



2021

SOCIAL ISOLATION

DURING COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, many New Yorkers have experienced isolation from their friends, family, and community. Stay-at-home orders and social distancing mandates have caused people to be cut off from their social networks and crucial social services, leading to increased feelings of isolation. Research has shown

that social isolation can have an adverse impact on both physical and mental health.¹ As part of the UJA Covid-19 Impact Study, we asked questions about this critical topic area and analyzed patterns in social isolation by geography and key demographics.

The report focuses on three main areas:

1 | Overall Social Isolation

2 | Change in Social Isolation During the Pandemic

3 | Relationship of Social Isolation to Other Issue Areas

Study Methodology and Defining Jewish Households

The UJA Covid-19 Impact Study collected information from a **representative sample of 4,400 New York area adults** who are Jewish or living in a household with one or more Jewish adults to learn more about the ways the coronavirus pandemic has affected the lives and livelihoods of the Jewish community. The broad coverage area included the **five New York City boroughs, as well as Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester counties**. To learn more about the methodology, you can read our **brief** or **detailed methodology report**.

This study aims to understand the impact of Covid-19 on **all members of the Jewish community**, across all — and regardless of — levels of observance, religious belief, and belonging to Jewish communal organizations.

This study relies on an **expansive definition of who is a Jew** by considering anyone who identifies as a Jew or lives with a self-identified Jew as a member of the Jewish community. For the purposes of this study, a Jewish adult is defined as someone aged 18 and over who self-identifies as Jewish or partially Jewish, either religiously, ethnically, culturally, or because of family background. This study counts those respondents who identify religiously with both Judaism and another religion, such as Christianity or Buddhism, as Jewish respondents. A household is defined as a Jewish household if it includes one or more Jewish adults ages 18 and over. To learn more about this, please visit our report **“Who counts as Jewish in the survey.”**

KEY FINDINGS

1 More than half of adults in Jewish households feel socially isolated

2 The extent of one's social network impacts feelings of social isolation

Nearly nine in ten adults in Jewish households who have no friends, family, or neighbors to depend on for help report feeling isolated from others.

3 LGBTQ adults experience isolation at a high rate

Eight in ten LGBTQ adults in Jewish households experience isolation compared to just over half of the overall population.

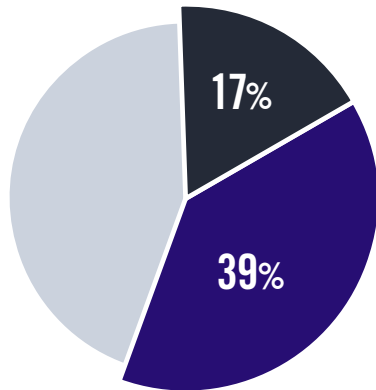
4 The pandemic exacerbated feelings of isolation

Nearly one in four adults in Jewish households reports feeling more isolated from others since the start of the pandemic.

5 Socially isolated adults experience mental health problems, substance abuse, and relationship violence at higher rates

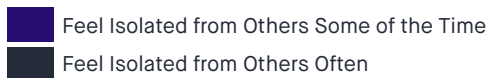
One-third of adults in Jewish households who feel isolated report symptoms of depression and/or anxiety.

OVERALL SOCIAL ISOLATION



MORE THAN HALF OF ADULTS (56%)

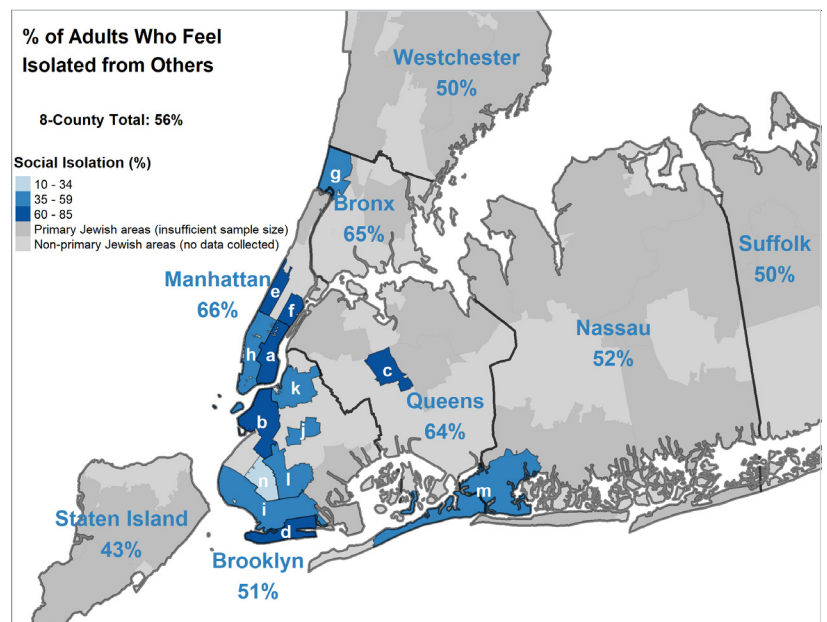
in Jewish households report feeling **socially isolated**² from others at least “some of the time” during the past 4 weeks. 39% feel socially isolated from others some of the time and 17% feel socially isolated from others “often.”



Regional Differences

On average, **New York City counties have a higher rate** of adults in Jewish households feeling socially isolated in the past 4 weeks (**58%**) when compared to **suburban counties (51%)**.

Manhattan (66%), the Bronx (65%), and Queens (64%) have high rates of social isolation, while Westchester (**50%**), Suffolk (**50%**), and Staten Island (**43%**) have the lowest rates. As shown below, people living alone are much more likely to feel socially isolated. The three counties with the highest share of single-person households, the Bronx (**34%**), Manhattan (**33%**), and Queens (**26%**), also have the highest rates of feeling socially isolated. In contrast, the three counties with the lowest share of single-person households and overall larger household sizes, Staten Island (**11%**), Westchester (**11%**), and Nassau (**11%**), have lower rates of social isolation.



SECTION 1: OVERALL SOCIAL ISOLATION

At the neighborhood level, **Lower Manhattan East (69%), Brownstone Brooklyn (68%), Forest Hills/Rego Park/Kew Gardens Area (67%), Coney Island/Brighton Beach/Sheepshead Bay (66%), and the Upper West Side (65%)** experience high rates of social isolation. Borough Park (13%), an area that this study shows to be more than 95% Orthodox and that boasts large household sizes, has, by far, the lowest rate.

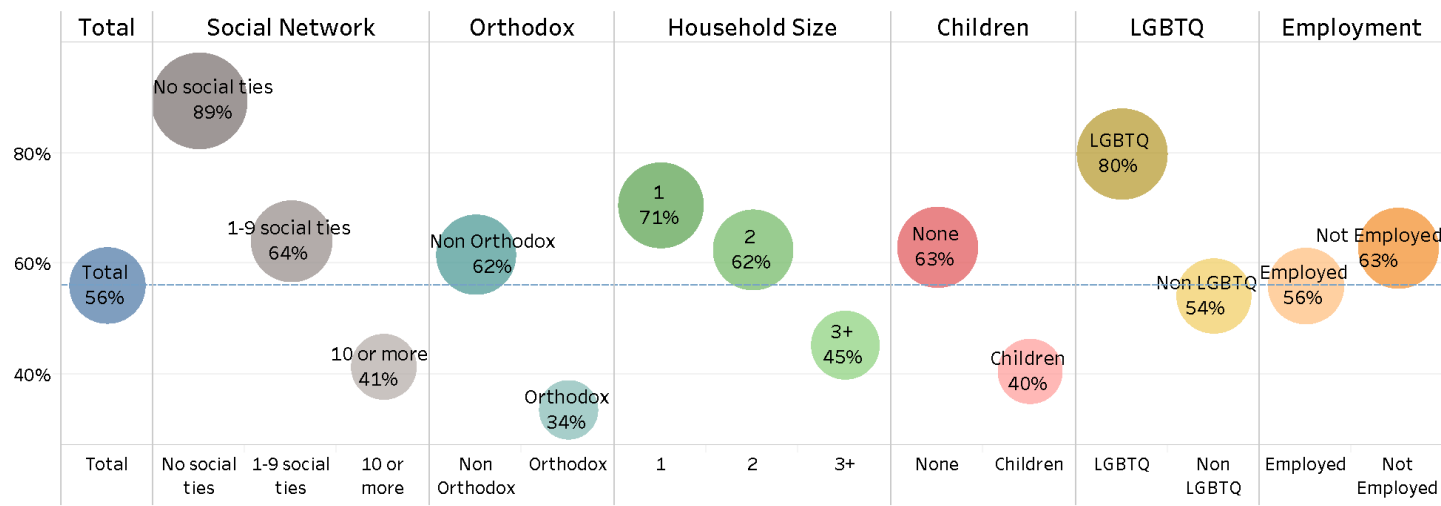
Neighborhood Identifier	Neighborhood Name	Percent
a	Lower Manhattan East	69%
b	Brownstone Brooklyn	68%
c	Forest Hills/Rego Park/Kew Gardens Area	67%
d	Coney Island/Brighton Beach/Sheepshead Bay	66%
e	Upper West Side	65%
f	Upper East Side	62%
g	Riverdale/Kingsbridge	59%
h	Lower Manhattan West	58%
i	Bensonhurst/Gravesend/Bay Ridge/Kings Bay/Madison	58%
j	Crown Heights	56%
k	Williamsburg	53%
l	Flatbush/Midwood/Kensington	41%
m	The Rockaways/Five Towns	40%
n	Borough Park	13%

Social and Demographic Patterns

Three groups of adults in Jewish households are much more likely than the overall population to feel isolated from others in the past 4 weeks: **adults with small social networks, adults who identify as LGBTQ, and**

single-person households. Being **Orthodox**, having **children** present in a household, or having a **social network of 10 or more** results in percentages well below the overall population.

FIGURE 2. % of Adults in Jewish Households Who Feel Isolated From Others



SECTION 1: OVERALL SOCIAL ISOLATION

Having a social network of friends, family, and neighbors to depend on for help is an important factor affecting feelings of isolation. **Nearly nine in ten respondents (89%)** who have **no social network to rely on for help** report feeling isolated from others in the past 4 weeks. In contrast, only 41% of adults with a large social network (10 or more close social ties) experience feelings of social isolation.

Orthodox adults (34%) report feelings of isolation at a **much lower rate** than the non-Orthodox population (**62%**). This is almost certainly related to the high average household size among the Orthodox (4.7 persons per household compared to 2.5 for non-Orthodox).

This survey also finds that feelings of social isolation are patterned by household size and composition. **71% of adults who live alone** report feeling isolated, compared to 62% for two-person households and 45% for households with three or more persons. **Adults in households without children (63%) are more likely to feel isolated** than those in households where children are present (**40%**). This suggests that programs that reach out to single-person households with telephone calls during a pandemic are important.

LGBTQ adults report feelings of social isolation at a high rate. **Eight in ten LGBTQ adults** feel isolated from others, compared to **54%** of the non-LGBTQ population.

Unemployed adults (63%) report feeling isolated at a **higher rate than employed adults (56%)**. While this difference is significant, it is interesting that only 7 percentage points separate these two groups.

In results not shown in Figure 2, **women (23%)** report feeling isolated **at a higher rate than men (18%)**. This difference could be due to the larger percentage of elderly women living alone than elderly men living alone. Feeling isolated is much higher for adults in Jewish households age 25-34 (**73%**) than for any other age group. Many in this age group have moved out of their parents' homes, but are not yet married and are, thus, living alone. Rates are highest for adults in Jewish households who are single, never married (**76%**), or separated (**71%**) and lowest for adults in Jewish households who are married (**47%**).

CHANGE IN SOCIAL ISOLATION DURING THE PANDEMIC

Nearly 4 in 10 respondents report higher levels of isolation in the past 4 weeks than before the pandemic began. Of all groups examined in this study, LGBTQ adults show the highest rate of increased feelings of isolation during the pandemic.

Orthodox Jews (25%) have a much lower rate of increased feelings of isolation than non-Orthodox Jews (44%). Again, high household sizes and tight-knit communities might be shielding them from increases in feeling socially isolated.

Women (43%) show an increase in feelings of isolation at a higher rate than men (36%).

Half of LGBTQ adults show an increase in feelings of isolation compared to 39% of the non-LGBTQ population.

Adults who live alone (46%) and adults in two-person households (44%) show higher rates of increased feelings of isolation during the pandemic when compared to adults in households with three or more persons (33%). Adults in households without children (42%) are more likely to show increased feelings of isolation compared to adults in households with children (33%).

In results not shown in Figure 4, adults in Jewish households in which the pandemic changed their job situation feel more isolated (47%) than those whose job situation did not change (34%).”

FIGURE 4. Respondents Who Show Increased Feelings of Isolation during the Pandemic by Demographic Subgroups

Demographic Subgroups		
Orthodox	Non-Orthodox	44%
	Orthodox	25%
Gender	Male	36%
	Female	43%
LGBTQ	Non-LGBTQ	39%
	LGBTQ	50%
Household Size	1	46%
	2	44%
	3+	33%
Presence of Children in Household	None	42%
	Children	33%

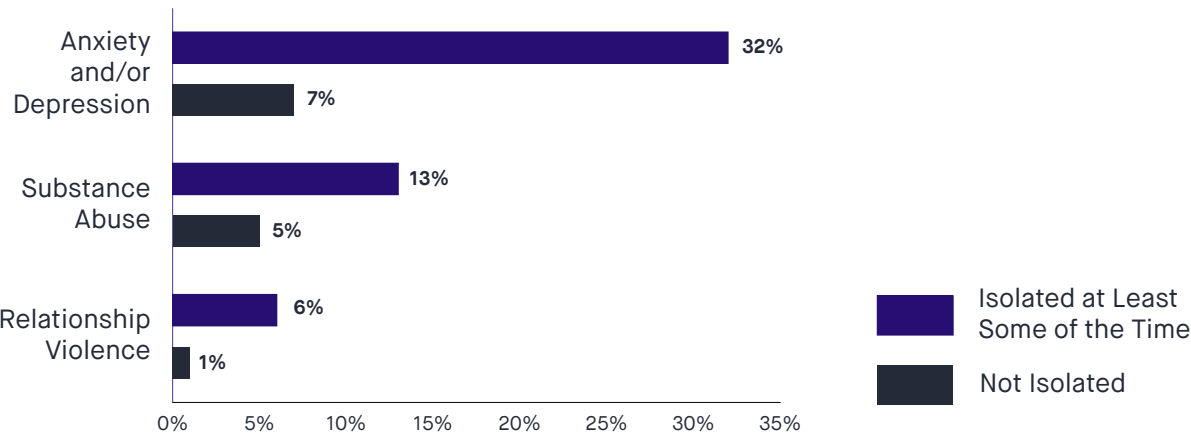
RELATIONSHIP OF SOCIAL ISOLATION TO OTHER ISSUE AREAS

Social isolation may be related to precarious mental health, substance abuse, and/or relationship violence.

Almost one-third of adults in Jewish households (32%) who report feeling isolated at least some of the time in the past 4 weeks also report symptoms of anxiety and/or depression. This is more than 4 times the rate for adults who report not feeling isolated.

Another 13% of adults who feel isolated report a substance abuse problem compared to just 5% among those who do not feel isolated. 6% experience relationship violence compared to only 1% of those who do not feel isolated.

FIGURE 5. % of Respondents Who Feel Isolated Who Suffer from Other Problems



NOTES

1. Pietrabissa, Giada, and Susan G. Simpson. "Psychological Consequences of Social Isolation during Covid-19 Outbreak." Frontiers. Frontiers, September 2020. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02201/full>.

2. Respondents were asked the following questions about their feelings of isolation:

How often **in the past 4 weeks** have you felt that you are isolated from others?

1. Hardly ever or not at all
2. Some of the time
3. Often

Before the Covid-19 pandemic began in March 2020, how often did you feel that you were isolated from others?

1. Hardly ever or not at all
2. Some of the time
3. Often