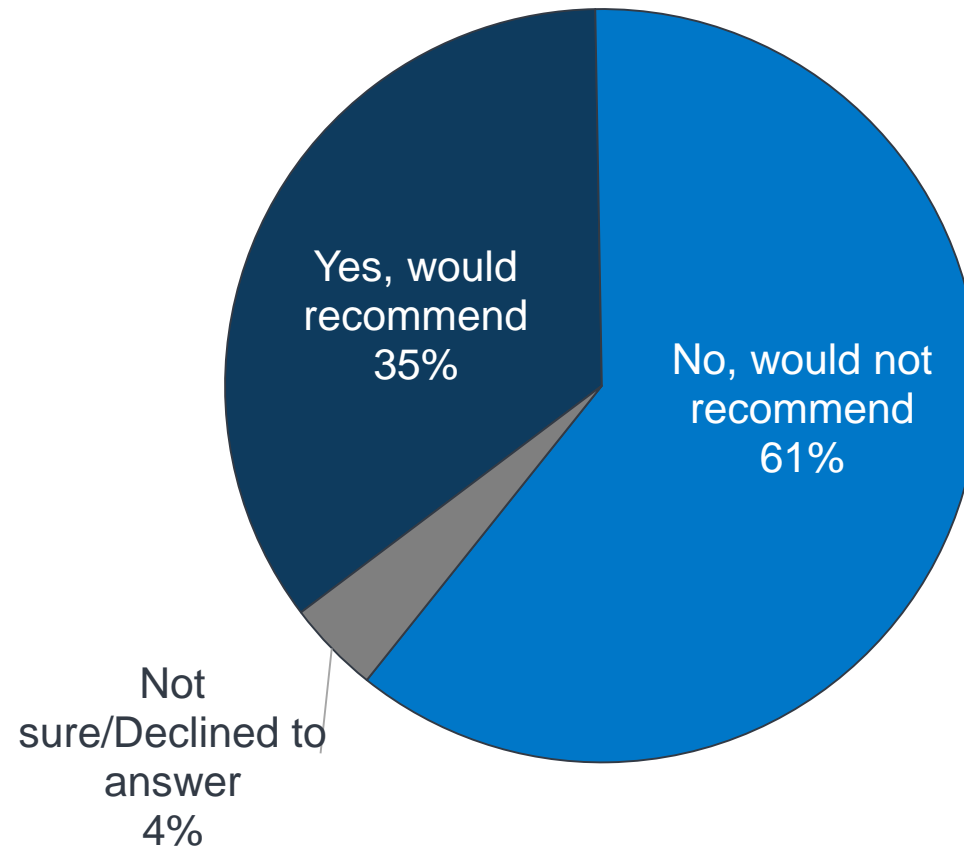


NOTE: Based on those who use social media.

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation/The Economist Survey on Loneliness and Social Isolation in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan (conducted April–June 2018)

Few Recommend Using The Internet As A Way To Cope With Loneliness

AMONG THOSE REPORTING LONELINESS OR SOCIAL ISOLATION: In general, if a friend were experiencing loneliness, would you recommend they use the internet as a way to help with their loneliness, or not?



SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation/The Economist Survey on Loneliness and Social Isolation in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan (conducted April–June 2018)

Final Thoughts and Takeaways

- Social media is a tool that some perceive to strengthen social networks and facilitate interaction, but heavy use may be connected to feelings of loneliness
- Relationship between social media use and loneliness/social isolation persists when controlling for other factors
- Heavy social media use (2+ hours/day) is a predictor of loneliness in our models; however, other factors are stronger predictors of loneliness, such as having a mental health or physically debilitating condition
- Policymakers may consider the pros and cons of using social media as a method of intervention

Areas For Future Research

Future research on this topic could explore:

- Cross-cultural comparisons and examine how different cultures/societal values play into the dynamic between loneliness and social media use
- Whether the type of social media used (or the specific platform) affects loneliness
- Collecting larger sample sizes of those reporting loneliness to examine more demographic subgroups
- Questions about causality remains



Thank you.