

Millennials Top Boomers in Feeling Lonely

January 19 2020 8:00 AM



PEORIA - Most of us understand that getting older can also mean a loss of friends and a greater feeling of loneliness but new research reveals millennials are feeling lonelier than Baby Boomers these days.

According to results of a survey by marketing research company YouGov, 30% of millennials (ages 26-28) often or always feel lonely. That compares to 15% of Baby Boomers (ages 55-75 years old) who responded they often or always felt that way.

Millennials were also the most likely to report having zero friends (22%), zero close friends (27%) and zero acquaintances (25%). By comparison, nine percent of the Baby Boom cohort in the study of nearly 1,300 reported having no friends or no acquaintances.

Morgan Hurtado of Bloomington, IL just turned 30 and has three boys ages nine, four, and one. She works days. Her husband works second shift. Weekends are spent with her

oldest boy's travel soccer team. But, Hurtado lives where she grew up and has longtime friends nearby. However, she says at least one other millennial friend has moved and feels very disconnected.

“I see him a lot on social media just doing things by himself or maybe on Snapchat just sitting at home, watching TV, not really going out and having face-to-face interactions in a large group setting where there, being a metropolitan area, there’s plenty of opportunity to do that,” she shared.

OSF HealthCare Behavioral Health Director Cheryl Crowe says the scenario Hurtado describes is very common. Many millennials are focused on developing and advancing in their careers which often takes them away from their family and friends.

“We’re now a very mobile workforce so previously the kids who came back home and they worked and they were by family and they still had their high school friends, that dynamic is fading quite a bit,” she suggested.

View Morgan Hurtado-Friend who moved seems lonely

View Cheryl Crowe-Contributing factor is mobile workforce

Crowe points out loneliness is not about being physically alone but it speaks to a loss of feeling connected through meaningful relationships.

YouGov data scientist Jamie Ballard noted in her report on the findings that other studies have decisively linked heavy social media and internet use with both loneliness and depression. Crowe says it’s certainly a contributing factor with an age group which tends to spend more time on the internet and social media.

“When you are on social media, a lot of what you’re seeing is not reality. What we post are our best situations, our best self, our best opportunities and often when we look at that, we may not measure up to what our friends are doing or what our acquaintances are doing,” according to Crowe.

Feeling connected to others in a meaningful way is important to a person’s mental and physical health. Crowe explains without a sense of belonging, it is easy for people to become depressed and ignore self-care.

“If you’re isolated and at home a lot, it may be over eating or over sleeping or not sleeping enough. So, there’s less self care. I think that when we’re getting our needs met

and our needs fulfilled, we're kind of at our best self so those individuals are kind of struggling with that," according to Crowe.

View Crowe-Social media influences perception of self

View Cheryl Crowe-Contributing factor is mobile workforce

So what's the prescription for loneliness?

When millennials in the latest study were asked why they didn't have friends, more than half responded, "Because I'm shy." Crowe says especially for many in this age group, it might just take challenging themselves to get out of their comfort zone to have new experiences.

"There certainly are functions at churches and libraries and community centers and going to the movies and just getting out in the community of people," she suggested. "If you're able to, volunteer work is a great source of that connection and to do something that is so valuable for others who may not have the benefits in life that you do."

Hurtado admits despite close proximity, she has a hard time seeing close friends and mostly relies on her family as her social support. But, she knows that's not enough and she's challenging herself in the new year.

"Something I'm trying in my personal life as sort of an experiment if you will, is to limit my social media interactions or just limit my time as a whole on social media, forcing me to have those in-person interactions more often and maybe leading to new relationships, friendships," she shared.

View Cheryl Crowe-Get out of your comfort zone

View Morgan Hurtado-Limiting her time on social media

Hurtado says she has made new acquaintances through son's travel soccer team but admits those new connections don't represent the kind of deep relationships that make her feel unconditionally loved and supported, something she knows is important and perhaps a bit missing beyond from family right now.

If you are struggling with loneliness to a degree you think it could impacting your life significantly, OSF Silver Cloud is an online tool and phone app that's a free resource. OSF HealthCare also offers free behavioral health navigation services to help understand all resources available in your area.