

Inequalities in Social Capital by Age and Sex, July 2015

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Abstract

This article provides an analysis of inequalities in social capital by age and sex in the UK, using the latest available data. The data are based on 25 headline measures, which cover 4 key aspects of social capital: personal relationships, social network support, civic engagement and trust and cooperative norms.

Main points

- Young people were the least likely to regularly stop and talk to their neighbours: less than half (45%) of those aged 18 to 24 regularly stopped and talked to their neighbours, compared to around 8 in 10 (83%) people aged 65 to 74 (2011 to 2012).
- Young people were the least interested in politics: around 4 in 10 (39%) of those aged 18 to 24 reported being quite or very interested in politics, compared to just under two-thirds (64%) of those aged 65 to 74 (2012 to 2013).
- People aged 75 and over were the least likely to have at least one close friend; 11% of them reported having no close friend at all, compared to 2% of those aged 18 to 24 (2011 to 2012).
- Around 1 in 4 women (24%) and in 1 in 5 men (19%) aged 75 and over reported caring for someone sick, disabled or elderly within their household (2012 to 2013).
- Middle aged people (aged 45 to 54) were the most likely to feel lonely of all age groups (15% in 2011 to 2012) and the least likely to socialise, with nearly half (49%) reporting meeting socially with family, friends or colleagues less than once a week (2012 to 2013).
- Fewer women than men reported feeling safe walking alone in their local area (58% compared to 85% in 2013 to 2014).

Introduction

Social capital represents social connections and all the benefits they generate. High social capital means a society where people are connected, tolerant, help each other and spend time for the “common good”. They have trust in others and in institutions, and are empowered to shape the society they live in. This has positive impacts on a range of areas, such as personal well-being, health, employment and crime.

Recent government evidence, submitted by the Cabinet Office to the [UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee](#) as part of their inquiry on well-being, highlighted the need for better evidence and further in-depth research to better understand social capital. Our current work, as part of the [Measuring National Well-being Programme](#), is helping to better understand social capital, using data from existing sources.

This article explores inequalities in social capital by looking at differences in age and sex in the UK using the latest available data. It follows a baseline analysis of [social capital in the UK](#) published earlier in the year. It allows policy makers to identify the areas where action may be best targeted to address differences in social capital by age and sex.

Background

Around 64% of the 64.6 million of people living in the UK in mid-2014 were aged 16 to 64 , 9.6% were 65 to 74 years old and 8% were 75 and over, according to the latest [population estimates](#). The UK has an ageing population: the proportion of the population aged 65 and over has increased over the past 30 years and this is projected to continue.

People of different age and sex might have different levels of social capital; for example, they might have a different range of social connections and resources; their civic attitudes, civic participation and the way they contribute to society might differ; their attitudes towards each other, their neighbours and institutions can also vary. Social capital can also make a difference at every stage of life, during the years in education, in the labour market and in older age, for both men and women. People of different age and sex can all shape the society and local area they live in.

A weakened social capital for people of different age and sex can in turn lead to inequalities in personal well-being ([Eurofound report, 2014](#)) and in accessing new opportunities or valuable resources for dealing with life challenges. A weakened social capital where people are less connected, integrated or civically engaged can also have an impact on community well-being and on social cohesion.

Personal relationships

This section looks at differences in the extent and nature of people's relationships with friends, family and neighbours, by age and sex.

Young people are less likely to interact with their neighbours

In 2011 to 2012, the proportion of people regularly stopping and talking with people in the neighbourhood increased steadily with age, with a slight decrease observed for those aged 75 and over (Figure 1). Only 45% of those aged 18 to 24 regularly stopped to talk with neighbours compared to 83% of those aged 65 to 74 and 79% of those aged 75 and over. Men were less likely to regularly stop and talk with people in the neighbourhood than women across all ages, with 63% of men doing so compared to 70% of women.

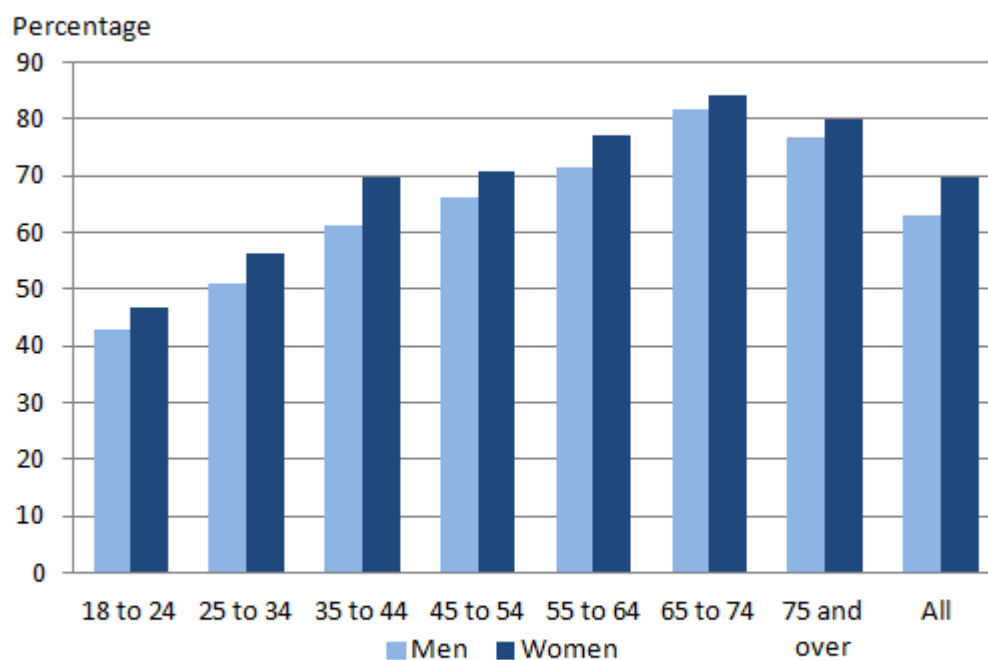
Positive attitudes in neighbourhoods, including taking the time to talk to neighbours, are important factors contributing to the building of communities in both urban and rural areas. More research is

needed to understand what prevents a higher proportion of younger people, in particular younger men, from building relationships with neighbours. We also need better understanding of the benefits that talking to neighbours can generate (for example, wider social network) and for the communities (for example, safer communities) across different ages.

Further discussion of neighbourhood measures for young people can be found in the Trust and Cooperative Norms section.

Figure 1: Proportion of people who regularly stop and talk with people in neighbourhood by age and sex, 2011 to 2012

United Kingdom



Source: Understanding Society

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People aged 45 to 54 are less satisfied about their social and family life, less likely to socialise often and more likely to feel lonely

Middle aged people rated their satisfaction with family and social life lower on average than other groups (Figure 2). A U-shape was observed for satisfaction with family life, with those aged 35 to 44 and 45 to 54 being the least satisfied with their family life on average (7.9 out of 10) (European Quality of Life Survey, EQLS, 2011 to 2012). Those aged 75 and over had the highest average rating

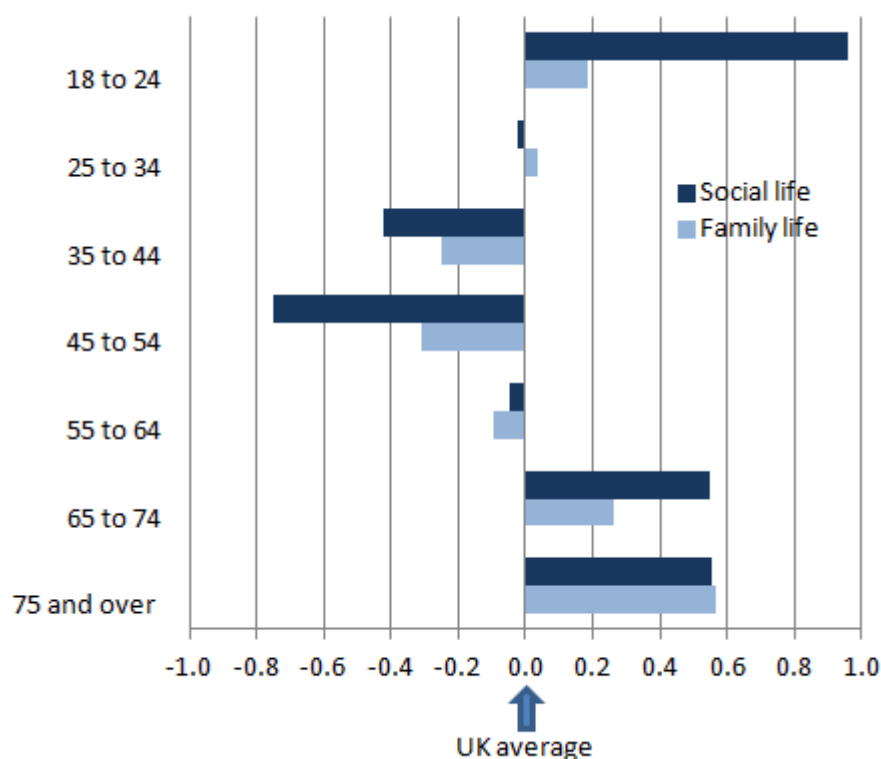
(8.8 out of 10) of all age groups for satisfaction with family life. This U-shape was more marked for satisfaction with social life, with those aged 45 to 54 rating their satisfaction with social life at 6.3 out of 10 on average (EQLS, 2011 to 12). Those aged 18 to 24 had the highest average rating (8.0 out of 10).

Satisfaction with both family life and satisfaction with social life have been shown to have a positive correlation with life satisfaction and happiness ([Eurofound, 2012a](#)). A similar U-shape in personal well-being with age has been widely reported in the literature over the last 40 years (ONS, 2013; Blanchflower and Oswald, 2008), with the drivers of this variation with age remaining largely unclear (ONS, 2013a).

Mid-life is an important transition and often a stressful time, burdened with simultaneous demands from work, childcare and ageing parents, but also a time where people re-evaluate and recalibrate their life, and might be more likely to suffer from mental health issues. Research across 27 European countries has shown a strong inverted U-shape in the use of antidepressants, peaking in people's late 40s (Blanchflower and Oswald, 2011). Also, the highest UK suicide rate in 2013 by broad age group was among people aged 45 to 59 ([ONSc, 2015](#)).

Figure 2: Deviations from the average ratings of satisfaction with family life and social life by age and sex, 2011 to 2012

United Kingdom



Source: Eurofound, Quality of Life Survey

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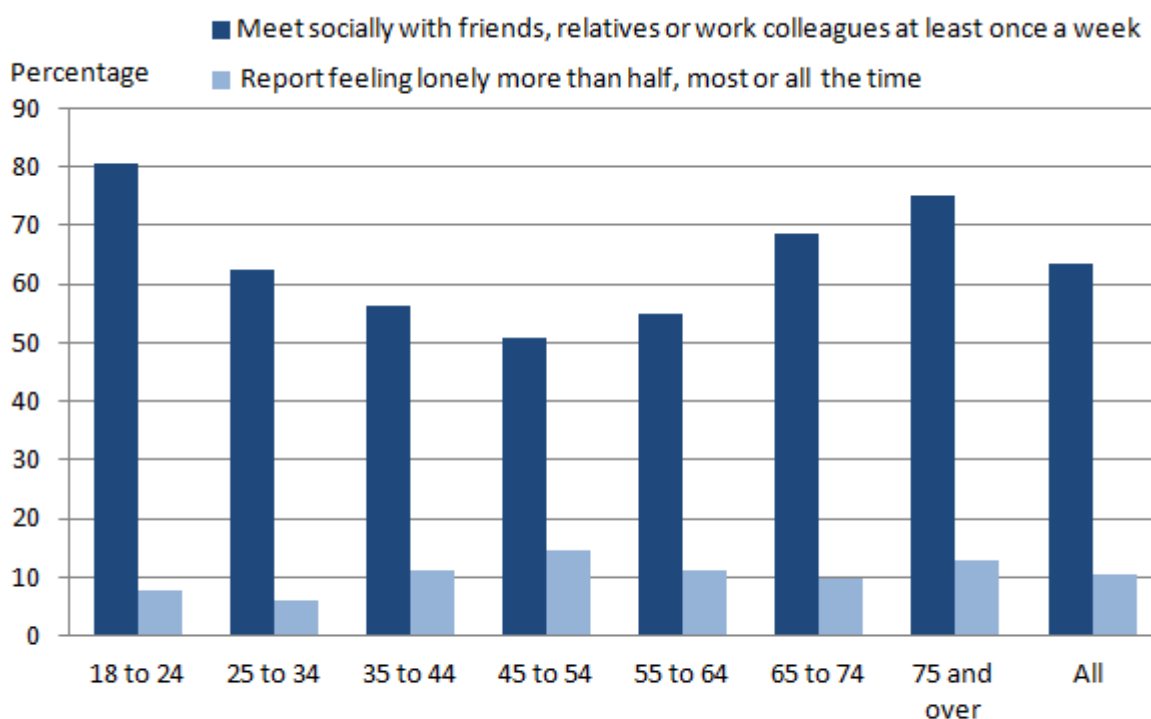
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Loneliness is not necessarily about being alone, but about the perception of being alone and isolated. In 2011 to 2012 around 1 in 7 (15%) people aged 45 to 54 reported feeling lonely, the highest of all age groups (Figure 3). This compares to 6% of younger people aged 25 to 34. More research is required to understand the dynamics of loneliness with age, in particular in middle-age groups.

The proportion of those reporting socialising at least once a weekly basis was also the lowest in the middle-age groups, with only half (51%) of those aged 45 to 54 reporting meeting socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues at least once a week (Figure 3). This compares to 81% of those aged 18 to 24 and 75% of those aged 75 and over who reported socialising frequently. This U-shape in socialising with age is likely to be accounted for by external factors, such as the lack of time and opportunities, financial constraints and caring responsibilities, which are likely to impact middle-aged people in particular.

Figure 3: Proportion of people who report feeling lonely more than half, most or all the time by age, 2011 to 2012 and proportion of people who report meeting socially with friends, relatives or colleagues at least once a week by age, 2012 to 2013

United Kingdom



Sources: European Social Survey and Eurofound, European Quality of Life Survey

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1 in 8 people aged 75 and over feeling lonely and 1 in 4 socialising less than once a week

There were 1 in 8 (13%) people aged 75 and over who reported feeling lonely more than half, most or all the time in 2011 to 2012, the second highest proportion of all age groups (Figure 3). Personal circumstances, such as poor health, living alone, caring for someone else, going through a relationship break-up or loss, moving to a new area away from existing social networks can all be factors contributing to feelings of loneliness.

There were 1 in 4 (25%) people aged 75 and over who reported meeting with friends, relatives or work colleagues less than once a week, in 2012 to 2013 (Figure 3). It is known that older people, especially those aged 75 and over, are vulnerable to social isolation which can impact on their physical and mental health. People can become socially isolated for various reasons, including long-term health conditions and illnesses (Lloyd J, 2014), or the deaths of spouses and friends.

Similarly, there was a strong association between having at least one close friend and age. Around 11% of people aged 75 and over reported having no close friend at all in 2011 to 2012 (Source: Understanding Society), the highest proportion of all age groups. This compared to 2% of those aged 18 to 34. Another 10% of people aged 75 and over reported having 1 close friend only. More men than women reported having no close friend across all ages, with the difference between sexes being more marked at older age: around 14% of men aged 75 and over reported having no close friend compared to 9% of women aged 75 and over.

The 2011 Census shows that 59% of those aged 85 and over and 38% of those aged 75 to 84 were living alone in England and Wales compared to 10% of those aged 25 to 34 (ONS, 2014). Around half of the 65 and over population in England were limited by a longstanding health condition or disability, with most people in this limited group living at home (93.5%) (Lloyd J and Ross A, 2014).

A small proportion of people aged 65 and over using social network websites

A social network website is defined as a platform to build social networks or social relations among people who share interest, activities, backgrounds or real-life connections. Social network websites can be a good way for people to keep in touch with family (such as grand-children for older people) and friends, to reconnect with old friends and to make new online friends. The use of the tablet computer can be particularly useful for people with limiting conditions.

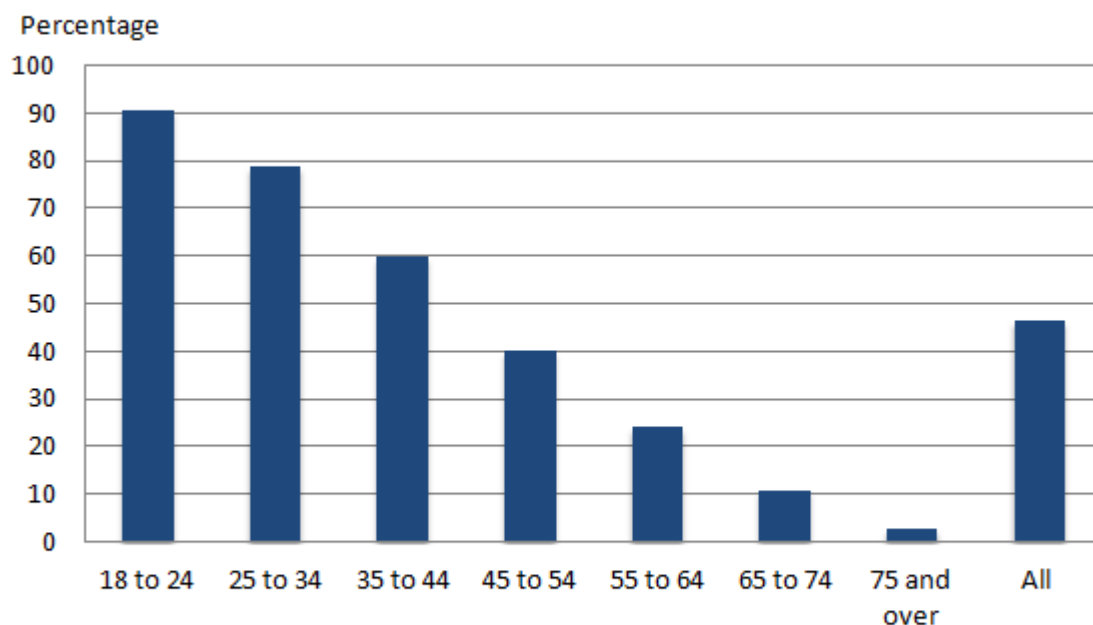
In 2011 in 2012, 3% of those aged 75 and over and 11% of those aged 65 to 74 belonged to a social network website, compared to 90% of those aged 18 to 24 (Figure 4). The proportion of people belonging to a social network website decreased with age, which is likely to indicate a cohort effect: the older people are, the less they will have been exposed to the use of computer and new computer-mediated forms of social interactions.

The latest [ONS internet use estimates](#) show that the proportion of people aged 75 years and over who had never used the internet decreased from 76% in April to June 2011, to 61% of people in

January to March 2015. Around 41% of men aged 75 years and over were recent internet users compared with 27% of women aged 75 years and over.

Figure 4: Proportion of people who report belonging to a social website by age, 2011 to 2012

United Kingdom



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Social network support

This section looks at differences in the extent to which people exchange resources or support within their own social network of family, friends and neighbours, by age and sex.

Fewer people aged 45 to 54, especially men, feel they can rely a lot on their family in case of a problem

The proportion of people who felt they can rely on their family in case of a serious problem formed a U-shape with age, which was more marked for men than women, in 2010 to 2011 (Figure 5).

Men were less likely than women to feel they could rely a lot on their family across all ages; the largest difference occurred at 55 to 64, where 55% of men and 68% of women felt they could rely a lot of their family. The lowest proportion of people who felt they could rely on their family a lot was found amongst those aged 45 to 54 for both men (47%) and women (57%). In comparison, the highest proportion of people who felt they could rely on their family a lot was found amongst those aged 75 and over for both men (73%) and women (82%).

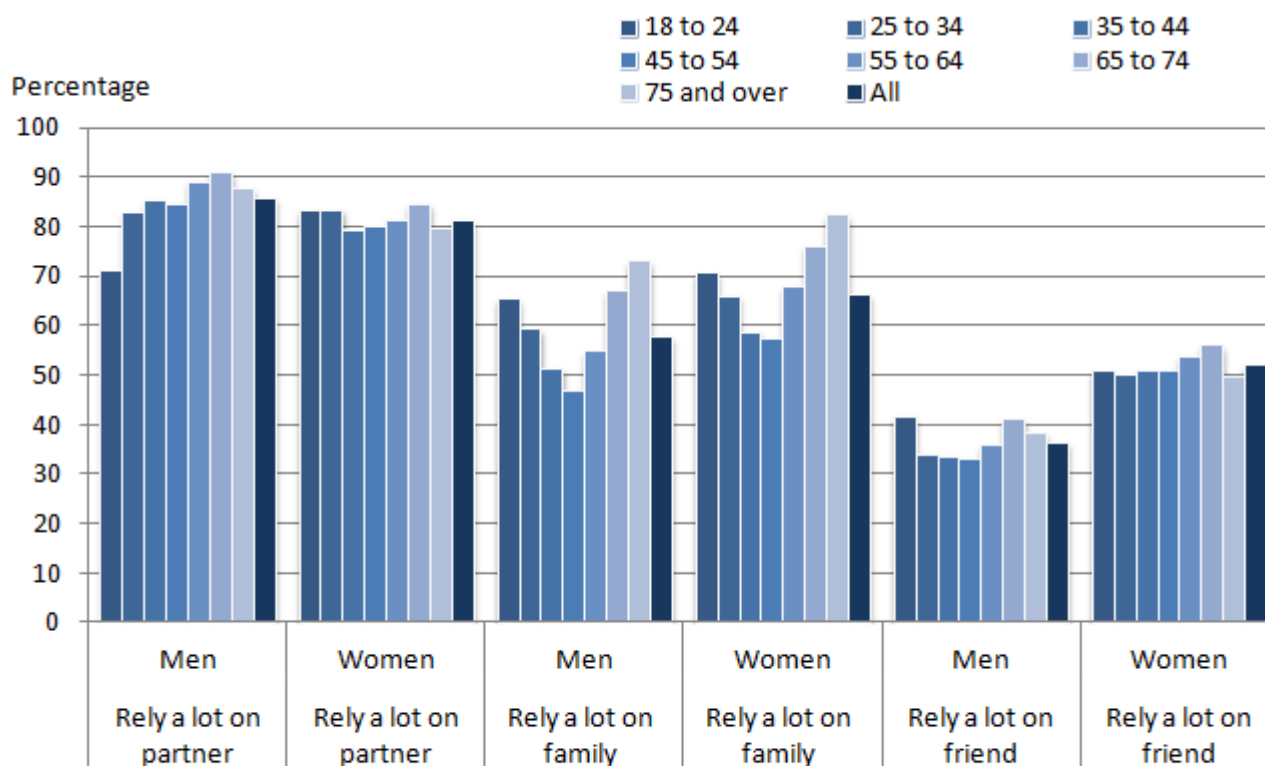
Fewer men feel they can rely on their friends, but fewer women aged 35 and over feel they can rely on their partner in case of a serious problem

Men were also less likely than women to rely on their friends and this was the case across all ages. (Figure 5). In 2011 to 12 around a third (36%) of men of all ages felt they could rely a lot on their friends compared to half (52%) of women of all ages. The proportion of women who felt they could rely on their friends remained similar across all ages, whereas that of men was higher at ages 18 to 24 and 65 to 74.

Amongst those who had a husband, wife or partner with whom they live, the lowest proportion who felt they can rely a lot on their partner in case of a serious problem was found amongst those aged 18 to 24 (71%) for men and amongst those aged 35 to 44 (79%) for women (Figure 5). In comparison, the highest proportion of people who felt they could rely a lot on their partner was found among those aged 65 to 74, for both men (91%) and women (85%). A lower proportion of women than men felt that they can rely a lot on their partner from age 35 to 44 onwards; the largest difference occurred at age 75 and over where 88% of men and 80% of women felt they could rely a lot on their partner.

Figure 5: Proportion of people who feel they can rely a lot on their partner, family and friends in case of a serious problem by age and sex, 2010 to 2011

United Kingdom



Source: Understanding Society

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Women, especially those aged 45 and over, are more likely than men to give special help to a sick, disabled or elderly person

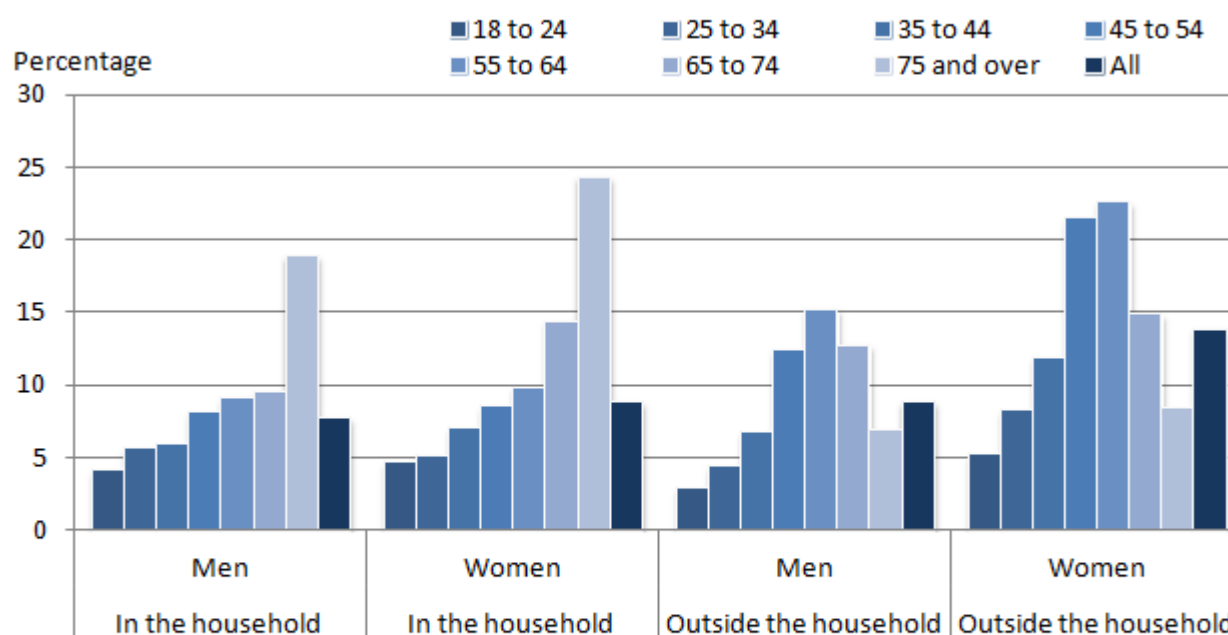
Nearly 1 in 5 people (19%) reported looking after, or giving special help, to someone sick, disabled or elderly inside their household (7%), outside their own household (10%) or both (1%) in 2012 to 2013. Around 21% of women of all ages reported caring for someone sick, disabled or elderly inside or outside their household, compared to 16% of men of all ages (Figure 6).

The proportion of men and women who reported caring for someone sick, disabled or elderly within the household increased with age, and was significantly higher for those aged 75 and over than for any other age groups (Figure 6). A higher proportion of older women than older men cared for someone inside their household. Around 1 in 4 women (24%) and 1 in 5 men (19%) aged 75 and over cared for someone within their household, compared to around 1 in 10 women (10%) and 1 in 10 men (9%) aged 55 to 64.

The proportion of men and women caring for someone sick, disabled or elderly outside their household formed an inverse U-shape with age (Figure 6). The highest proportion of people caring for someone outside their household occurred at age 55 to 64 for both men (15%) and women (23%). The proportion of women caring for someone sick, disabled or elderly outside the household was significantly higher than that of men for those within the age groups 25 to 64. The largest difference occurred at age 45 to 54, where 21% of women care for someone outside their household compared 12% of men.

Figure 6: Proportion of people who give special help to at least one sick, disabled, elderly person living or not living with them, by age and sex, 2012 to 2013

United Kingdom



Source: Understanding Society

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Fewer men than women are receiving or giving help to their children who have grown up and left home

The proportion of parents who reported regularly receiving help from their children aged 16 or over not living with them increases with age (Understanding Society, 2011 to 2012). Around a third of people aged 55 to 64 (37%) and 45 to 54 (31%) report regularly receiving help, compared to 45% of

people aged 65 to 74 and 60% of people aged 75 and over. A higher proportion of people gave than received help in the age groups before 75, but the reverse occurred for people over 75.

A lower proportion of men than women reported regularly receiving help across all ages. For example, 66% of women aged 75 and over and 50% of women aged 65 to 74 reported receiving help compared to 53% of men aged 75 and over and 50% of men aged 65 to 74.

Nearly 7 out of 10 parents aged 55 to 64 (70%) and 45 to 54 (69%) reported regularly giving help to a child aged 16 and over not living with them. Around 65% of men aged 45 to 54 and 67% of men aged 55 to 64 reported regularly giving help, compared to 72% of women aged 45 to 54 and 55 to 65.

Younger people are less likely to borrow things and exchange favour with their neighbours

The proportion of people regularly borrowing things and exchanging favour with their neighbours was lower for both men (32%) and women (31%) aged 18 to 24 than for people of any other groups (Understanding Society, 2011 to 2012). In comparison, around 45% of men and 49% of women aged 35 to 44 regularly borrowed things and exchanged favours with neighbours. This is in line with the finding that younger people were also less likely to stop and talk to neighbours, as described in the Personal Relationships section. Analysis of the feelings of young people about their local area can be found in the Trust and Cooperative Norms section.

Civic engagement

This section looks at differences in activities such as volunteering, political participation and other forms of community actions, by age and sex.

People aged 25 to 44 and 75 and over are less likely to volunteer

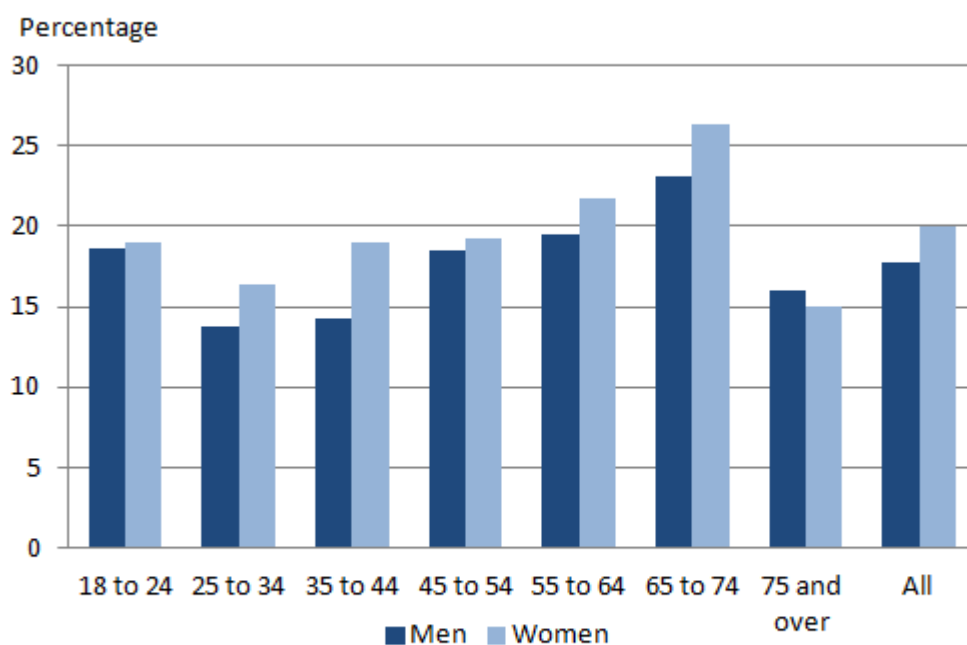
In 2012 to 2013, people aged 25 to 44 and 75 and over were less likely to be involved in volunteering than younger people (18 to 24) and people aged 45 to 74 (Figure 7). Around 15% of people aged 25 to 34 reported volunteering in the previous 12 months, compared to a quarter (25%) of those aged 65 to 74. Previous research has shown that the top 3 barriers to volunteering are work commitments, looking after children or the home and having other things to do with their own time ([Cabinet Office](#), 2013). Health limitations are likely to restrict the ability to volunteer for people over 75.

There was a higher proportion of women volunteering than men, although these differences were not statistically significant; the only exception was for the age group 35 to 44, where a higher proportion of women (19%) than men (14%) had volunteered in the previous 12 months (Figure 7). At age 35 to 44, around a fifth (22%) of women also report being members of a parents/school association, compared to only 5% of men of that age. The higher volunteering rate of women

aged 35 to 44 could potentially be associated with a higher involvement of mothers than fathers in activities of school-aged children, although this would need to be investigated further.

Figure 7: Proportion of people who volunteered in the last 12 months, by age and sex, 2012 to 2013

United Kingdom



Source: Understanding Society

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Gender gap in membership of organisations

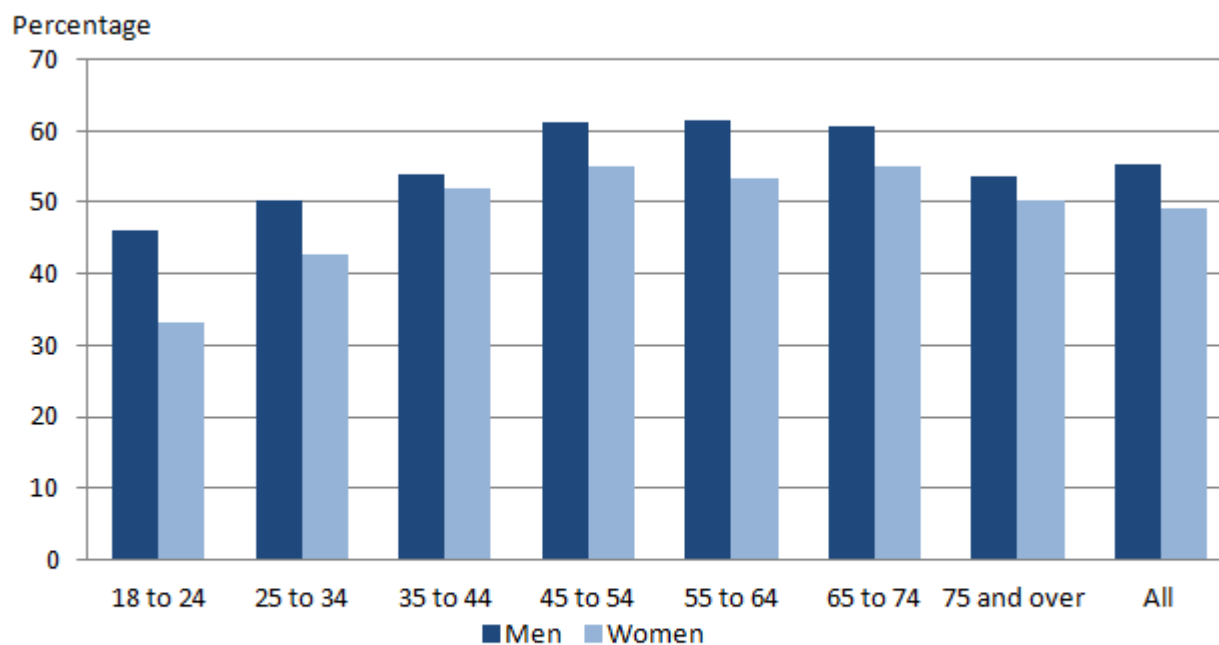
Men (55%) were more likely to be members of an organisation (whether political, voluntary, professional or recreational) than women (49%) in 2011 to 2012 (Figure 8). This gender gap in membership in organisations was significant for all ages, except at ages 35 to 44 and 75 and over. It was largely driven by differences in memberships in sports clubs. Around 42% of men of all ages reported being members of a sports club compared to 24% of women of all ages in 2011 to 2012. Conversely, around 26% of women belong to religious or church organisation, compared to 17% of men. A similar proportion of men (22%) and women (19%) reported being members of professional organisations.

The likelihood that people are members of organisations gradually increased with age and peaked at 45 to 54, staying relatively stable until age 75 and over, when the likelihood declined. Around 41% of those aged 18 to 24 reported being members of organisations, compared to 58% of those aged 45 to 54 (Figure 8).

People of different ages belonged to different types of organisations in 2011 to 2012. For example, around 33% of those aged 45 to 54 were members of a trade union, 32% were members of a sports club, but only 18% were members of a religious or church organisation. In comparison, among those aged 25 to 34, 41% are members were members of a sports club, 26% were members of a trade union and 15% were members of a religious or church organisation. Among those aged 75 and over, 39% were members of a religious group or church organisation and 16% of a sports club.

Figure 8: Proportion of people who are members of organisations, whether political, voluntary, professional or recreational by sex and age, 2011 to 2012

United Kingdom



Source: Understanding Society

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Age gap in community engagement in local area

Social action can be described as “people getting together to cover a community project in their local area” (Cabinet Office, 2014). It includes activities such as setting up a new service or amenity to help local residents or trying to collectively stop something happening in a local area. Previous research has shown that most people get involved because they are asked by someone they know, while one of the main barriers is not being asked ([Cabinet Office](#), 2013).

Men and women were equally likely to get involved in social action (18%) and equally likely to feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area (34%) ([Community Life Survey](#), 2013/14).

The level of involvement in social action was lower amongst the under 35s and the over 75s, with 11% of those aged 25 to 34 and 12% of those over 75 reporting having been involved in social action in the previous 12 months. In comparison, nearly a quarter (22%) of those aged 35 to 74 reported having been involved in social action in the preceding 12 months.

The older age groups (65 to 74 and 75 and over) were the least likely to feel that they were influential, with only 29% and 27% respectively feeling that they definitely or somewhat feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area in 2013 to 2014, compared to 36% of those aged 18 to 64.

Younger people are less likely to vote

Voter turnout is a good indicator of the degree of civic engagement. Voter turnout is low among young people compared to older age groups, and whilst voting has declined for all, the decline between 1964 and 2005 has been sharpest amongst voters aged 18 to 24. (Table 1). The lowest proportion in 40 years was observed in 2005, when only 38% of 18 to 24 year olds voted in the General Election. However, the proportion increased in 2010, with over half (52%) of people aged 18 to 24 voting in the General Election, indicating a possible new engagement of young people in politics. This proportion remains low compared to that of people aged 65 and over: three-quarters (75%) of them voted in the 2010 General Election.

[Previous ONS research](#) has shown that in 2011 to 2012, just under 4 in 10 (39%) of those aged 18 to 24 agreed or strongly agreed that they would seriously be neglecting their duty as a citizen if they did not vote, compared with over 8 in 10 (80%) of those aged 65 and over.

Table 1: Estimated percentage turnout by age at General Elections 1964 to 2010

United Kingdom

	1964	1966	1970	1974 ²	1974 ³	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010
18 to 24	76.4	60.5	64.9	70.2	62.5	62.5	63.9	66.6	67.3	54.1	40.4	38.2	51.8
25 to 34	70.7	70.8	66.5	77.2	69.0	72.4	67.6	74.0	77.3	62.2	45.0	47.7	57.3
35 to 44	79.5	80.0	72.8	78.7	73.9	76.3	76.2	74.9	78.3	70.2	55.7	61.6	64.4
45 to 54	79.1	79.8	74.9	73.1	76.6	81.2	77.6	79.9	81.8	76.4	63.2	65.5	67.5
55 to 64	78.4	78.0	74.1	82.2	76.6	81.4	77.2	78.9	78.1	79.9	64.0	72.6	69.8
65 and over	76.7	75.9	77.2	79.2	76.0	77.7	73.1	76.0	79.2	77.7	70.1	74.3	74.7
All	77.1	75.8	72.0	78.8	72.8	76.0	72.7	75.3	77.7	71.4	59.4	61.3	65.0

Table notes:

1. Source: The international Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
2. February 1974
3. October 1974

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Younger people and those over 75 are less likely to be involved in political action

Political actions include attending a demonstration, contacting an official or signing a petition. A similar proportion of men (33%) and women (34%) in the UK reported having been involved in at least 1 political action during the previous 12 months, according to the [European Quality of Life Survey](#), 2011 to 2012.

The proportion of having been involved in a political action was the lowest amongst the younger people and for those aged over 75 and the highest for people in the middle-aged groups. Around 28% of those aged 18 to 24 reported having been involved in a political action in the previous 12 months, compared to 41% of those aged 45 to 54 and only 18% of those aged 75 and over.

Women and younger people less interested in politics

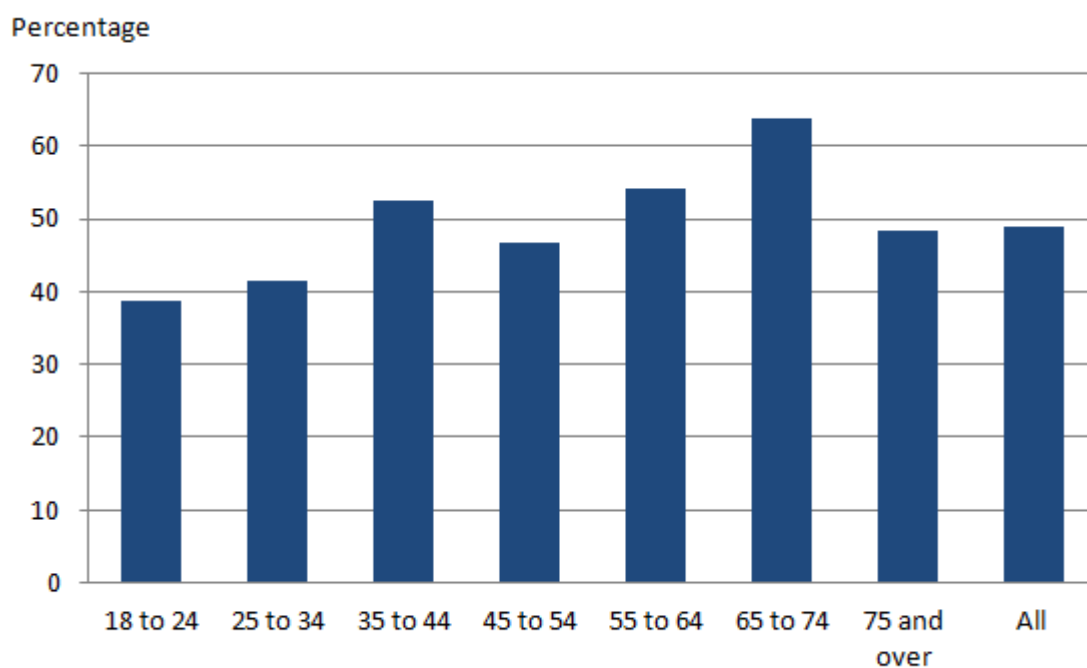
Women (43%) were less likely than men (55%) to be very or quite interested in politics in 2012 to 2013 (Figure 10). This is despite the previous finding that a similar proportion of men and women were engaged in political actions.

Interest also differed across age bands (Figure 9). The youngest age group was the least likely to be interested in politics, which reflects the voter turnout results; around 39% of those aged 18 to 24 and 42% of those aged 25 to 34 reported being very or quite interested in politics in 2012 to 2013. People in the 65 to 74 age group were the most likely to be very or quite interested in politics (64%), which is in line with [our previous findings](#) (2014). Whether people are more or less likely to feel they have any say over how governments run the country may be an important factor to their continued political interest ([ONS, 2014b](#)).

The low levels of political interest have been well documented and could have several possible implications. It could be that younger age groups are more disillusioned with politics than older generations. Some people have suggested that younger people reject conventional politics in favour of single issues such as the environment, human and animal rights (Wilkinson and Mulgan, 1995), or using new ways of political engagement such as boycotting for political, ethical or environmental reasons (Yates, 2011). Other possible reasons are that young people perceive politics as boring and irrelevant to their present life and lack trust in politicians to keep promises and be responsive to their needs (White et al., 2000).

Figure 9: Proportion of people who are very or quite interested in politics by age, 2012 to 2013

United Kingdom



Source: European Social Survey

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Trust and cooperative norms

This section looks at differences in trust in national government, trust in others and measures of local community and neighbourhood, by age and sex.

People over 35 were less likely to trust the National Government in 2014

Nearly a third of men (32%) and women (31%) trusted the National Government in the UK in November 2014 (Source: Eurobarometer). The proportion of people who tended to trust the National Government was lower amongst those over the age of 35 than those under 35 (Table 2). For example, only a quarter (23%) of those aged 45 to 54 tended to trust their National Government compared to 38% of those aged 25 to 34.

Table 2: Proportion of people who tend to trust the National Government by age and sex, November 2014

United Kingdom

	Tend to trust	Tend not to trust	Don't know
18 to 24	39.0	50.0	11.0
25 to 34	38.0	53.0	9.0
35 to 44	28.0	67.0	5.0
45 to 54	23.0	72.0	5.0
55 to 64	30.0	64.0	6.0
65 to 74	28.0	67.0	5.0
75 and over	33.0	59.0	8.0
Men	32.0	62.0	6.0
Women	31.0	61.0	8.0
All	31.0	62.0	7.0

Table notes:

1. Source: Eurobarometer

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Younger people less likely to trust others

Men were more likely than women to trust others, with 37% of men reporting that most people can be trusted compared to 34% of women in the UK in 2009 to 2010 (Figure 10), although these differences were not statistically significant across all ages. Around 44% of women and 39% of men reported that “you can’t be too careful” when asked whether they trust others.

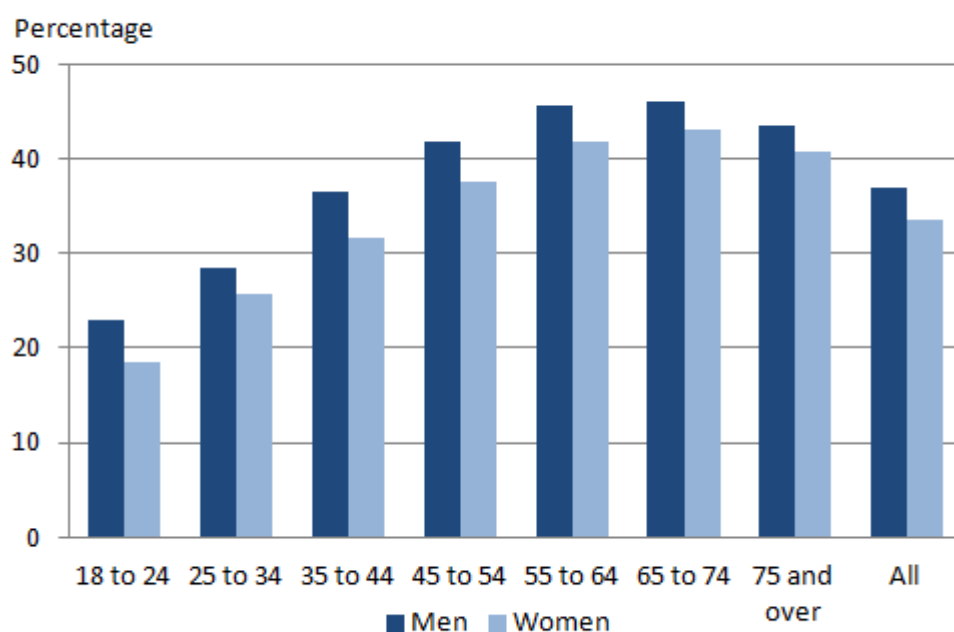
The proportion of people who reported that most people can be trusted increased with age until ages 65 to 74 for both men and women (Figure 10). The lowest proportions of people trusting others were found amongst women (18%) and men (23%) aged 18 to 24. In comparison, 43% of women and 46% of men aged 65 to 74 reported that most people can be trusted.

In the European Social Survey, trust in others is measured on a scale of 0 to 10. On such a scale, 0 indicates that people think that you have to be careful in dealing with people, whereas 10 shows that they think most people can be trusted. Results show that the average score for trust in others in the UK increased steadily with age, from 5.1 for those aged 18 to 24 to 5.8 in those aged 75 and over in 2012 to 2013. Conversely, previous research has shown that overall in 27 European countries, younger age is associated with higher trust, and that trust of people aged 65 and over was affected more negatively during the years of financial crisis, 2009 to 2010 (Eurofound, 2012). This indicates that socio-demographics, such as age, are likely to have a different affect on trust across different countries.

More research is required to better understand what causes the lower trust in younger people, especially women. The difference in trust with age could be caused by a cohort effect, where younger people are less trusting because they have grown up in a society where they have access to a wider range of information, but can also connect to a wider range of different people through internet usage and social network websites. Younger people, especially women, might feel more vulnerable to others, which results in fear of negative experiences with strangers.

Figure 10: Proportion of people who feel that most people can be trusted by age and sex, 2009 to 2010

United Kingdom



Source: Understanding Society

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Wide gap between sexes at every age for feeling safe walking alone in the local area

Fear of walking alone at night is important because it can affect the decisions that people make, in terms of where to live and how they spend their time.

A large majority of men (85%) reported feeling very or fairly safe walking alone in their local area in England and Wales in 2013 to 2014, compared to 58% of women (Figure 11). This gap between men and women was the widest for ages 18 to 24 and 75 and over.

There was no statistically significant difference between age groups in the proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their local area, with the exception of women aged 75 and over. In this group, less than half (41%) reporting feeling safe walking alone in their local area, the lowest proportion across all age bands and sexes (Figure 11).

Research shows that the gender gap in feeling of personal safety is universal, with women feeling less safe walking alone in the night in 2013 than in any point in the previous 8 years, and with

the largest differences being observed in high-income and highly prosperous countries ([Legatum Institute, 2014](#)).

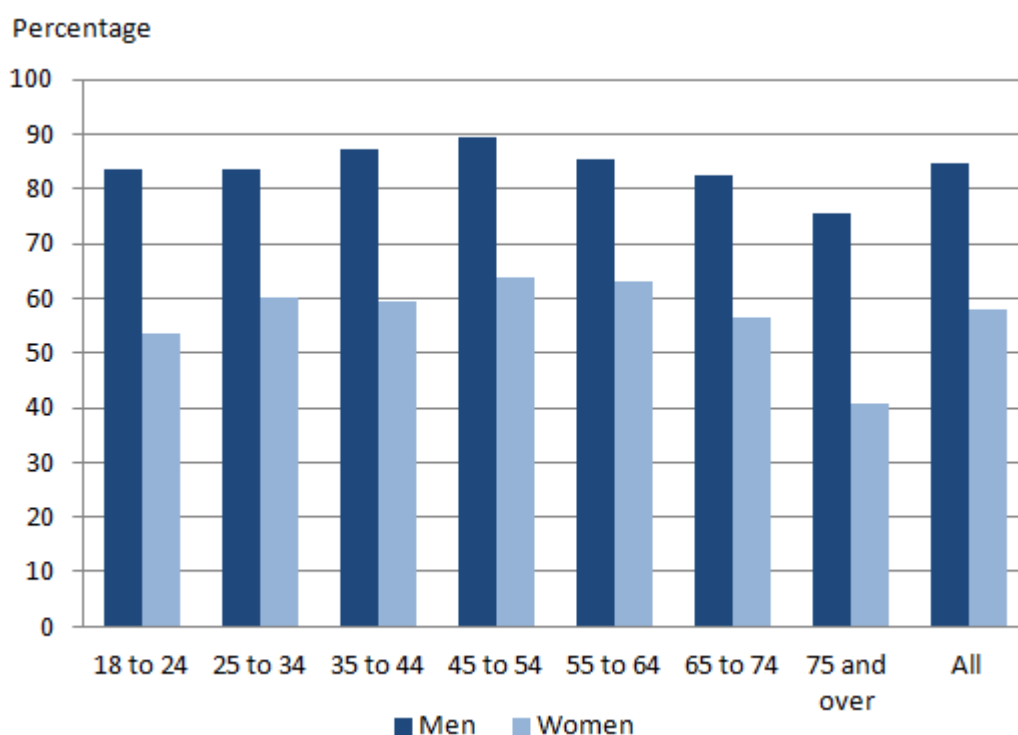
Women were also more likely than men to perceive that crime across the UK (68%) and in their local area (36%) have been rising in 2015, as described in chapter 2 of [Crime Statistics, Focus on Public Perceptions of Crime and the Police, and the Personal Well-being of Victims, 2013 to 2014](#). Additionally, women were more likely to worry about being a victim of violent crime than men.

It has been previously shown that at a national level, there is a gap between the levels of crime (which has been falling since 1995) and subjective feelings of crimes. Conversely, at a local area level, there is a clear relationship between objective levels of crime and subjective perceptions of crime.

More research is needed to investigate how the feelings of feeling safe walking in local area, which is a subjective perception, relate to objective levels of crime for both men and women.

Figure 11: Percentage of people who feel safe walking alone in their local area after dark by sex and age, 2013 to 2014

England and Wales



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics

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Younger people are less likely to trust people in their local area and to feel they belong to their local area

Although women were less likely than men to trust others in general, they were as likely as men to trust people in their local area (around 65% in 2011 to 2012). Women and men were also equally likely to feel that people in their local area are willing to help their neighbours (around 7 in 10 people in 2011 to 2012) and to agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together (85% in 2013 to 2014).

Indicators of social capital in the local area were strongly associated with age. Those aged 18 to 24 were significantly less likely to report trusting others in their local area (47%) and feeling that people in their local area are willing to help their neighbours (60%) than any other age groups. In comparison, among those aged 75 and over, around 8 in 10 reported trusting people in their local area and feeling that people in their local area are willing to help their neighbours (82% and 79% respectively) (Figure 12).

Those aged 18 to 24 were also less likely to stop and talk with their neighbours and borrow things and exchange favours with their neighbours, as shown in this article. Less than half (47%) of those aged 18 to 24 reported feeling that they belong to their local area, compared with around 8 in 10 people (81%) of those aged 75 and over.

However, a high proportion of people reported that their local area was a place where people from different backgrounds got on well together in 2013 to 2014, across all age groups (80% of those aged 18 to 24 and 93% of those aged 75 and over).

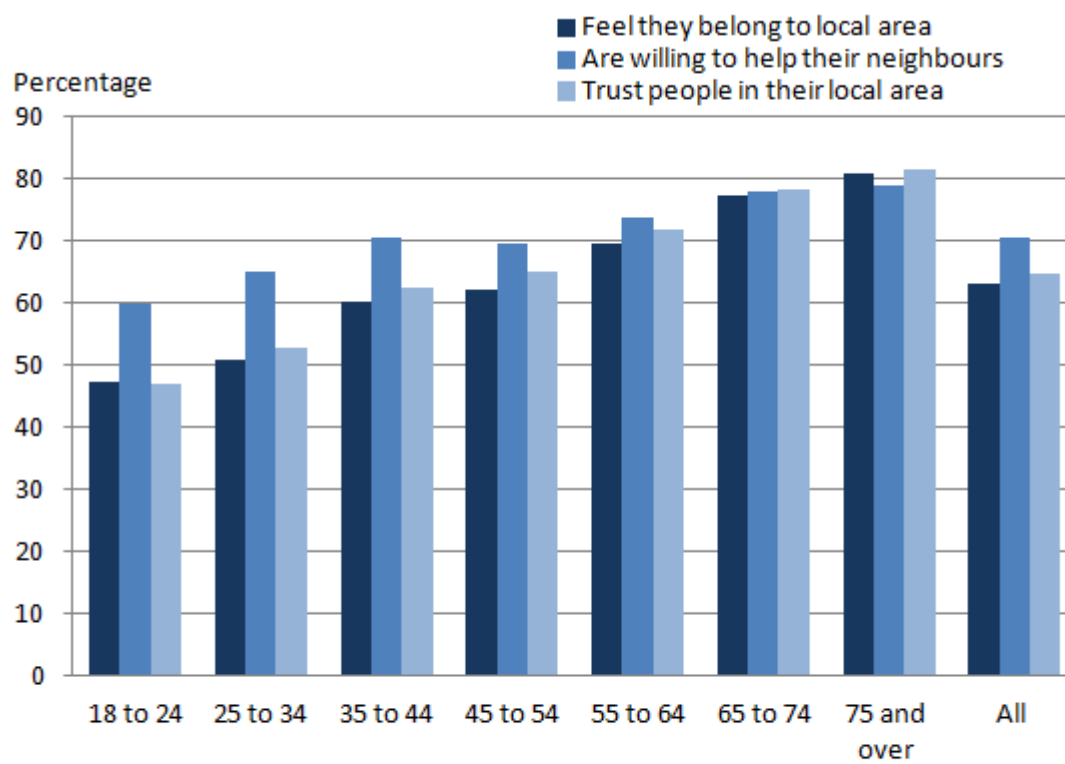
More research is needed to investigate the drivers of this age gap in interaction with neighbours, and how this relates to trust in others in the local area and sense of belonging in the local area. We also need to look at why these indicators of social capital are low for young people, yet most people, including the young, feel that people from different backgrounds get on well in the local area.

Our previous research has shown that the 2 peak ages for [internal migration from one local authority to another](#) was 19 and 22, with nearly a quarter (23%) of 19-year olds and 15% of 22 year-olds living in England and Wales moving between local authorities in mid-2012. It can reasonably be assumed that time is needed to build trust and relationships in local communities. If younger people are more likely to be new residents in an area, they are also less likely to know and trust their neighbours, and to feel they belong to where they live.

More longitudinal research is required to investigate whether people change attitudes to their neighbours as they get older and as they have higher residential stability, and the differences between rural and urban areas. We need to look at whether this is a generational effect, where younger people today are less likely to be involved with their neighbours and their community, which would lead in a decline in social capital in the long-term. In any case, young people have an important role in building social capital. Their involvement in local area is important for building safe, cohesive and engaged communities.

Figure 12: Proportion of people who feel people in their local area, can be trusted, are willing to help their neighbours and feel they belong to their local area by age, 2011 to 2012

United Kingdom



Source: Understanding Society

Download chart

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Background notes

1. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk

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