



# **Social Integration and Connectedness: Attachment to People and Place**

***Roona Simpson***

*Solo Living Seminar*

*26 October 2009*

Centre for Research on Families and Relationships



Solo-living consequential both for individuals and wider society:

- solo-livers disembedded from social ties, social isolation
- social disintegration, reduced social capital.

Popular and academic discourse: e.g. one-person households a proxy for loneliness (Reher, 1998).

Research on social networks of solo-livers - other social differences may be more significant than living arrangements.

# Sources of Support



- *“Well my father, he’s given me a lot of help like with the house with decorating and stuff like that when I moved in”*  
[Benjamin, 33, rural]
- *“I did actually break my ankle last year...So, I was virtually housebound ...and my brother-in-law was great, he works (nearby) so he would pop in every day practically to see if I needed any shopping”*  
[Catriona, 37, urban]
- *“I’m close to my mum. I could tell my mum anything”*  
[Ailsa, 28, urban]
- *“I could discuss absolutely anything with my girlfriend... I talk to her about absolutely anything at anytime”.*  
[Stephen, 41, urban]
- *“I've got a couple, well two close friends that I would tell loads of things [...] they know that if they wanted to phone me and say ‘Alexandra, help’ - they know I'd be here”*  
[Alexandra, 41, rural]

## Primacy of Kin:



*“And any other key people in your life at the moment?”*

*“Em, I mean, I've got friends, but nobody particularly that I would say is important as my family, to be honest” Moira (33, urban)*

*“mother and sister [...] that's the only people I would describe as significant in my life”.*

*Ray (44, urban, gay)*

## Friends as 'Family'



*“I’ve got about three or four close friends, and then I’ve got an older friend who I used to work with, she’s retired now and she’s like a mother figure to me”.*

*“Would you say that family ties would be a factor at all in future plans you made about where you lived? Not necessarily, no. I think I’ve always been my own person to a certain extent [...] And I think my friends are part of my family as well. So my close friends, so that might have a bit more effect... I think the support network to have there is good”.*

*[Geraldine, 45, urban]*

# Home as a site of social interaction



- *“Yeah, that I do fairly regularly ... friends, family, lots of people come to Edinburgh to stay, so it’s fairly regular ... [friends and family] I would say once a month, yeah” [Albert, 38, urban]*
- *“I’m the one with the spare bed [...] and it’s like, and if there’s gonna be a party, it’ll be at my house because I’ve got no kids to worry about.” [Kathryn, 44, rural]*
- *“I just didn’t want to have one single bedroom just to confine myself in it, you know, living on my own I just like to have friends come over and being able to put them in a separate room rather than stay in myself in the living room, you know what I mean, so I like my comforts a little bit [laugh].” [Janech, 27, urban]*

# Home and non-resident parents



*“when my son came to stay he just slept in my room and I would sleep on the floor or whatever.”*

*(Nathan, 40, urban)*

*“It’s difficult because I only have a one bedroomed flat. . . . So I’ve got a, I’ve got a collection of blow up beds and I have, if I have like the kids staying over then, it’s just impossible to move because it’s quite a small flat. . . . Yes, it’s like a war zone in here at the weekends sometimes.”*

*(Stephen, 41, urban)*

# Factors shaping Social Capital



*“The big thing for me would be ... for friends to drop in or to go out and about, you know, meeting up with people, and things like that. Which I don’t have. I don’t have. It’s always ... you’re going around places on your own, you’re coming home and it’s empty [...] I might not go out, I could be out once in ten days. I think there’s a line in a song somewhere about ‘there’s no one I know, there’s nowhere I have to be, there’s no one I know who’s waiting for me’, that’s the one... I suppose you do become lazy, despondent – what’s the point in going out? [...] I do feel isolated here ... I mean I can go days without seeing anybody or talking to anybody. And that’s hard.*

*[Harry, 35, urban, gay]*



*Well, Christ, I've sort of lost contact with a lot of people. Friends, like close friends, seem to have moved away from the area because they're in relationships [...] it's sort of like people you see in sort of pubs and whatever, it's not people I'd see going out, like doing anything".*

*'Christ, well it's... it's just a couple of years since like I've had a... like...so, I've not had a Christmas with anyone, so... if I was with the like partner, yeah, I would have spent Christmas with them, or before that I sort of spent Christmas with other members of family, but since then, no, the last couple of years I haven't, no. I've, don't really celebrate it as such'.*

*[Living alone] just something that I've become used to [...] I don't actually like being in the house myself. I don't like... I don't like it [...] I don't want to be living myself for the rest of my life".*

*[Anthony, 34, urban]*

# Mobility Patterns of respondents, Telephone Interviews (Numbers)



		Men	Women	Total
Urban	Living where brought up	16	23	39
	Incomer	20	12	33
	<i>Total</i>	36	35	71
Rural	Living where brought up	25	14	39
	Incomer	14	16	30
	<i>Total</i>	39	30	69

# Sense of Belonging



*‘I’ve lived here all the time [...] My great grandfather is in the war memorial for the first, the Great War [...] we’re related to the fishermen going back to the 1700s from this town’. [Brian, 42, rural]*

*‘There’s a saying up here called ‘interloper’, meaning someone from outside, and that could even be somebody from five miles away.’ [Harvey, 38, rural]*

# Family Ties and Place:



*“I would consider it but there would have to be a very good reason for it. I have been [here] for all my life basically apart from the two years in [nearby town] and I didn’t like it”.*

*“It’s just what we’re used to. I mean it’s not the most exciting place but it’s nice but that could just be because friends and family are close by. I like the security of knowing that they’re there. As a town it’s not got that much to offer”.*

*[Ailsa, 28, urban]*

## Employment Mobility



*“It’s one of these areas like a lot of places they say it’s up and coming, but up and coming places never arrive. They are just somewhere that people move to for a while before they go somewhere else”.*

*“Yes. Absolutely yes. I have moved around quite a lot as it is so I wouldn’t rule out another move [...] I think living on my own and not being married or anything at the moment, that helps me keep an open mind towards something like that [...]*

*[nowadays] I think people are much more independent and more nomadic and move around a lot more, as I have done” [Jake, 28, urban]*

# Family Formation And Place



*“I do love where I live ...the beauty of the area ... I’ve got great, fantastic friendships here, I love the sense of community here”.*

*“I do have doubts sometimes [...] it’s quite a scary prospect ... possibly I could be happier but what if I’m not as happy and then there’s no stepping back ... if I give up here it would be very difficult to ever come back [...] if it doesn’t happen soon things will start to fizzle out and then I think well how will I feel about that but I don’t know, I don’t know how I feel about that”.*

[Paula, 36, rural]

# Conclusion



In contrast with stereotypes of solo-livers as lacking connection, the data demonstrates strong attachments to both people and place. Many solo-livers had rich social networks, with a prioritising of kin evident for many.

Solo-living in itself is not a harbinger of disassociation from people or place. For most solo-livers, sustaining social networks contributed to their sense of well-being and these were an important dimension of a satisfaction with solo-living.

# References



Reher, D. S. (1998) Family Ties in Western Europe: Persistent Contrasts, *Population and Development Review* 24 (2): 203-234.