

THE SILENT EPIDEMIC: UNRAVELLING THE COMPLEXITIES OF LONELINESS AMONG *young Australians*

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In the bustling cities and quiet towns across Australia, a silent epidemic is taking hold among the nation's youth. While the majority of young adults navigate their daily lives with a sense of connection and belonging, an increasing number are grappling with a pervasive sense of loneliness. This phenomenon, once primarily associated with the elderly, has now emerged as a significant concern for those in the prime of their lives. In an Australian study of nearly 1500 adolescents and young adults, more than one in three (37%) young adults aged 18–25 indicated a problematic level of loneliness.¹

For some this can be emotional loneliness—the lack of attachment to a significant person. For others it may be social loneliness—the lack of a larger support

network.² Despite the prevalence of loneliness, there remains a significant stigma attached to admitting feelings of isolation. This stigma can prevent young adults from seeking help or openly discussing their experiences, further entrenching their sense of disconnection.

In an age where technology promises unprecedented connectivity, the irony of increasing isolation is stark. Young Australians find themselves more connected than ever before, yet simultaneously more disconnected from meaningful human interaction. This paradox lies at the heart of the loneliness epidemic, challenging our understanding of social bonds in the digital era.³

Being a young adult in Australia today is a peak time for loneliness;⁴ but loneliness is not in any sense caused by being a certain age. Rather, if a young person is lonely, it is likely to be the consequence of a combination of factors they are exposed to as a young adult.⁵ So why is it that so many young people are lonely?

JOINING THE ADULT WORLD – WORK AND STUDY

The transition from adolescence to young adulthood has always been a period of significant change and potential vulnerability. Moving from school to tertiary education or into the workforce can disrupt social connections. Gone are the days



¹ Michelle H. Lim, Robert Eres & Claire Peck, *The Young Australian Loneliness Survey: Understanding Loneliness in Adolescence and Young Adulthood*. (Swinburne University, 2019.) ² Relationships Australia, *Is Australia Experiencing an Epidemic of Loneliness?* (2018). ³ Patrick Parkinson, 'The Loneliness of the Digitally Connected' Cambridge Papers, December 2022. ⁴ Lim et al., above n.1. ⁵ Louise C. Hawkey et al, 'Loneliness from Young Adulthood to Old Age' (2022) 46(1) *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 39–49.

of built-in friendships, courtesy of a young person's class schedule and downtime at recess or lunch. Now, catching up with friends can feel like coordinating a small-scale event. Not everyone adapts well to this sudden drop in social interaction consequent upon leaving the school environment.⁶ For some, the shift from bustling school hallways to making their way in adult life can leave them starved of social connection.

Most young adults either go into the workforce or on to some form of further education or training. Often, it is a mixture of both, as they work part-time while studying. However, both the work experience and study have changed markedly in recent years. Work for young adults is increasingly in the 'gig economy'. A 2022 study found that 56% of young Australians reported earning income from gig work in the previous year.⁷ Though it provides a source of income, gig work is less likely than regular part-time employment to give young adults a sense of connection and belonging in their work environment. This is due to the inconstancy or low number of hours associated with such roles.⁸ While the gig economy offers freedom, it often comes with instability and fewer opportunities for workplace friendships. Furthermore, gig economy work is associated with higher anxiety and instability.⁹ This can have negative implications for mental health. The rise of remote work, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has further disrupted traditional avenues for social connection.

REGULAR CAMPUS ATTENDANCE, IN-PERSON INTERACTIONS AND INVOLVEMENT IN STUDENT ORGANISATIONS ALL PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN BUILDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

The educational environment for students has also changed markedly. The shift to online learning no doubt has its benefits, but it has also reduced interaction between students and with staff. In 2022, even as the COVID-19 pandemic was receding, only one in five post-secondary students attended exclusively face-to-face classes.¹⁰

Regular campus attendance, in-person interactions and involvement in student organisations all play an important role in building a sense of community, with some of these relationships leading to lifelong friendships. Recognizing the potential isolation of off-campus students, one Australian university initiated a program to address this issue. The result was an increased sense of belonging among participants.¹¹

While most young adult Australians are working or studying, a surprisingly large proportion are doing neither, and this helps explain the social isolation of at least many in this age group. The Australian Youth Barometer in 2022 reported that around 12% of 18–24 year-olds were neither in work or study in the 2021 census.¹² Data on income support benefits provides a window into this. In 2020, 20% of young



⁶ Lim et al., above n.1. ⁷ The Monash Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice (CYPEP), *2022 Australian Youth Barometer* (2022). ⁸ Department of Premier and Cabinet (Vic), *Digital Platform Work in Australia: Preliminary Findings from a National Survey* (2019); The Actuaries Institute, *The Rise of the Gig Economy and its Impact on the Australian Workforce* (2020). ⁹ Edison Research, *The Gig Economy* (2018). ¹⁰ CYPEP, above n.7. ¹¹ Adam Fernandes, 'Building a Sense of Belonging Among Tertiary Com' ¹² CYPEP, above n.7.

people aged 16 to 24 received income support payments. Of these, 51% received unemployment payments and 10% were on disability benefits.¹³ Most 16–24 year-old disability support pension recipients are on benefits because of intellectual or learning disabilities. The next highest category is psychological or psychiatric disorders.¹⁴ Indeed, for those aged 16 and over with severe autism, the main source of income was the disability support pension.¹⁵ Having any form of disability can impact one's ability to become part of a community and feel a sense of belonging. Almost 30% of those with a disability experience loneliness.¹⁶ Those on a disability pension are likely to be amongst the most isolated.

Another consideration in young adult loneliness is having a low income.¹⁷ Of course, this is closely connected with unemployment, casual work arrangements and employment in the gig economy. Unsurprisingly, lower incomes are correlated with higher levels of loneliness. Financial stress can limit opportunities for social engagement and contribute to feelings of inadequacy and isolation.



THERE ARE MANY BENEFITS TO THE DIGITAL AGE; BUT THERE IS CLEARLY A LINK BETWEEN LONELINESS AND INTERNET USE

THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

Of course, there are many benefits to the digital age;¹⁸ but there is clearly a link between loneliness and internet use for all age groups.¹⁹

The digital age has particularly affected how young people socialise and interact. Usage of the internet and social media begins for many children in the primary school years, and accelerates in adolescence.²⁰ By the time people get to young adulthood the amount of screen time can equate to a full-time job.²¹

The transformation in social interactions

The ubiquity of smartphones, social media platforms, and instant messaging has transformed the way young people communicate. There has been a shift in preference towards screen-based forms of communication. In Australia, a large portion of people are more comfortable texting than with a phonecall.²² 50% of young people find it easier to connect online than in person.²³

While these tools offer the illusion of constant connection, they often fall short in providing the depth and richness of face-to-face interactions. The ping of a notification may momentarily alleviate feelings of isolation, but it rarely satisfies the fundamental human need for genuine

¹³ CYPEP, above n.7. ¹⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *People with Disability in Australia* (2024) at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/summary>. ¹⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Autism in Australia* (2017) at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/autism-in-australia/contents/autism>. ¹⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, (2024), above n.14. ¹⁷ Friends for Good Inc, *Loneliness in Australia* (2019); Ending Loneliness Together, *State of the Nation Report* (2023). ¹⁸ Andrew J. Campbell, Steven R. Cumming & Ian Hughes, 'Internet Use by the Socially Fearful: Addiction or Therapy?' (2016) 9(1) *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 69–81. ¹⁹ Rebecca Nowland, Elizabeth A. Necka & John T. Cacioppo, 'Loneliness and Social Internet Use: Pathways to Reconnection in a Digital World?' (2017) 13(1) *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 1–18. ²⁰ George Thomas et al, 'Screen-based Behaviors in Australian Adolescents: Longitudinal Trends from a 4-year Follow-up Study' (2020) 141 *Preventive Medicine*: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2020.106258>. ²¹ Jean M. Twenge, *iGen* (Atria, 2018). ²² Telstra, *Talking Loneliness Report: Research into the State of Loneliness in Australia in 2021* (2021). ²³ Telstra, *Talking Loneliness Report: Research into the State of Loneliness in Australia in 2021* (2021). ²⁴ CYPEP, above n.7.

connection. For many young adults, the digital realm, with its myriad distractions and endless scroll of content, has become both a sanctuary and a prison. Hours spent curating online personas and engaging in virtual interactions can lead to a form of digital disengagement from the physical world. This disengagement manifests in various ways, from reduced participation in community activities to a diminished ability to form and maintain deep, personal relationships.

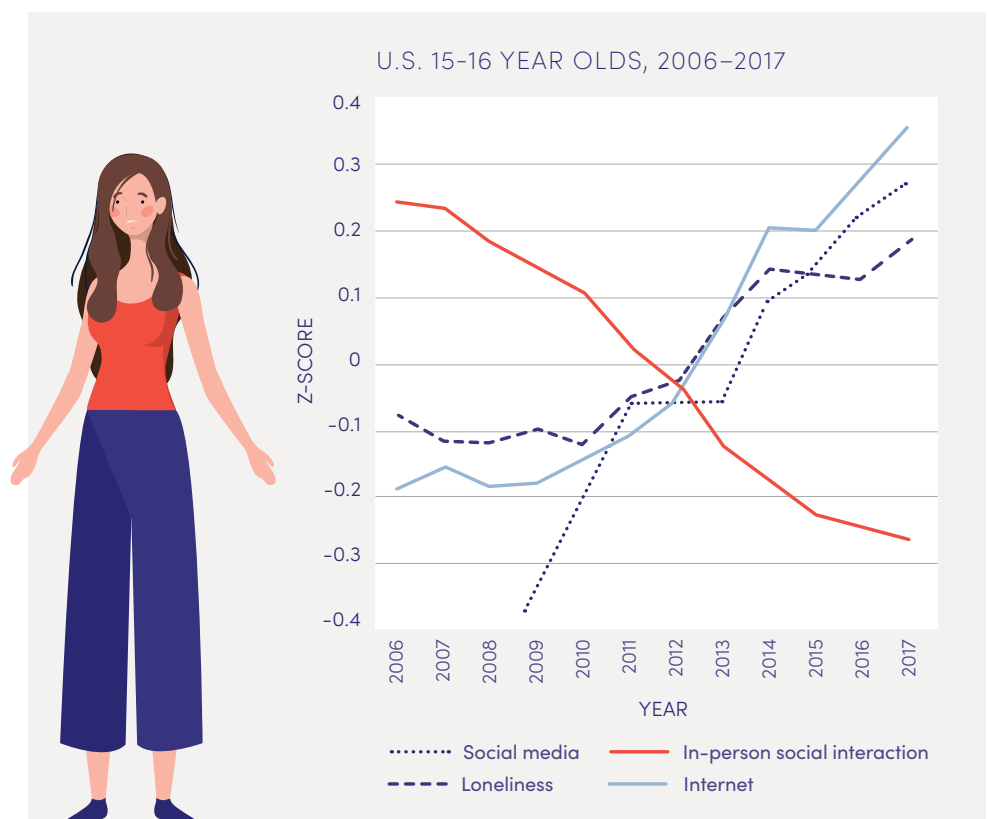
Screen time in the form of internet use, social media and smartphones all have traits that can be seen to aggravate loneliness in young adults. A lot of life can now be lived on the screen, and the regular integration of internet usage into everyday life is often taken for granted. Activities that have often involved the presence of other people—relationships, shopping, organising travel and entertainment—can now be conducted in physical isolation.

Added to this is the ever-increasing opportunity to upskill through online means — again, in isolation from others. 75% of young Australians have undertaken some form of informal online training. Most have undertaken this form of isolated learning through work software, social media or an online learning platform.²⁴

THE MORE TIME TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS SPEND ENGAGED WITH THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA, THE LESS TIME THEY HAVE FRIENDS.

The more time teens and young adults spend engaged with the internet and social media, the less time they have for engagements with friends face-to-face. Australian data indicate that young women aged 14–24 spend an average of nearly two hours a day on social media, and young men in the same

age group spend more than one hour per day.²⁵ In the USA, between 2006 and 2017 there was a sharp drop in the proportion of 15–16 year olds who said that they got together regularly with friends, either at home or going out to parties, movies, shopping malls or dating. The decline in face-to-face contact was roughly equally matched with increased use of the internet and social media:²⁶



²⁴ CYPEP, above n.7. ²⁵ Roy Morgan Research, 'Young Women the Queens of social media in Australia', Roy Morgan May 14, 2018 at <https://www.roymorgan.com/findings/young-women-the-queens-of-social-media-in-australia>. ²⁶ Jean M. Twenge, Brian H. Spitzberg & W. Keith Campbell, 'Less In-person Social Interaction with Peers among U.S. Adolescents in the 21st Century and Links to Loneliness', (2019) 36 *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 1892–1913.



**YOUNG WOMEN AGED 14–24
SPEND AN AVERAGE
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A DAY ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

Heavy use of smartphones can also hinder day-to-day social interactions with people. Staring down constantly at your phone can detach you from an awareness of your present position in time and space—impacting levels of engagement with people in the world around you.²⁷ Smartphone use, and the digital technologies that it enables, also diminishes mundane social interactions with strangers. No need to talk to someone in a queue if you can bury yourself in a phone. No need to ask someone for directions when there is an app for that.²⁸

The digital environment and mental health

While technology offers new ways to connect, it also presents challenges to mental health and social development. The constant exposure to curated glimpses of others' lives on social media platforms can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy. Young adults may find themselves caught in a cycle of seeking validation through 'likes' and 'shares', while simultaneously feeling more isolated in their real-

world experiences. Males show more susceptibility to the negative impacts of general internet use and gaming and with the advent of virtual experiences, some men are retreating from the tangibles of everyday life such as employment, education and relationships.²⁹ In contrast, females are more susceptible to the negative impacts of social media.

Internet use can contribute to loneliness through exacerbating social anxiety and depression.³⁰ Prof. Jean Twenge, an internationally-renowned expert, says that internet time is the strongest predictor of anxiety for teens worldwide.³¹ The association between social media use and social anxiety has been shown in various studies.³² Other studies show that online internet gaming is a maladaptive coping strategy to deal with depression and social anxiety.³³ In internet interactions people may feel less anxious compared to being face-to-face.³⁴

Why would extensive engagement with the digital world have an impact on social anxiety or depression? Social

²⁷ Eva Thulin, Bertil Vilhelmson & Tim Schwanen, 'Absent Friends? Smartphones, Mediated Presence, and the Recoupling of Online Social Contact in Everyday Life' (2020) 110(1) *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 166–183. ²⁸ Kostadin Kushlev, *Digitally Connected, Socially Disconnected: Can Smartphones Compromise the Benefits of Interacting With Others?* (2015) PhD, The University of British Columbia. ²⁹ Jonathan Haidt, 'Why I'm Increasingly Worried about Boys, Too' *After Babel* (<https://jonathanhaidt.substack.com>), December 6, 2023. ³⁰ Jean M. Twenge, Gabrielle N. Martin & W. Keith Campbell, 'Decreases in Psychological Well-being among American Adolescents after 2012 and Links to Screen Time during the Rise of Smartphone Technology' (2018) 18 *Emotion*, 765–780; Jean M. Twenge, 'Teens are Spending Incredible Amounts of Time on Social Media' *Generation Tech* (<https://jeanmtwenge.substack.com>), June 26, 2023. ³¹ Jean M. Twenge, 'Why are Teens so Anxious?' *Generation Tech* (<https://jeanmtwenge.substack.com/>), August 31, 2023. ³² Anna Vannucci, Kaitlin M. Flannery & Christine McCauley Ohannessian, 'Social Media Use and Anxiety in Emerging Adults' (2017) 207 *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 163–166; Aviv Weinstein et al, 'Internet Addiction is Associated with Social Anxiety in Young Adults' (2015) 27(1) *Annals of Clinical Psychiatry*, 4–9. For a study that predates smartphones and widespread social media, see Dennis Mazalin & Susan Moore, 'Internet Use, Identity Development and Social Anxiety Among Young Adults' (2004) 21(2) *Behaviour Change*, 90–102. ³³ Francesca Gioia, Gianluca Mariano Colella & Valentina Boursier, 'Evidence on Problematic Online Gaming and Social Anxiety over the Past Ten Years' (2022) 9 *Current Addiction Reports*, 32–47. ³⁴ Ju-Yu Yen et al, 'Social Anxiety in Online and Real-Life Interaction and their Associated Factors' (2012) 15(1) *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 7–12. See also Simon Rice et al, 'Leveraging the Social Network for Treatment of Social Anxiety' (2020) 20 *Internet Interventions*: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.invent.2020.100323>.

media can make young people anxious or depressed because of bullying and other negative social interactions online, or because friends' curated lives and appearance seem so much better than they can achieve. The pressure to present a perfect image on social media can create a discrepancy between a young person's carefully crafted online persona and their lived reality. There can also be a sense of missing out, as young people observe on social media what their friends are doing without them.

Young people seem only too aware of some of the negative implications of social media, with a number reporting it as a major contributor to mental health problems.³⁵ 70% of young adults say it is between somewhat and completely responsible for mental health issues.³⁶ A number of young people also admit to their own social media addiction.³⁷

Whatever the reasons for the impact of social media on adolescent and young adult mental health, the evidence shows that withdrawal from social media improves wellbeing. One study found that university students had better wellbeing after only three weeks of reduction in social media use.³⁸ Along with this there was a noticeable reduction in fear of missing out and anxiety.

THE DECLINE IN SOCIAL GROUP PARTICIPATION

As one report says: social groups "enhance a sense of community and assist people in developing social relationships and a sense of belonging."³⁹



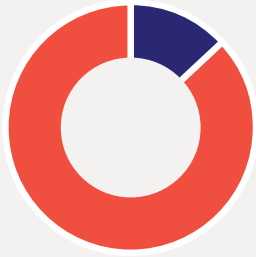
EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT WITHDRAWAL FROM SOCIAL MEDIA IMPROVES WELLBEING

Religious institutions, local clubs and neighbourhood associations no longer play the central role they once did in many people's lives. This erosion of community touchpoints leaves a void that digital connections struggle to fill. Such social group participation has been in decline for decades. 30 years ago, sociologist Robert Putnam described the individualistic culture in the United States as one of "bowling alone".⁴⁰ More recently, Andrew Leigh, now a federal government minister, has mapped a similar decline in community engagement in Australia.⁴¹ This trend isn't confined to young people, but it is certainly evident with today's young adults. In the UK, for example, researchers have noted a substantial weakening of community ties among young adults, leading to feelings of alienation and lack of trust.⁴²

One Australian study noted that 87% of young people perceive barriers to entry for organised activities they would like to be involved in.⁴³ Some organised activities are perceived as time-consuming, expensive and difficult to access.

Church attendance is one aspect of this great disconnection from community. There has been a significant drop in church attendance as people move from childhood into adulthood, with this decline becoming more pronounced in recent years. American researcher David Kinnaman describes the ages of 18 to 29 as the 'blackhole of church

³⁵ Headspace, *National Youth Mental Health Survey 2018* (2018). ³⁶ Bhawna Singh, 'Half of Gen Z and Millennials in Australia Have Taken a Social Media Break for Their Mental Health' *YouGov*, October 10, 2023 at <https://au.yougov.com/health/articles/47536-half-of-genz-and-millennials-in-australia-have-taken-a-social-media-break-for-their-mental-health>. ³⁷ Ending Loneliness Together, *State of the Nation Report* (2023). ³⁸ Melissa G. Hunt et al, 'No More FOMO: Limiting Social Media Decreases Loneliness and Depression' (2018) 37(10) *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 751-768. ³⁹ Way to be, *Understanding Sport Participation for 18-24 year olds: An Exploration of Issues, Motivations, Barriers and Trends* (2018). ⁴⁰ Robert D. Putnam, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital' (1995) 6(1) *Journal of Democracy*, 65-78. ⁴¹ Andrew Leigh, *Disconnected* (UNSW Press, 2010). ⁴² Onward UK, *Age of Alienation* (2021). ⁴³ CYPEP, above n. 7.



87% OF OF YOUNG PEOPLE PERCEIVE BARRIERS TO ENTRY FOR ORGANISED ACTIVITIES THEY WOULD LIKE TO BE INVOLVED IN



attendance'. His research indicates there is a 43 per cent drop-off between the teen and early adult years in church engagement in the United States.⁴⁴

Linked to a decline in community participation is an emphasis on individualism in the culture. Western individualistic values have negative implications for young people's well-being and mental health.⁴⁵ If young Australians focus more on themselves than did previous generations, it ought to be no surprise that a reasonable portion say they are lonely. In a multicultural society, of course, there is much variance in how individualistic people are. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, for example, have a strong communal culture, as do many Middle Eastern and Asian communities.



THE DELAY IN LONG-TERM PARTNERING

Societal shifts have led to a delay in traditional milestones such as marriage, homeownership and starting a family. With the fall in marriage rates, and even with the number of young adults living with a partner, around half of young Australians now identify as being single.⁴⁶ Unsurprisingly, those who are single are more likely to feel lonely than those who are married or in another committed relationship. If these people have strong family relationships, this can alleviate some of the feelings of loneliness, but not completely.⁴⁷

This postponement of long-term commitments can leave young adults in a prolonged state of transition, potentially hindering the formation of stable social networks and support systems. Many young adults still live at home,⁴⁸ which provides the opportunity to have regular contact with other people. This can alleviate feelings of loneliness if the family relationships are of a good quality. For those who do not still live at home, the challenges of entering the housing market in many Australian cities can force young adults into living situations that are not conducive to forming strong social bonds. Frequent moves and share-

⁴⁴ Philip Hughes, 'Why Young People are Leaving the Church' (2015) 25(1) *Pointers: Bulletin of the Christian Research Association*, 1–8. ⁴⁵ Ashley Humphrey & Ana-Maria Bliuc, 'Western Individualism and the Psychological Wellbeing of Young People' (2022) 2 *Youth*, 1–11; Ashley Humphrey, *The Western Delusion? An Examination of Individualistic and Extrinsic Value Systems in Western Cultures and Their Link to Young People's Psychological Wellbeing* (2018) PhD, Monash University. ⁴⁶ Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Couple Relationships* (2020). ⁴⁷ Katarzyna Adamczyk, 'An Investigation of Loneliness and Perceived Social Support Among Single and Partnered Young Adults' (2016) 35 *Current Psychology*, 674–689; Karen L. Fingerma et al, 'Relationships Between Young Adults and Their Parents' in A Booth et al (eds) *Early Adulthood in a Family Context* (Springer, 2012). ⁴⁸ Rebecca Huntley, 'Young People Living at Home Longer is Often Seen as a Bad Thing—But is it?' *ABC Everyday*, July 8, 2019 at <https://www.abc.net.au/everyday/young-people-living-at-home-longer-isnt-always-a-bad-thing/11279244>.

house arrangements can make it difficult to establish a sense of community and belonging.

The dating landscape has also undergone a radical transformation with the advent of dating apps and online platforms. While these tools offer unprecedented access to potential partners,⁴⁹ they can also contribute to a sense of disposability in relationships and a reluctance to commit to deep, meaningful connections. While swipe-based applications can be a beneficial addition to intimate relationships,⁵⁰ they can also promote higher levels of depression, anxiety and distress.⁵¹ The use of pornography may also lead to negative mental health outcomes,⁵² which is a key contributor to loneliness.

CONCLUSION

This report does not cover all the reasons why many young people in Australia feel lonely. Instead, it highlights the main factors identified from numerous studies worldwide and across various academic fields. The rise in loneliness among young

MANY YOUNG ADULTS STILL LIVE AT HOME, WHICH PROVIDES THE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE REGULAR CONTACT WITH OTHER PEOPLE

adults in Australia is not due to their age, but rather a mix of factors in their lives that make them more prone to loneliness compared to other age groups.

Screens, social media and electronic devices are at least in part to blame for this loneliness epidemic; however, much depends on how they are used. Social media platforms can facilitate the maintenance of long-distance friendships and the discovery of like-minded communities. On the other hand, excessive screen time can lead to physical disconnection from others. Habitual internet use can foster escapism and disconnection, and an obsession with social media can result in shallow relationships. Constantly relying on smartphones can lead to personal disengagement. Using these technologies doesn't automatically increase the risk of loneliness, but heavy usage can exacerbate social isolation.

There are numerous other factors at work as well. The significant life changes for young adults can make it harder to be part of a community and stay connected. Transitioning out of school interrupts what was once easily accessible physical connection to others. Social group participation has been declining for decades. Connected family and intimate relationships are not always the norm.

Unemployment or being on a disability pension not only increase isolation, but the low income derived from being reliant on government support makes it hard to afford to socialise in ways that cost money. Most young adults are in some form of



⁴⁹ Shirali Garga et al, 'Motivations, Dating App Relationships, Unintended Consequences and Change in Sexual Behaviour in Dating App Users at an Australian Music Festival' (2021) 18(49) *Harm Reduction Journal*: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-021-00493-5> ⁵⁰ Lyndsay Newett, Brendan Churchill & Brady Robards, 'Forming Connections in the Digital Era: Tinder, a New Tool in Young Australian Intimate Life' (2017) 54(1) *Journal of Sociology*, 1-16. ⁵¹ Nicol Holtzhausen et al, 'Swipe-based Dating Applications Use and its Association with Mental Health Outcomes' (2020) 8(22) *BMC Psychology*: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-020-0373-1>. ⁵² Megan S.C. Lim et al, 'Young Australians' Use of Pornography and Associations with Sexual Risk Behaviours' (2017) 41(4) *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 438-443.

**BY RECOGNIZING LONELINESS
AND FOSTERING CONNECTION,
YOUNG AUSTRALIANS CAN
FEEL SUPPORTED, ENGAGED,
AND TRULY CONNECTED**



employment, but casual employment and participation in the gig economy typically do not provide the environment for forming long-term relationships that traditional workplaces provide.

In all of these ways, young adults are experiencing less opportunity for consistent personal interaction and attachment to others. Addressing the loneliness epidemic requires equipping young adults with the skills and knowledge to build and maintain meaningful relationships in both digital and physical realms.

Young adults need support in redefining what meaningful connection looks like in the digital age. This involves recognizing the value of both online and offline relationships and learning to cultivate depth in digital interactions. Initiatives that bring together different age groups can

help foster intergenerational understanding and support. Older generations (such as parents and grandparents reading this article) can model how to connect deeply and sustainably and without relying on a device. While the challenges are significant, they are not insurmountable. By recognising the multifaceted nature of loneliness and adopting a holistic approach to fostering connection, we can work towards a future where young Australians feel supported, engaged, and truly connected. Addressing this issue requires a collective effort from individuals, communities, institutions and policymakers. It calls for a re-evaluation of our priorities as a society and a commitment to creating environments—both physical and digital—that nurture meaningful human connections.

