

DESIRED OUTCOMES

People enjoy constructive relationships with others in their families, whānau, communities, iwi and workplaces. Families support and nurture those in need of care. New Zealand is an inclusive society where people are able to access information and support.

Social Connectedness

INTRODUCTION

Social connectedness refers to the relationships people have with others.

Social connectedness is integral to wellbeing. People are defined by their social roles, whether as partners, parents, children, friends, caregivers, teammates, staff or employers, or a myriad of other roles. Relationships give people support, happiness, contentment and a sense they belong and have a role to play in society.⁸⁷ They also mean people have support networks in place that they can call on for help during hard times.

Social connectedness also refers to people joining together to achieve shared goals which benefit each other and society as a whole – this may range from working together as part of a business and paid employment to contributing to their communities through voluntary groups.

One of the most important aspects of social connectedness is the relationship people have with a spouse or a partner. Studies have consistently found that having a partner contributes to a person's reported level of wellbeing.⁸⁸

Several studies have demonstrated links between social connectedness and the performance of the economy as well as positive outcomes for individual health and wellbeing.⁸⁹

Social connectedness is fostered when family relationships are positive, and when people have the skills and opportunities to make friends and to interact constructively with others. Good health, employment, and feeling safe and secure all increase people's chances of developing positive relationships.

There can be many barriers to social connectedness. The tendency to make connections outside the family varies between cultures and communities. Factors such as language differences, high levels of inequality and tensions between ethnic groups can create barriers between people.

INDICATORS

Five indicators are used to measure New Zealand's levels of social connectedness. Together, the five indicators measure opportunities for and the actual levels of connection between people, both within people's immediate social groups and within the wider community. The indicators are: telephone and internet access, regular contact with family/friends, trust in others, the proportion of the population experiencing loneliness and contact between young people and their parents.

Access to the internet is significant because it gives people more access to information and, as a consequence, more opportunity to engage in society. Both the phone and the internet enable people to keep in touch without seeing each other face to face. This means social connectedness can be maintained even when people are in different cities or even in different countries. It also means new social networks can be opened up between people who may never have met, crossing geographical boundaries.

For the vast majority of people, social networks centre on family and friends. The second indicator measures the proportion of people who take part in family activities and have family or friends over for a meal at least once a month.

Trust in others, the third indicator, measures the extent to which people expect others to act fairly towards them. High levels of trust enhance wellbeing by facilitating co-operative behaviour among people who otherwise do not know each other. Trust also enhances people's ability to develop positive relationships with others.

Levels of loneliness are measured in the fourth indicator. Isolation and loneliness undermine overall wellbeing and can be detrimental to people's physical and emotional health, resulting in stress, anxiety or depression.

The final indicator, the proportion of young people who report getting enough time each week with their parents, is a measure of the extent to which people in need of care and nurturing receive that support.

Telephone and internet access in the home

DEFINITION

The proportion of the population with telephone and internet access in the home, as measured by the *2000 Living Standards Surveys*.

RELEVANCE

Being able to communicate and interact easily in the absence of frequent face-to-face contact helps maintain social connectedness. Access to telephones and access to communication via the internet, especially emails, are particularly relevant as social indicators because access to mail services is almost universal and fax use is principally by businesses. The internet also makes it easier to access a significant and growing repository of information and knowledge.

CURRENT LEVEL

Access to a telephone at home is almost universal in New Zealand, at 97 percent overall. Internet access at home is also relatively high at 41 percent, considering the relatively recent introduction of this communication technology.

Table SC1.1 **Proportion (%) of the population with telephone and internet access in the home, by population characteristics, 2000**

	Telephone	Internet access
Population estimates		
Total population	97.3	40.6
Dependent children	96.4	44.3
Age groupings		
Adults aged under 65	97.3	44.2
Adults 65 and over	99.2	11.8
Family ethnicity		
Māori economic family	92.3	28.3
Pacific economic family	88.1	16.4
European economic family	99.2	44.3
Other economic family	96.9	50.7
Families with dependent children		
One parent with dependent children	88.9	25.3
Two parents with dependent children	98.3	49.6
All families with dependent children	96.8	45.6
Family employment/income status		
18–64 year olds, main income earner in full-time employment	98.8	49.0
18–64 year olds, main income earner not in full-time employment	91.6	29.2
65 year olds and over, with employment or other income (above New Zealand Superannuation)	99.5	18.2
65 year olds and over, with little or no other income (above New Zealand Superannuation)	98.8	5.4

Source: Ministry of Social Development (2003b)

ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

People living in Pacific economic families (those with any Pacific member) have the lowest level of telephone and internet access in the home (88 percent and 16 percent, respectively), followed by people living in Māori economic families (92 percent and 28 percent). The highest level of internet access in the home was among people living in other non-European economic families (51 percent).

AGE GROUP AND EMPLOYMENT OR INCOME DIFFERENCES

Adults 65 years and over are more likely than adults under 65 to have a telephone, but much less likely to have internet access in their home (12 percent compared to 44 percent among adults under 65). Older people with no income other than New Zealand Superannuation have the lowest level of internet access in the home (5 percent).

Among adults under 65, telephone and internet access in the home is lower than average where the main earner in the family is not in full-time employment, the difference being more striking in the case of internet access (29 percent compared to 49 percent).

DIFFERENCES BY FAMILY TYPE

Overall, families with dependent children are more likely than average to have internet access in the home. However, sole-parent families are half as likely as two-parent families to have internet access (25 percent compared to 50 percent) and less likely than two-parent families to have a telephone (89 percent compared to 98 percent).

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

New Zealand compares relatively favourably with other countries for access to the internet. In 2000, 14 out of every 100 New Zealanders were internet subscribers, compared with an OECD median of 11. New Zealand ranked ninth out of 26 OECD countries.⁹⁰

Participation in family/whānau activities and regular contact with family/friends

DEFINITION

The proportion of the population who participated in family/whānau activities and the proportion of the population who had family or friends over for a meal at least once a month, as measured by the *2000 Living Standards Surveys*. Family/whānau activities were not specified in the surveys; respondents interpreted them in their own ways.

RELEVANCE

An important reflection of social connectedness is found in the extent to which people are in regular contact with family and friends, and the extent to which they participate in family/whānau activities.

CURRENT LEVEL

A high proportion of the population say they take part in family/whānau activities (87 percent) and more than two-thirds (71 percent) report having family or friends over for a meal at least once a month.

Table SC2.1

Proportion (%) of population participating in family activities and having family/friends over for a meal, by population characteristics, 2000

	Participation in family activities	Have family/friends over for a meal
Population estimates		
Total population	86.8	70.5
Age groupings		
Adults aged under 65	86.5	72.0
Adults aged 65 and over	80.4	60.5
Family ethnicity		
Māori economic family	90.9	68.9
Pacific economic family	86.1	79.6
European economic family	87.6	70.0
Other economic family	71.8	70.3
Families with dependent children		
One parent with dependent children	87.4	65.4
Two parents with dependent children	90.0	72.6
All families with dependent children	89.6	71.4
Family employment/income status		
18–64 year olds, main income earner in full-time employment	89.0	73.4
18–64 year olds, main income earner not in full-time employment	83.4	66.9
65 year olds and over, with employment or other income (above New Zealand Superannuation)	85.5	69.3
65 year olds and over, with little or no other income (above New Zealand Superannuation)	75.4	51.8

Source: Ministry of Social Development (2003b)

ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

According to the surveys, people living in Māori economic families are the most likely to take part in family/whānau activities (91 percent), while Pacific and European people have average levels of participation (86 and 88 percent, respectively). Those living in other economic families are much less likely than average to take part in such activities (72 percent), perhaps reflecting the fact this group may include many new migrants whose families live overseas. Sharing meals in the home is more common among Pacific peoples (80 percent) than among people of “Other” ethnic groups (70 percent).

**AGE GROUP AND
EMPLOYMENT
OR INCOME
DIFFERENCES**

Adults over 65 years are less likely to engage in family activities (80 percent) and considerably less likely to have people over for a meal (61 percent), particularly those with no income other than New Zealand Superannuation (52 percent).

Among adults under 65, participation in family activities and sharing meals is somewhat lower than average where the main earner in the family is not in full-time employment (83 percent and 67 percent).

**DIFFERENCES
BY FAMILY TYPE**

Not surprisingly, families with dependent children are more likely than average to participate in family/whānau activities, and there is little difference between sole-parent and two-parent families on this measure of social connectedness. However, sole-parent families are less likely than two-parent families to have friends or family over for a meal (65 percent compared to 73 percent).

Trust in others

DEFINITION

The proportion of the population aged 15 and over reporting that people can “almost always” or “usually” be trusted, as reported in the *Quality of Life in New Zealand’s Largest Cities Survey 2004*.

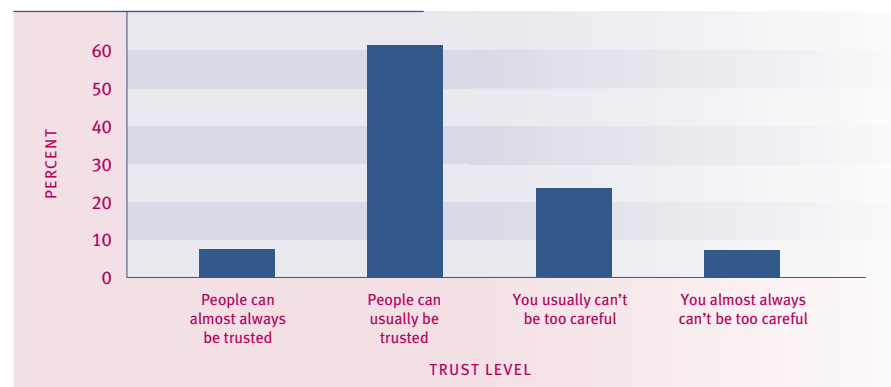
RELEVANCE

Trust in others is an important indicator of how people feel about members of their community. High levels of trust facilitate co-operative behaviour among people and contribute to people’s ability to develop positive relationships with others.

CURRENT LEVEL

In 2004, 69 percent of New Zealanders said they believed people can be trusted, with 8 percent reporting “people can almost always be trusted” and 61 percent reporting “people can usually be trusted”.

Figure SC3.1 Levels of trust in other people, 2004



Source: Auckland City Council et al (2005) Quality of Life in New Zealand’s Largest Cities

SEX AND AGE DIFFERENCES

The proportion of those reporting that people can be trusted was the same for both males and females, at 69 percent. Eight percent of females and 7 percent of males support the statement “people can almost always be trusted”. Both sexes have the same proportion of supporters (61 percent) for the statement “people can usually be trusted”.

Levels of trust ranged from 65 percent at ages 15–24 years to 70 percent at 25–49 years.

ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

People in the “Other” ethnic group reported the highest overall level of trust in others with 73 percent responding that people could “almost always” or “usually” be trusted, followed by European at 71 percent and Asian/Indians at 66 percent. Māori (57 percent) and Pacific peoples (56 percent) had the lowest proportions who felt that people could be trusted.

Figure SC3.2 Proportion of respondents reporting that people can “almost always” or “usually” be trusted, by ethnic group, 2004

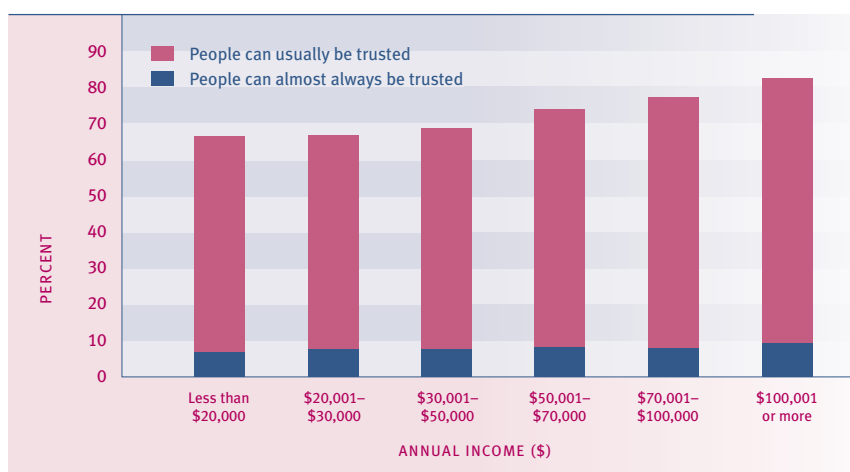


Source: Auckland City Council et al (2005) Quality of Life in New Zealand's Largest Cities

PERSONAL INCOME DIFFERENCES

Across all income levels a majority of New Zealanders indicated that people could “almost always” or “usually” be trusted. Trust in others tends to increase as personal income levels increase. New Zealanders with personal incomes over \$100,001 reported the highest overall levels of trust (82 percent). Those with incomes of \$30,000 or less reported lower levels of trust overall, with only 66 percent indicating that they thought people could be trusted “almost always” or “usually”.

Figure SC3.3 Proportion of respondents reporting that people can “almost always” or “usually” be trusted, by personal income, 2004



Source: Auckland City Council et al (2005) Quality of Life in New Zealand's Largest Cities

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

Across all Big Cities a majority of New Zealanders indicated people could “almost always” or “usually” be trusted. Those living in Wellington reported the highest levels of trust, with 78 percent indicating people could be trusted “almost always” or “usually”. Those living in Manukau reported the lowest level of trust in others, with 61 percent reporting people could “almost always” or “usually” be trusted.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

In 1998, 49 percent of New Zealanders said most people can be trusted. This was high compared to an OECD median of 38 percent in 1995/1996. New Zealand ranked sixth out of 26 OECD countries. Norway had the best outcome in the OECD, with 65 percent of Norwegians stating most people can be trusted. Outcomes for other countries include Canada at fifth, with 52 percent, Australia at 13th, with 40 percent, the United States at 14th, with 36 percent, and the United Kingdom at 18th, with 31 percent.⁹¹

Loneliness

DEFINITION

The proportion of people aged 15 and over who reported feeling lonely “sometimes”, “most of the time” or “always” during the previous 12 months, as reported in the *Quality of Life in New Zealand’s Largest Cities Survey 2004*.

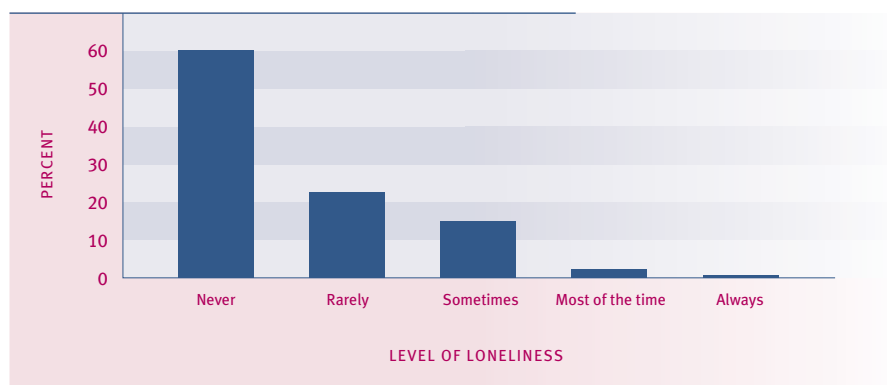
RELEVANCE

Social contact is of fundamental importance to people: humans are social creatures. Self-assessed loneliness is a proxy indicator of whether people are happy with the amount and quality of social contact they get. As well as being an undesirable state in itself, loneliness may also contribute to poor outcomes in other areas, including adverse health problems such as stress, anxiety or depression.

CURRENT LEVEL

In 2004, 18 percent of New Zealanders reported having felt lonely over the last 12 months. Fifteen percent said they felt lonely “sometimes”, while a small group of people reported feeling lonely more frequently. Two percent said they were lonely “most of the time” and fewer than 1 percent said they “always” feel lonely. Unemployed people and people without a partner were more likely than New Zealanders as a whole to report feeling lonely (31 percent and 32 percent respectively).

Figure SC4.1 **Proportion of people experiencing loneliness, 2004**



Source: Auckland City Council et al (2005) *Quality of Life in New Zealand’s Largest Cities*

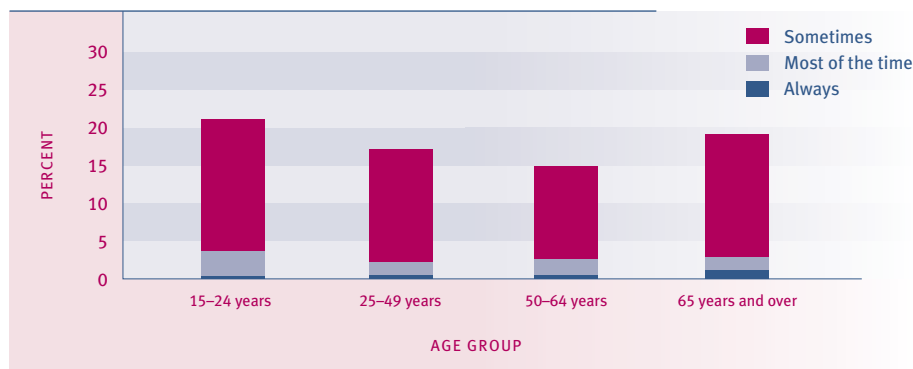
SEX DIFFERENCES

Overall, females (20 percent) were more likely to report having felt lonely “sometimes”, “most of the time” or “all of the time” in the last 12 months than males (15 percent). Seventeen percent of females said they were “sometimes” lonely compared to 13 percent of males.

AGE DIFFERENCES

Loneliness is most prevalent among those aged 15–24 years, followed by people aged 65 and over: 21 percent of people aged 15–24 and 19 percent of those aged 65 and over experienced feelings of loneliness “sometimes”, “most of the time”, or “always”. Levels of loneliness were somewhat lower among those aged 25–49 (17 percent) and lowest among 50–64 year olds (15 percent).

Figure SC4.2 Proportion of people experiencing loneliness, by age, 2004



Source: Auckland City Council et al (2005) Quality of Life in New Zealand's Largest Cities

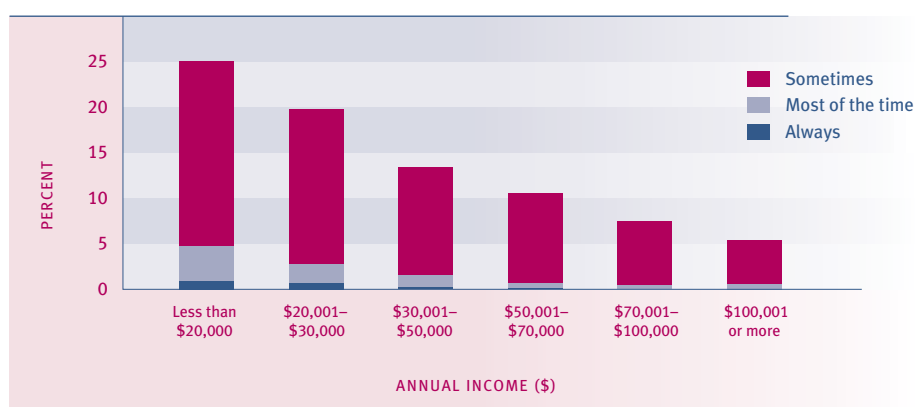
ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

Europeans reported the lowest rate of loneliness with 15 percent reporting they are lonely "sometimes", "most of the time", or "always". Twenty-two percent of Māori and 25 percent of Pacific peoples reported they are "sometimes", "most of the time", or "always" lonely. Asian/Indian peoples (36 percent) and people in "Other" ethnic groups (36 percent) reported the highest rates of loneliness.

PERSONAL INCOME DIFFERENCES

Experiencing loneliness declines as personal income rises. People with personal incomes of \$20,000 or less reported higher rates of loneliness than people with higher incomes: 25 percent said they felt lonely "sometimes", "most of the time", or "always" in the past 12 months. This compares with a loneliness rate of only 5 percent for those with a personal income over \$100,001.

Figure SC4.3 Proportion of people experiencing loneliness, by personal income, 2004



Source: Auckland City Council et al (2005) Quality of Life in New Zealand's Largest Cities

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

People living in Manukau City had the highest reported incidence of loneliness with 21 percent reporting they felt lonely "always", "most of the time" or "sometimes". Those living in the Rodney District had the lowest reported incidence of experiencing loneliness (14 percent).

Contact between young people and their parents

DEFINITION

The proportion of secondary school students aged 12–18 years who reported that most weeks they were able to spend enough time with Mum and/or Dad (or someone who acts as Mum and/or Dad).

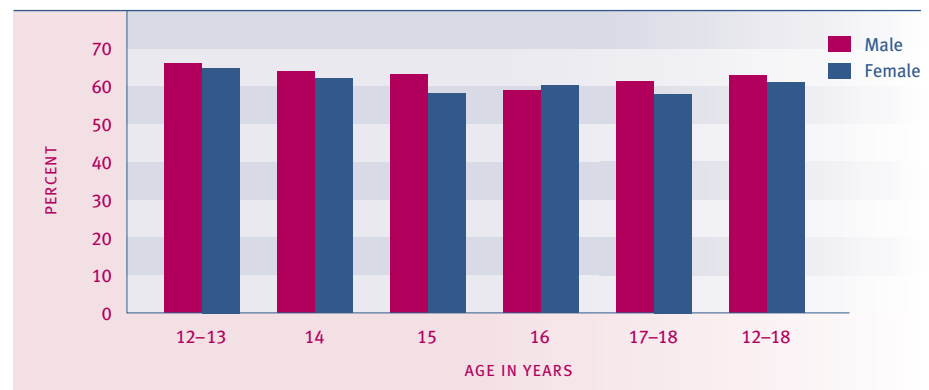
RELEVANCE

Healthy relationships are built through both the quantity and quality of time spent together. Young people having enough time with their parents is a proxy indicator of the extent to which those in need of care and nurturing receive appropriate support.

CURRENT LEVEL

In 2001, 63 percent of male students and 61 percent of female students reported that most weeks they were able to spend enough time with at least one parent.

Figure SC5.1 **Students reporting they spent enough time with their parent(s), by age and sex, 2001**



Source: Adolescent Health Research Group (2003a)

AGE AND SEX DIFFERENCES

There were no significant differences by sex in the proportion of students reporting they spent enough time with at least one parent. Girls at 15 years of age reported less often than younger boys and girls (12–13 years) that most weeks they were able to spend enough time with Mum or Dad.

ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

Fifty-five percent of Māori students and 65 percent of European students reported that most weeks they were able to spend enough time with Mum and/or Dad. The difference was statistically significant after adjusting for age, sex and socio-economic differences between the two ethnic groups. Pacific students (60 percent), Asian students (65 percent) and students of “Other” ethnic groups (60 percent) showed no statistically significant difference from New Zealand European students after adjusting for age, sex and socio-economic differences.