

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

**NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## **Australia a lonely nation...and getting lonelier**

Loneliness is a serious problem in Australia and is getting worse, new University of Tasmania research has found.

A paper from the Housing and Community Research Unit (HACRU) at UTAS, “Loneliness in Australia”, by Professor Adrian Franklin and Dr Bruce Tranter, reports on a new nationally representative survey carried out in 2007 that examined loneliness in contemporary Australia.

The paper highlights the most “at risk” groups and the pattern of loneliness across the life course.

It strongly suggests that loneliness has reached unprecedented levels and that it may have as much to do with reduced social connectivity and networks as the quality of the social bonds themselves.

Professor Adrian Franklin said the paper identifies loneliness to be a potentially very serious and widespread problem with profound implications.

“The paradox of contemporary loneliness is that our unswerving pursuit of freedom means we are, at the same time, unwilling to commit to the enduring and stable bonds we crave as lonely people,” he said.

While significant loneliness was evident among most groups and ages, the survey suggests that for men, particularly those who have separated from partnerships, loneliness has been a more serious problem that is endured for longer periods, as well as being a problem they are less able to deal than women.

While separated women are only twice as likely as married women to experience loneliness as a serious problem, separated men are over 13 times more likely to develop loneliness as a serious problem than married men.

“The fact that marriage seems to insulate people so well against loneliness demonstrates how it may be the nature of the bond rather than relationships per se (their number and their frequency of interaction) that are important to understand in studies of contemporary loneliness,” Professor Franklin said.

The paper also reveals that Australia has an unusual profile of loneliness across the life course.

“Whereas modern Western nations produces a shallow bowl-like curve where loneliness peaks in late adolescence/early adulthood and again in late old age, in Australia we have found a more dome-like curve where loneliness also peaks among those aged 25-45 (with a reprise among the over 80s).

“Our data suggests loneliness is worsening in Australia - in 2007, 23 per cent of women and 21 per cent of men aged 25 to 44 claimed to be lonely once a week or more often.

“In 2007 34% of women and 33% of men aged 25-44 agreed with the statement ‘loneliness has been a serious problem for me at times.’

“Put another way, one third of both Australian men and women in the prime of life have experienced loneliness as a serious problem at times,” Professor Franklin said.

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