

Manchester Libraries

Research into how libraries help people
suffering from loneliness and isolation

December 2020

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1. Foreword

Libraries up and down the country are community hubs that improve lives and communities. Manchester's libraries bring many benefits to the communities they serve and are extremely well used. We know that residents' health and wellbeing is improved by using the library, and wanted to help demonstrate that people feel better when they use their local library.

We are delighted to pilot this research into how libraries help people suffering from loneliness and isolation. This research has confirmed what we have always believed, but not previously been able to prove – that libraries make people less lonely and more engaged with their communities.

In Manchester, our libraries are the beating hearts of their communities.

Neil MacInnes OBE

Head of Libraries, Galleries and Culture
Manchester City Council

2. Executive summary

Users of Manchester's libraries are more inclined to report that they always or often experience feelings of loneliness compared to the public in general. However, they are also more likely to say that they rarely ever or never experience these feelings.

While, within the general population, women are more likely to state that they always or often experience such feelings, we find that for those using Manchester's libraries it is men who are more likely to report this.

The findings would suggest that it is the younger people in the community who experience feelings of loneliness rather than elderly people. This is especially true for those aged under 35, who are twice as likely as those aged 35 and over to always or often feel lonely or isolated.

The propensity for those with a disability or impairment towards feeling lonely is noted, ie they are four to five times more likely to answer always or often compared to those without a disability or impairment.

Compared to those living in the North West, library users living in Manchester are far more likely to say that they hardly ever or never experience feelings of loneliness.

More than eight in ten respondents, who did state that they often or sometimes have feelings of loneliness, reported that the library helps to reduce these feelings. This is as true for men as it is for women.

Those aged between 16 and 24 are far less likely to state that the library helps in this context compared to those aged 25 or over.

While those with a disability or impairment are more inclined to always or often experience feelings of loneliness, they are also more inclined to state that the library helps to reduce these feelings.

3. About

This report utilises information from two recent surveys: the Manchester Libraries User Survey, carried out by Manchester City Council, and the Community Life Survey, a household self-completion survey from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. A comparison of the questions used for the two surveys can be found in the Appendix.

Manchester Libraries User Survey

The library users' survey captures information of adults (16+) on a range of topics including books, computers and information needs alongside a number of Government Statistical Service (GSS) harmonised demographic questions. The most recent survey, completed during February 2020, also included questions on the topic of loneliness.

Headline measures – 2019/20

- 7% of respondents said they feel lonely often or always.
- Compared with the 53% in the Community Life Survey who stated that they hardly ever or never feel lonely, some 61% of library users reported they hardly ever or never did.
- While 64% of women said that they hardly ever or never feel lonely, the equivalent figure for men was just 57%. Younger age groups are more prone to feelings of loneliness compared with the older age groups. For example, those aged under 35 are more than twice as likely as those over 35 to often have experienced feelings of loneliness (under 35, 11% often compared with over 35, 5% often).
- Respondents with a disability or impairment were far more likely to often or always experience feelings of loneliness (19%) compared to those without (4%).
- Asian and mixed ethnic groups report that they are more likely to often or always experience feelings of loneliness compared to other ethnic groups.
- It appears that those living in output areas south of the city centre and stretching from Chorlton across to Gorton/Clayton Hall are more likely to often or always experience feelings of loneliness, compared to those living in other output areas.

The Community Life Survey

The **Community Life Survey** collects information about the wellbeing of adults (16+) in England and uses the GSS harmonised principle of loneliness to measure levels of loneliness. The estimates presented here, from the survey that ran from April 2019 to March 2020, are therefore comparable with other surveys that use this principle.

Headline measures – 2019/20

- 6% of respondents said they feel lonely often or always. This is the same as in 2017/18 and 2018/19.
- In 2019/20, 21% of respondents said they never feel lonely, similar to 2018/19 and 2013/14 (23%).
- Men were more likely to say that they never felt lonely than women (25% compared with 18%).
- There were differences by age group in feelings of loneliness, with people aged 16 to 24 more likely to say they feel lonely often or always (10%) than age groups of 35 years and over (4–6%). 65–74 year olds reported the lowest levels of loneliness, with 30% saying they never felt lonely, as compared to 14% of 16–24 year olds.
- People with a limiting long-term illness or disability were more likely to say that they felt lonely often/always than those without (14% compared with 4%) and less likely to say they never felt lonely (14% compared with 23%).
- 20% of respondents in urban areas reported never feeling lonely, whereas in rural areas, the corresponding figure was 26%.
- Those living in the most deprived areas were more likely to feel lonely often or always than those living in the least deprived areas (9% compared with 4%).
- No significant variability was seen between the different ethnicity or region categories.

4. Report

Do you feel lonely or isolated from others?

Headline

Table 1.1

	Community Life Survey 2019/20	Manchester Libraries
Often/always	6.4%	7.2%
Some of the time/occasionally	40.9%	32.2%
Hardly ever/never	52.7%	60.7%
Respondents	10,066	3,736

Generally, the difference between the results of the two surveys for those who are often or always lonely is too small (0.8%) to be meaningful. However, there are clearly significant differences for the other options/combinations. The Manchester library service appears to attract a larger proportion of individuals that hardly ever or never experience feelings of loneliness and consequently a smaller proportion of those that experience these feelings some of the time or occasionally.

Gender

Table 1.2

	Community Life Survey 2019/20		Manchester Libraries	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Often/always	5.6%	7.1%	8.1%	5.7%
Some of the time/occasionally	36.5%	45.1%	34.7%	30.5%
Hardly ever/never	57.9%	47.8%	57.2%	63.9%
Respondents	4,511	5,441	1,386	2,084

Drilling down into the results, in this case by gender, more stark differences emerge from the results. For example, the proportional difference between the two surveys appears to suggest that men using the library service are more inclined to say that they are often or always lonely while females are less inclined to say this. Clearly, women are far less likely to state that they experience loneliness some of the time or occasionally and consequently are far more likely to state that they hardly ever or never do so. The results for men are roughly equivalent for those two factors.

Age group

Table 1.3

Community Life Survey 2019/20

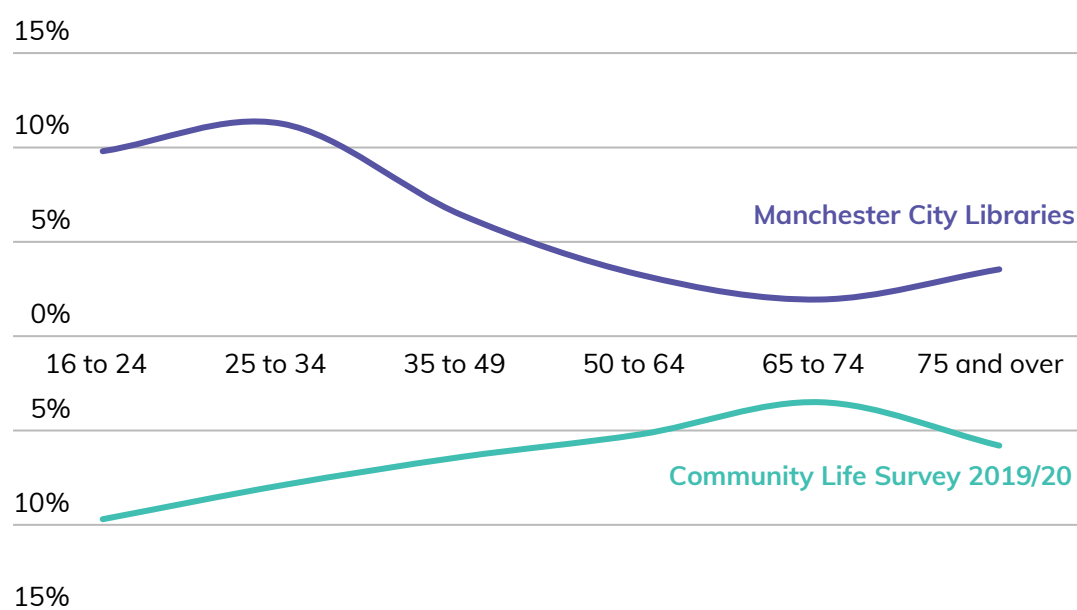
	16 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	65 to 74	75 and over
Often/always	9.7%	7.9%	6.4%	5.2%	3.5%	5.8%
Some of the time/occasionally	50.2%	47.4%	38.7%	37.5%	32.9%	41.1%
Hardly ever/never	40.1%	44.7%	54.9%	57.3%	63.6%	53.0%
Respondents	971	1,731	2,527	2,419	1,509	841

Table 1.4

Manchester Libraries

	16 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	65 to 74	75 and over
Often/always	9.8%	11.3%	6.4%	3.2%	1.9%	3.5%
Some of the time/occasionally	27.3%	35.1%	33.5%	36.1%	24.4%	20.5%
Hardly ever/never	62.9%	53.6%	60.1%	60.7%	73.7%	75.9%
Respondents	391	567	953	643	407	192

Figure 1.1



The breakdown by age group reveals some small differences for those who stated that they often or always experience feelings of loneliness. Generally, most of these differences are too small to be statistically significant. The only age group where there is possibly a meaningful difference is for those aged 25 to 34, ie library users appear to experience higher levels of always or often feeling lonely

compared to the general public. Given we only have 567 responses for this age group this cannot be taken as being certain. However, more reliably, across all ages library users hardly ever or never experience feelings of loneliness compared to others. The chart would suggest some form of correlation between age and the extent to which respondents to both surveys always or often feel lonely, ie as age increases so this figure decreases.

Ethnicity

Table 1.5

Community Life Survey 2019/20

	White	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other
Often/always	6.1%	7.5%	8.8%	9.5%	6.9%
Some of the time/occasionally	40.2%	43.9%	40.1%	49.0%	41.8%
Hardly ever/never	53.7%	48.6%	51.1%	41.4%	51.3%
Respondents	7,941	792	385	440	115

Table 1.6

Manchester Libraries

	White	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other
Often/always	5.0%	10.7%	7.1%	14.2%	4.0%
Some of the time/occasionally	32.8%	32.0%	31.6%	30.7%	48.7%
Hardly ever/never	62.2%	57.3%	61.3%	55.1%	47.3%
Respondents	2,091	498	429	181	104

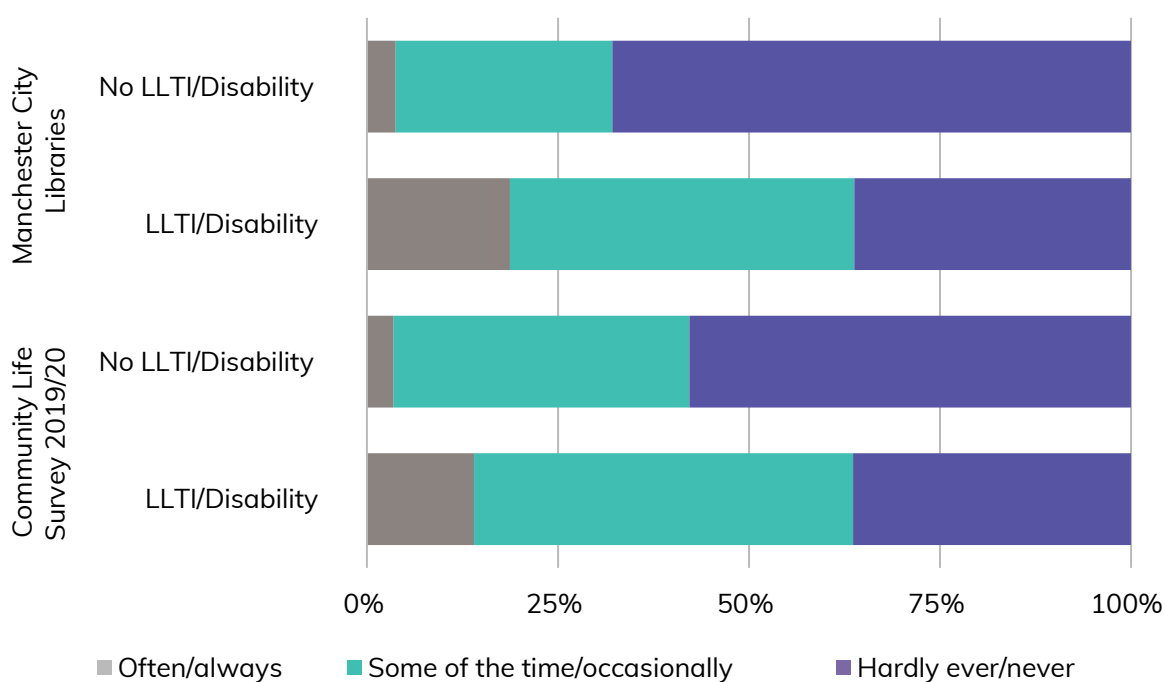
Across all ethnic groups we can reliably assume that library users are far more likely to hardly ever or never experience feelings of loneliness. Correspondingly, and again across all ethnic groups, library users are far less likely to say that they occasionally or some of the time experience such feelings. Finally, while there are some proportional differences across the two surveys for those that ticked often or always, these differences are small enough to be statistically insignificant.

Disabled/impaired

Table 1.7

	Community Life Survey 2019/20		Manchester Libraries	
	LLTI / disability	No LLTI / disability	LLTI / disability	No LLTI / disability
Often/always	14.0%	3.5%	18.7%	3.7%
Some of the time/occasionally	49.6%	38.7%	45.0%	28.4%
Hardly ever/never	36.4%	57.8%	36.2%	67.9%
Respondents	1,902	5,871	851	2885

Figure 1.2



Note: LLTI is an abbreviation for limiting long-term illness.

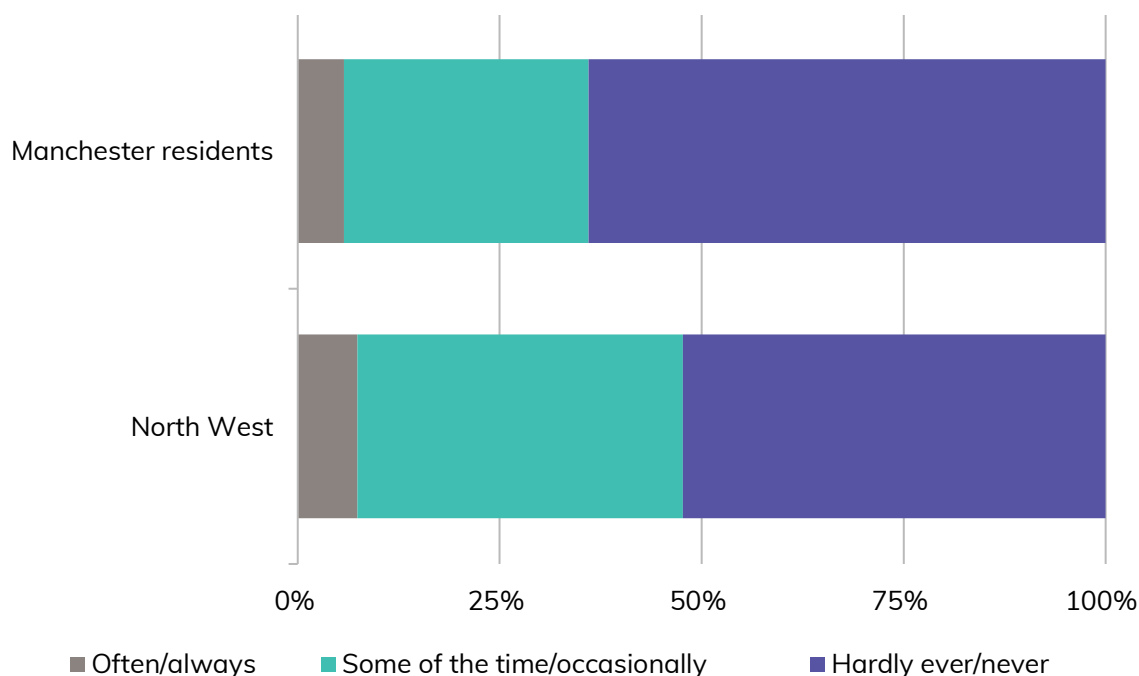
Compared to their peers, users of Manchester libraries tend to experience higher levels of always or often feeling lonely but lower levels of feeling this some of the time or occasionally. For those with no disabilities or impairments, library users are more likely to hardly ever or never have such feelings and are less likely to do so some of the time or occasionally.

Regional

Table 1.8

	Community Life Survey 2019/20	Manchester Libraries
	North West	Manchester residents
Often/always	7.4%	5.7%
Some of the time/occasionally	40.3%	30.3%
Hardly ever/never	52.4%	64.0%
Respondents	1,129	2,454

Figure 1.3



This compares the results for those who reside in the North West against library users who live within the Manchester City boundary line. Generally, library users are far more likely to hardly ever or never experience feelings of loneliness compared with the general population of the North West and consequently are far less likely to do so either some of the time or occasionally. The results would also suggest that those in the North West generally experience feelings of loneliness always or often to a higher degree than library users living in Manchester, although the difference falls within the margin of error, ie less than or equal to 3%.

Index of multiple deprivation (IMD) quintile

Table 1.9

Community Life Survey 2019/20

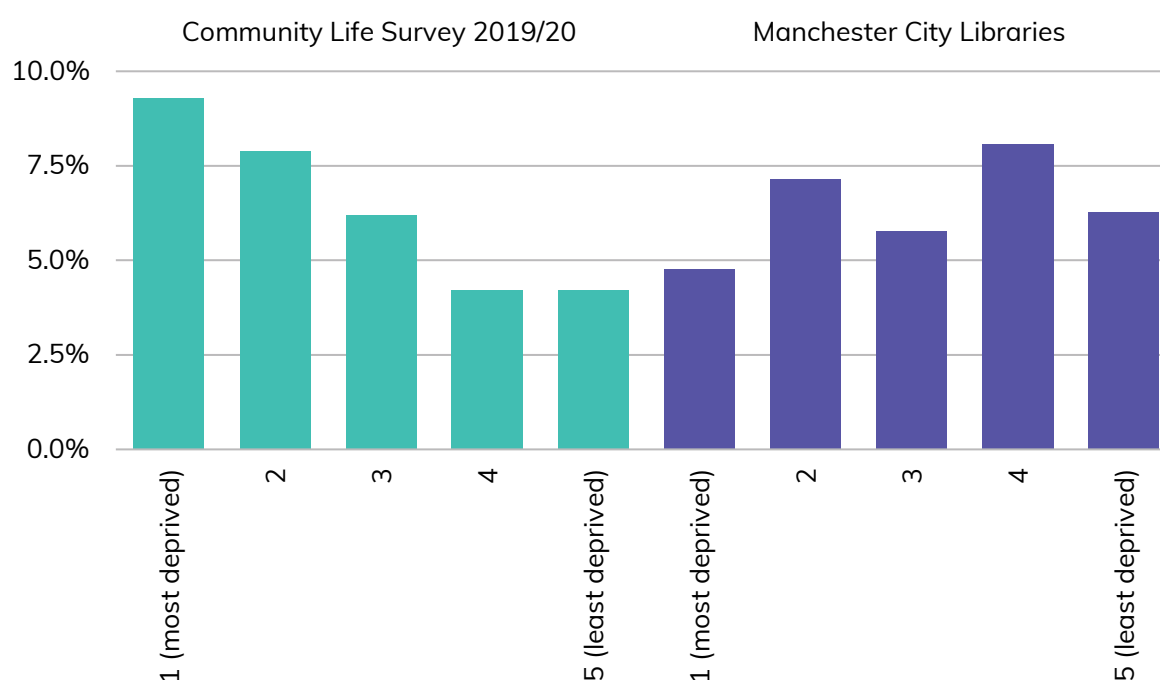
	1 (most deprived)	2	3	4	5 (least deprived)
Often/always	9.3%	7.9%	6.2%	4.2%	4.2%
Some of the time/occasionally	43.7%	43.0%	40.5%	40.9%	36.5%
Hardly ever/never	46.9%	49.1%	53.4%	54.8%	59.3%
Respondents	2,648	2,432	1,957	1,631	1,398

Table 1.10

Manchester Libraries

	1 (most deprived)	2	3	4	5 (least deprived)
Often/always	4.8%	7.2%	5.8%	8.1%	6.3%
Some of the time/occasionally	30.8%	34.5%	26.7%	29.9%	27.9%
Hardly ever/never	64.4%	58.3%	67.5%	62.0%	65.8%
Respondents	1,625	637	338	176	56

Figure 1.4: Chart – often/always lonely



The results from the Community Life Survey show a high degree of correlation between the respondent's IMD and the extent to which they always or often feel lonely, whereas no such relationship can be found in the libraries survey.

Urban/rural

Table 1.11

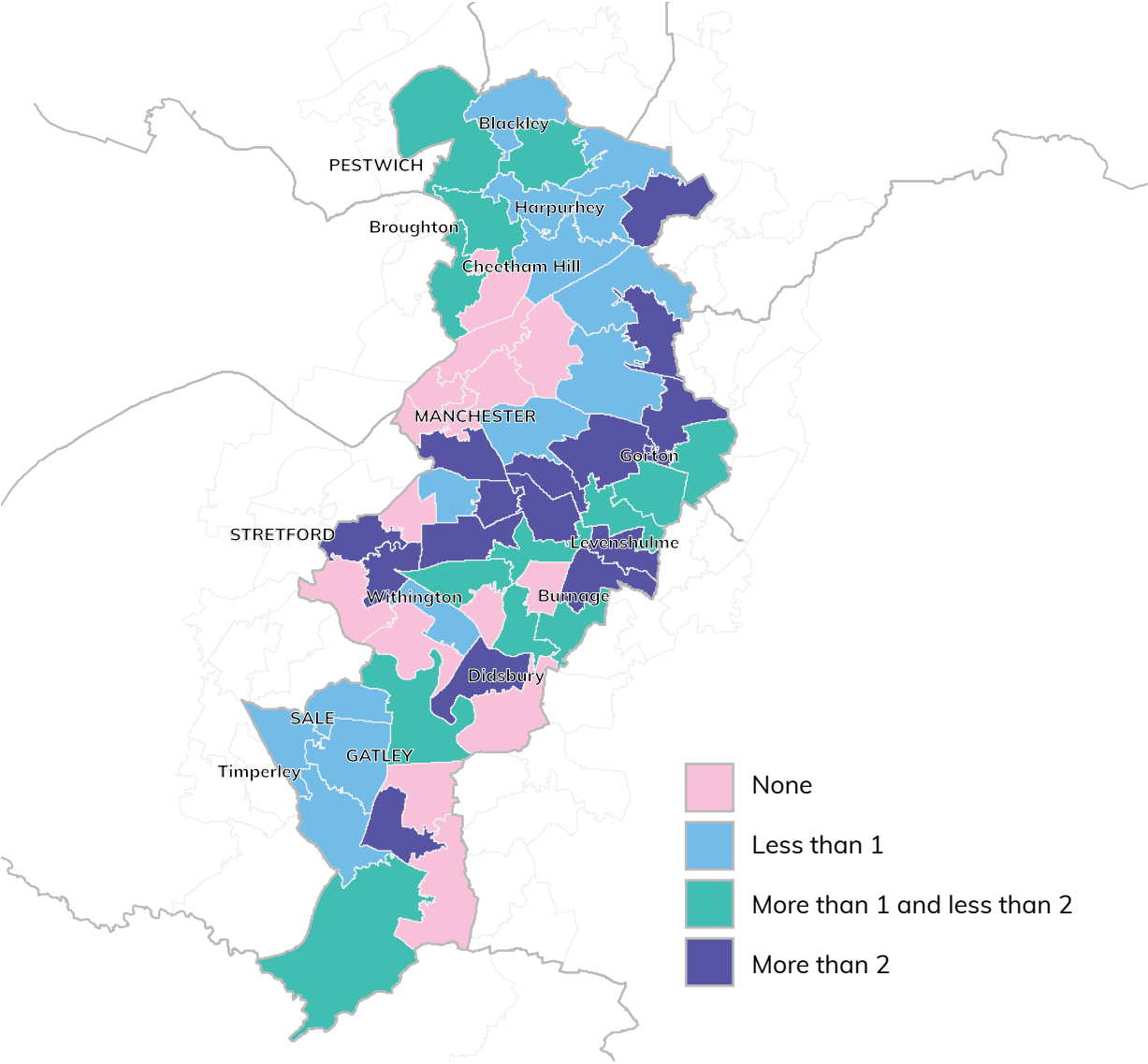
	Community Life Survey 2019/20		Manchester Libraries	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Often/always	6.6%	5.5%	5.8%	0%
Some of the time/occasionally	42.2%	35.4%	30.9%	45.2%
Hardly ever/never	51.2%	59.2%	63.2%	54.8%
Respondents	8,890	1,176	2,825	8

Note: Numbers for Manchester Libraries rural visitors are far too low to be considered useful for comparison purposes and are only included for completeness.

While for respondents to the Community Life Survey there is clearly a discernible difference between those who live in urban and rural areas, it is not possible to undertake the same evaluation for library visitors. However, comparing those living in urban areas in the two surveys we find that library users are far more likely to hardly ever or never experience feelings of loneliness and far less likely to experience these feelings some of the time or occasionally.

Middle layer super output area (MSOA)

Figure 1.5: Chart – Often lonely by MSOA



In total some 2,454 respondents to the survey live within the Manchester City Council boundary. The above chart/map shows the proportion of respondents living within each MSOA who selected the option often. It would appear that those who live closest to the city centre tend to experience this feeling more highly than those living elsewhere, although there are some other isolated areas where this occurs.

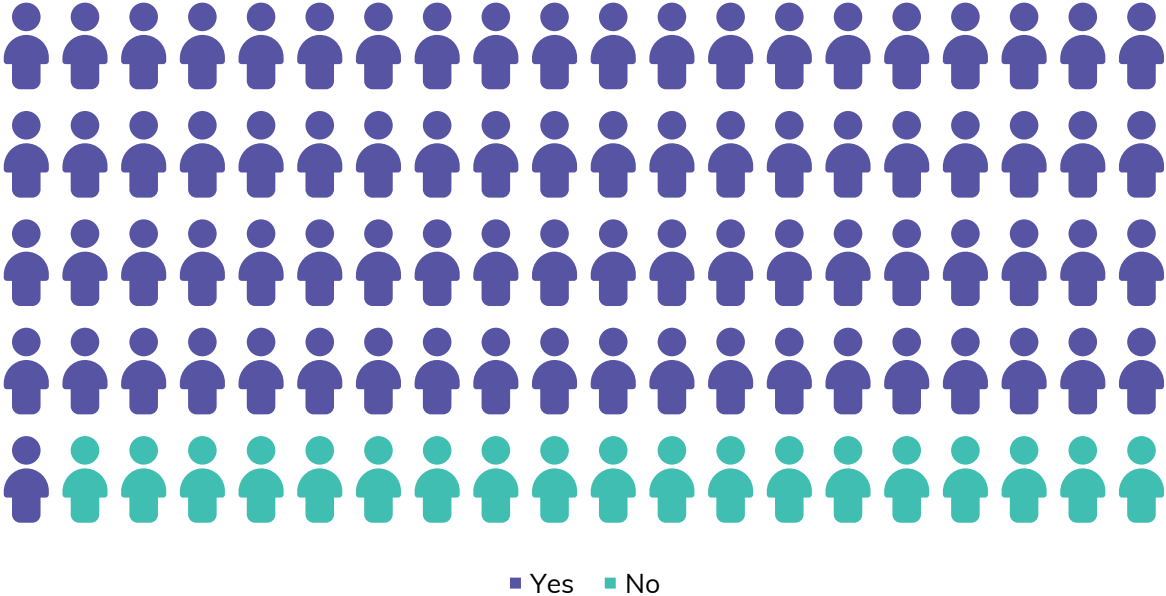
Does the library help to reduce your feelings of loneliness and isolation?

Headline

Table 2.1

Yes	81%
No	19%
Respondents	1,331

Figure 2.1



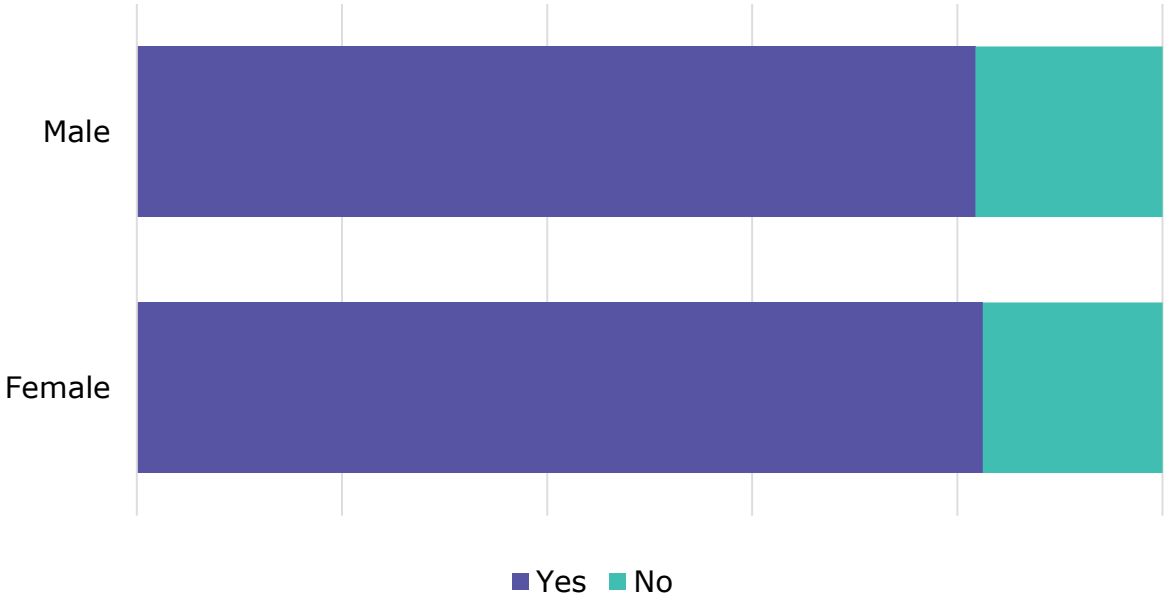
Where library survey respondents indicated that they did experience feelings of loneliness often or some of the time, we then asked a supplementary question to establish whether the library helped. In over 80% of cases respondents agreed that it did. Over the next few pages we provide breakdowns by demographic responses to identify who benefitted more or less.

Gender

Table 2.2

	Women	Men
Yes	83%	82%
No	17%	18%
Respondents	728	505

Figure 2.2



It would appear that women benefit slightly more than men, however, the difference is so small (0.7%) that it might be statistically meaningless.

Age group

Table 2.3

	16 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	65 to 74	75 and over
Yes	60%	90%	87%	88%	89%	83%
No	40%	10%	13%	12%	11%	17%
Respondents	144	220	328	246	127	52

Figure 2.3



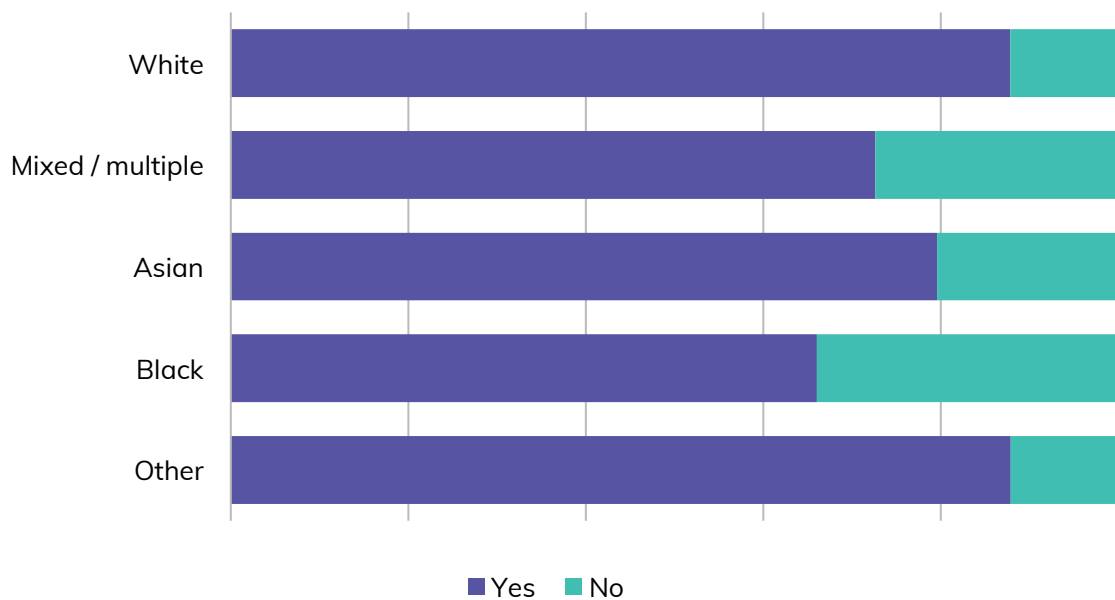
Compared to the overall score of 81% (yes) it would appear that only those aged 16 to 24 differ widely from this level of agreement. All other age groups, especially those aged 25 to 34, are far more inclined to report that, yes, the library does help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. Interestingly, there does appear to be a slight relationship with age and whether respondents agree or not, ie as age increases so the value decreases, albeit not uniformly.

Ethnic group

Table 2.4

	White	Mixed / multiple	Asian	Black	Other
Yes	88%	73%	80%	66%	88%
No	12%	27%	20%	34%	12%
Respondents	722	78	200	127	48

Figure 2.4



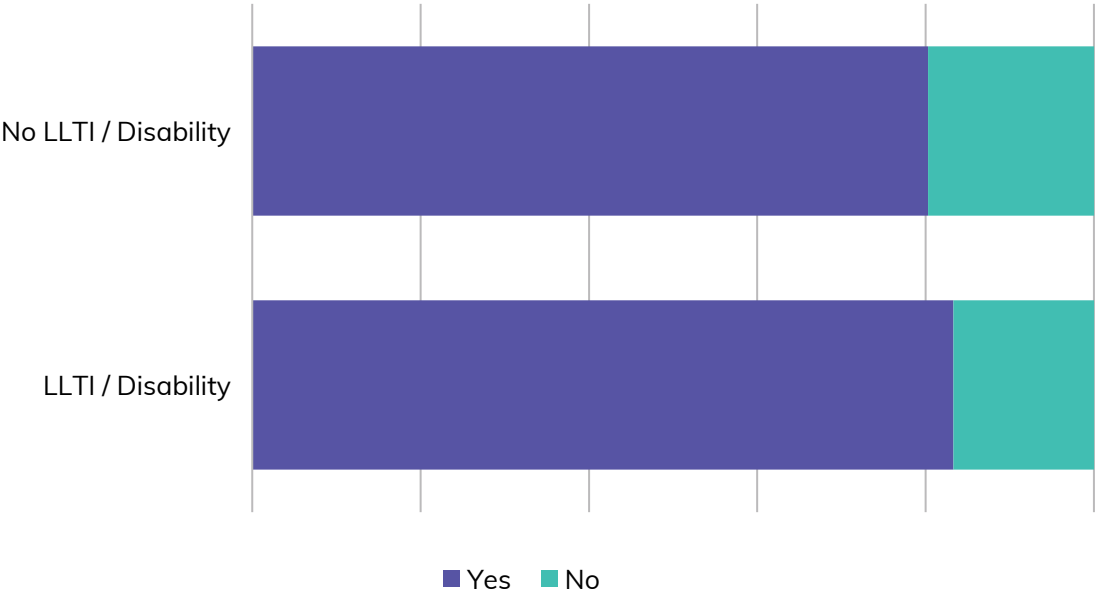
With 81% (yes) as the overall score, it would seem that those who self-classified themselves as mixed/multiple or black tended to agree less that the library helped, whereas as those who self-classified themselves as white or other agreed more.

Disabled/impaired

Table 2.5

	LLTI / Disability	No LLTI / Disability
Yes	83%	80%
No	17%	20%
Respondents	459	872

Figure 2.5



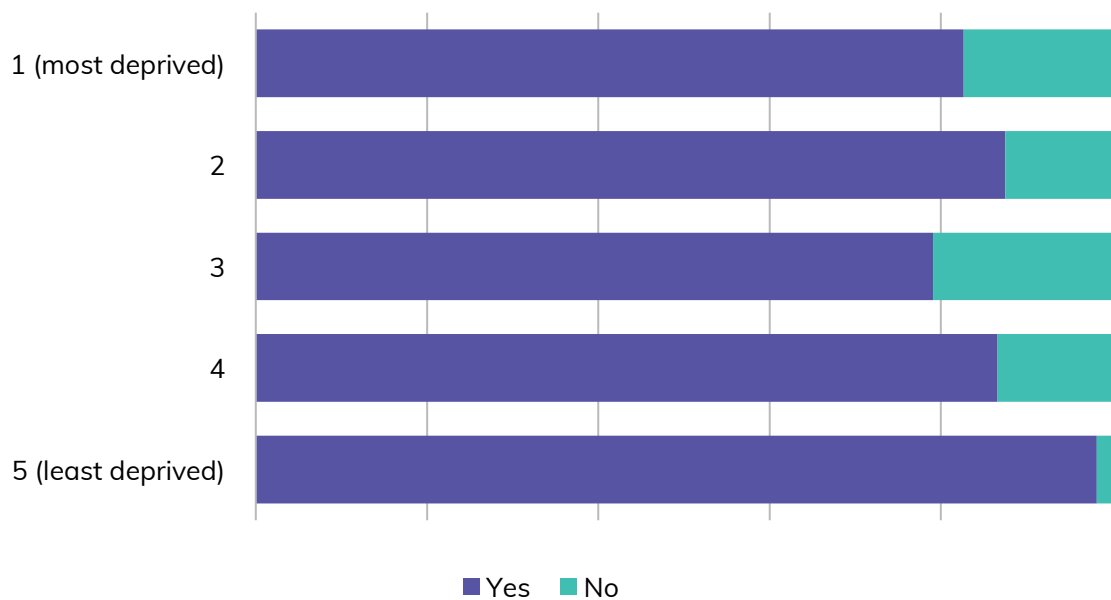
Those who stated that they had a form of impairment or disability were more likely to agree that, yes, the library helps offset feelings of loneliness or isolation than those without a disability.

IMD quintile

Table 2.6

	1 (most deprived)	2	3	4	5 (least deprived)
Yes	83%	88%	79%	87%	98%
No	17%	12%	21%	13%	2%
Respondents	564	220	104	48	12

Figure 2.6



It is impossible to draw any conclusions from the relationship between the IMD and the extent to which survey respondents agree or disagree with the notion that the library helps to reduce feelings of loneliness or isolation.

The number of respondents for quintiles 4 and 5 are too small to be considered valid for statistical purposes.

5. Appendix

Question comparison

The question asked in the Community Life Survey 2020 on the topic of loneliness was:


- How often do you feel lonely?
 - Often/always
 - Some of the time
 - Occasionally
 - Hardly ever
 - Never

The question asked in the Manchester Libraries user survey 2020 was:

- Do you feel lonely or isolated from others?
 - Hardly ever or never
 - Some of the time
 - Often

To allow for comparison of results we aggregated the results for the Community Life Survey as follows:

Community Life Survey	Manchester Libraries
Often/always	Often
Some of the time + occasionally	Some of the time
Hardly ever + never	Hardly ever or never



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