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The Contributions of the Older Population

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The Contributions of the Older Population

Key Findings

- Overall, 41% of adults aged 58 years and older provide some kind of regular help and/or care for their spouses, relatives (not including grandchildren), neighbours and friends
- Overall, 5% of men and 7% of women aged 58 years and over report that they provided informal care for a family member or friend in the last month
- 8% of the population aged 58 years and over had living parents; 12% of men and 21% of women aged 58-64 years and 12% of men and 31% of women aged 65-74 years provided help with dressing, feeding and bathing to their parents.
- 42% of men and 50% of women who have living parents report they regularly helped them with household chores and tasks.
- 16% of men and 19% of women aged 58-64 report helping their children with household tasks, this increases to 24% of men aged 65-74 but remained at 17% for women in this age group and decreased to 7% and 5% respectively for men and women aged 75 years and over.
- The older population also help their friends and neighbours with household tasks; 14% of men and 12% of women aged 58-64 and 15% of men and 12% of women aged 65-74 report helping their friends and neighbours with household tasks. A lower but still substantial number (8%) aged 75 years and over also report providing friends and neighbours with this help.
- Grandchild care is very common in the older population, and 42% of older adults report that they looked after their grandchild in the last month. This increased from 40% of men aged 58-64 to 54% of men aged 65-74 years while for women the proportion remained similar at half of all aged 58-64 year (50%) and 65-74 years (54%) and remained high in both men (30%) and women (21%) aged 75 years and older.

- Overall, 55% of men and 51% of women report that they volunteered in the past year.
- The three most common reasons given for volunteering were because they enjoyed it (28% of men and 41% of women, so that they could use their skills (23% men, 23% women) and so they could contribute something useful (15% men, 15% women).
- Overall, 90% of adults participate in active and social leisure activities each month, while 72% participate in organised groups such as sports groups, book clubs, or charitable organisations.
- Overall, one in five (21%) adults aged 58 years and over has four or more regular contacts. These networks are maintained through participation in a wide range of organisations and attendance at religious services.

6.1 Introduction

The older generations in Ireland have been long recognised for the vibrant and important contribution they make to society in Ireland. Research from The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) has previously highlighted the range and importance of the contributions that the older population make, in family life, through providing help and resources to both older and younger family members (1-3), and through volunteering and active participation in society. (4)

Currently, with national resources oriented towards responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland, many discussions are taking place about the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on our older population, with progressively greater restrictions placed on social interactions resulting in greater social isolation among this group. We take this opportunity to underscore once again the contribution that older persons make to society in Ireland and to the country's economic wellbeing, either directly or indirectly by enabling others to take part in the workforce through their volunteering and caring. We also highlight some of the challenges current COVID-19 restrictions may pose for informal family caring and for childcare for working parents who have previously relied on grandparents to provide affordable childcare options enabling mothers, in particular, to remain in the workforce.

This chapter uses data collected in Wave 5 of The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) from both the Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) (n=4,908) and the Self Completion Questionnaire (SCQ) (n= 4,233), which contains more sensitive questions.

The aim of this chapter is to describe and quantify the contribution that the population aged 58 years and older make to society in Ireland. The chapter is organised as follows. The first section provides a background to the topic, describing the context for the research; it describes the questions used and the characteristics of the community-dwelling adults aged 58 years and over resident in Ireland who were eligible for this analysis. The second section describes the types and prevalence of help and care provided to family and friends. The third section describes and quantifies the numbers of older adults who are volunteers. The fourth section describes the prevalence of regular social and leisure activities, while the final section discusses the results and puts them in the context of successful ageing in Ireland.

6.2 Population providing help and care

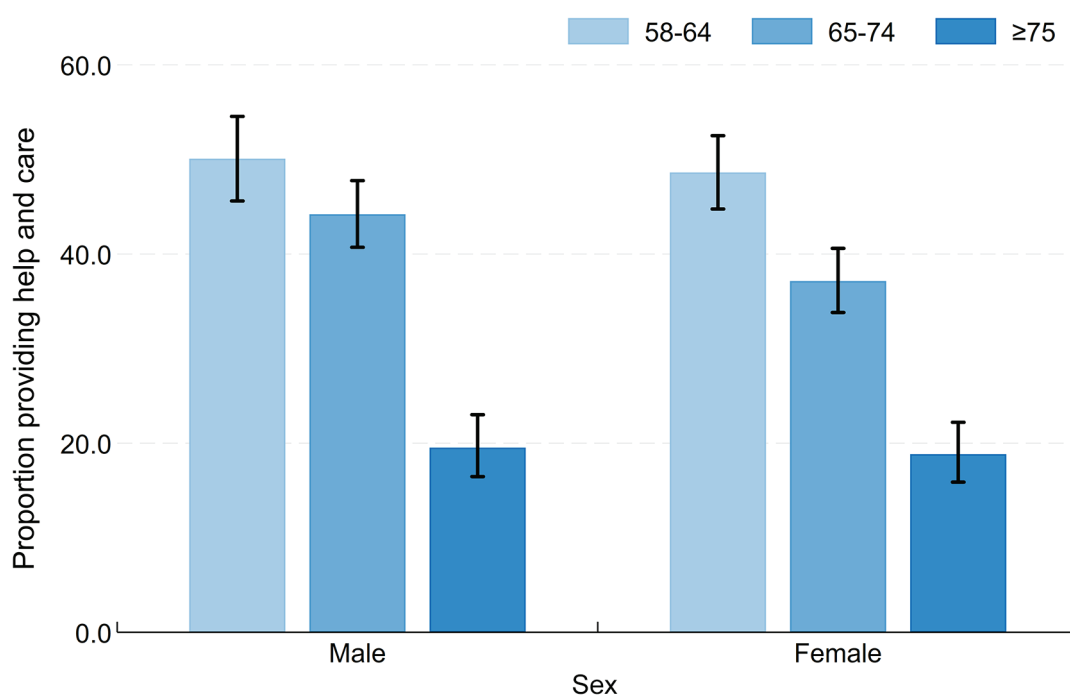
TILDA asks about a variety of types of care that participants provide to different people including children, parents, relatives etc. In this first section we describe the characteristics of those participants who provide any form of care on a regular basis. In subsequent sections we describe specific types of care provided to named groups.

In TILDA, we ask if participants provided care for someone in the past month, and if so, for how many hours that was in the last week, and what their relationship was to those for whom they provided this care. We also ask about help they may have provided to their parents and other relatives, and whether this is help with household tasks or with basic activities of daily living (ADLS, include help with tasks like bathing, dressing, eating and toileting). Finally, we asked about any other household help provided to neighbours and friends. These are referred to as Instrumental activities of daily living (IADLS) and include help with housework, shopping, filling in forms etc.

Overall, we find that 37% of adults aged 58 years and older (39% of men and 35% of women) provide some kind of regular help and/or care for their spouses, relatives (not including grandchildren), neighbours and friends. This help takes two forms. The majority provide help with household chores for their relatives, friends and neighbours. Others provide care with ADLs.

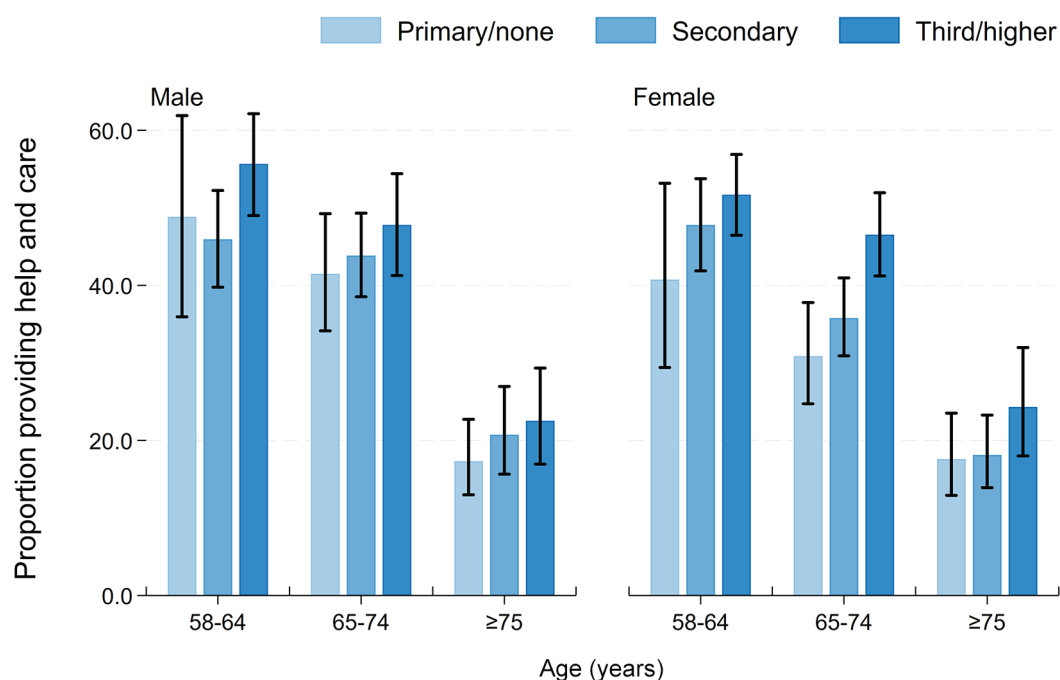
When numbers providing any help and/or care are combined, Figure 6.1 shows that 50% of men and 49% of women aged 58-64 report that they have provided help or care for family and friends in the last month; this decreased to 44% and 37% respectively in those aged 65-74 years, and to 20% and 19% in those aged 75 years and over.

Figure 6.1. The Proportion of the population providing help and/or care to family and friends by age group and sex



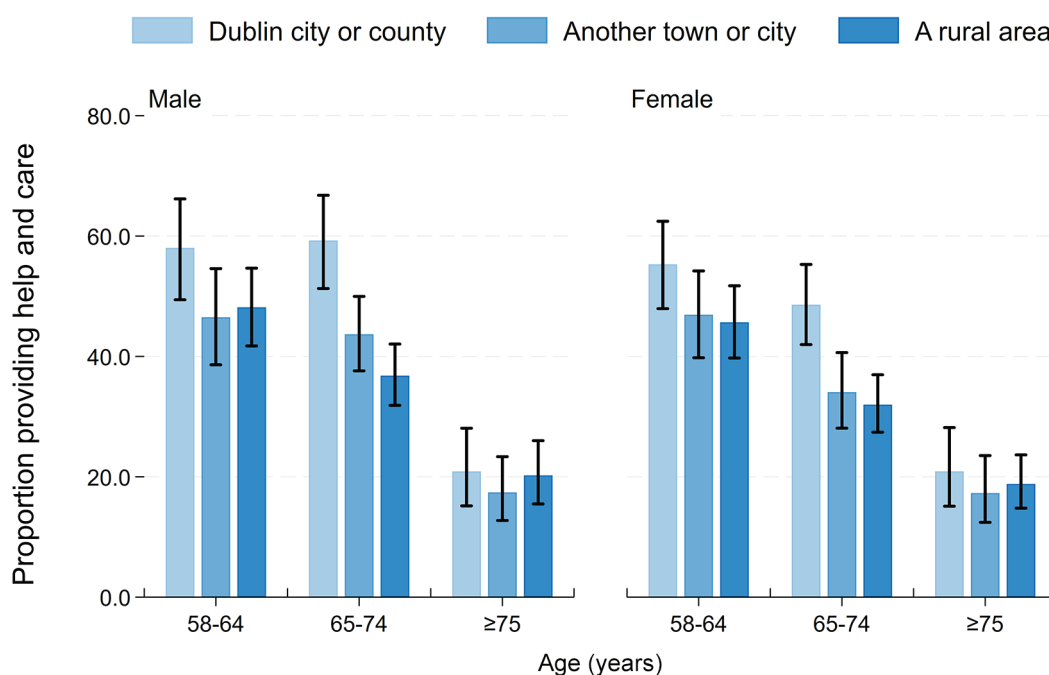
The proportion who provide any help and/or care varies by level of educational attainment for women, shown in Figure 6.2. A higher proportion of women aged 65-74 who have a tertiary education report providing any help and care (47%) than women with either primary (31%) or secondary education (36%) within that age group.

Figure 6.2. The Proportion of the population providing help and/or care to family and friends by educational attainment, age group and sex



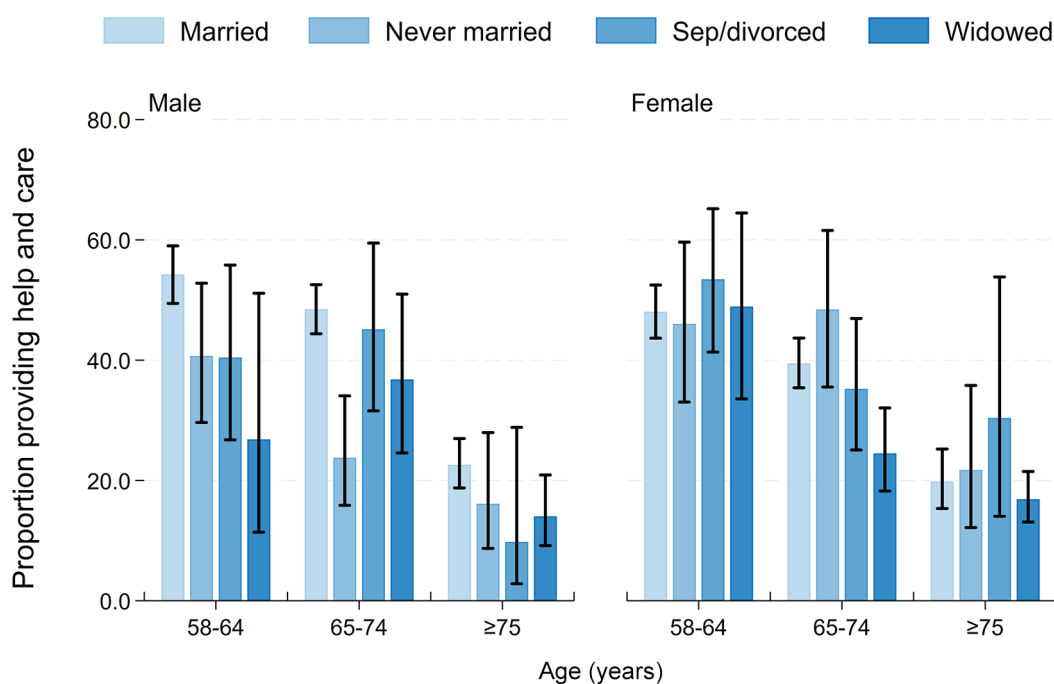
A higher proportion of both men and women living in Dublin aged between 58 and 74 years report that they have provided help or care to family and friends than those living in either another town or city or a rural area: 58% of men and 55% of women aged 58-64 years in Dublin compared to 48% and 46% respectively in a rural area; and 59% of men and 49% women aged 65-74 years in Dublin compared to 37% and 32% respectively for those in the age group living in a rural area (Figure 6.3). These differences were not seen in those aged over 75 years, where 21% report they provided help or care to family or friends and neighbours (Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3. The Proportion of the population providing help and/or care to family and friends by area of residence, age group and sex



As shown in Figure 6.4, a higher proportion of women aged 65-74 who were never married report providing help and care in the past month (62%) compared to women in the same age group who are married (41%), separated or divorced (39%), or widowed (28%) (Figure 6.4).

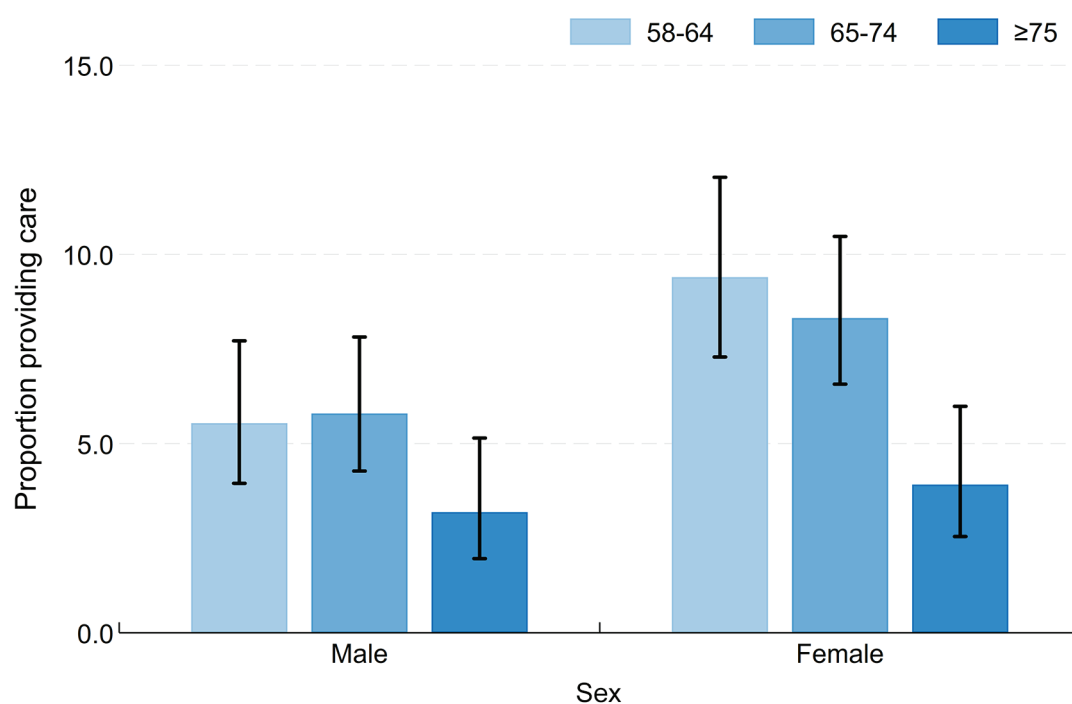
Figure 6.4. The Proportion of the population providing help and/or care to family and friends by marital status and age group



6.2.1 Family carers

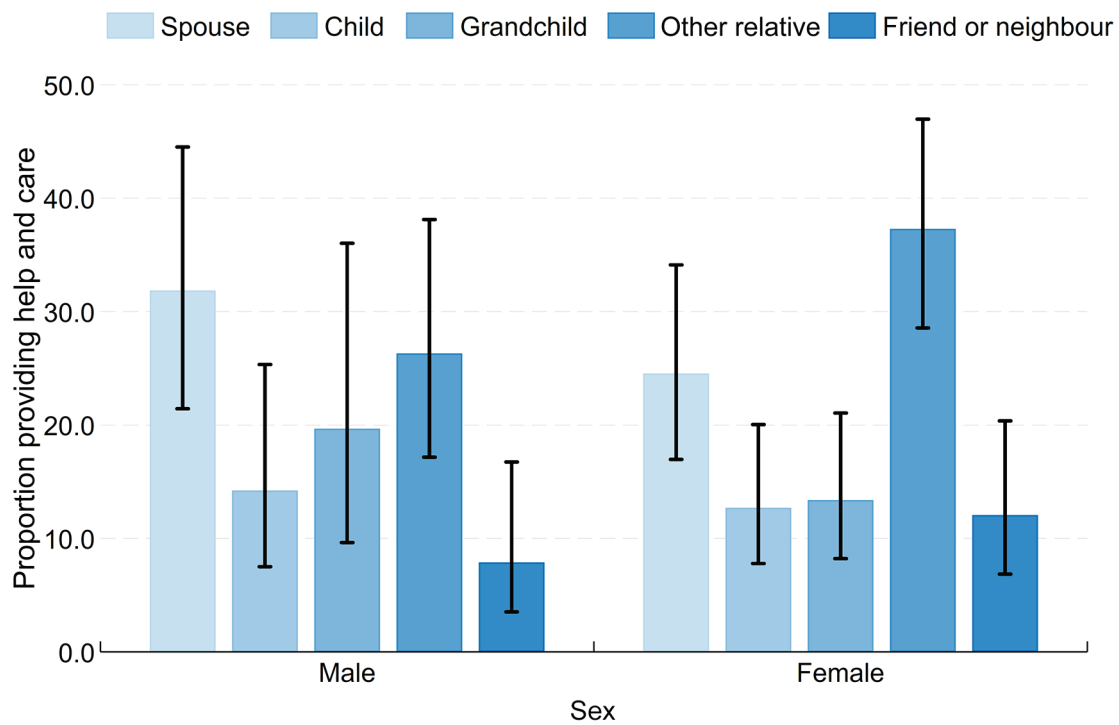
This section separates out the type of care provided and also describes patterns of informal family caring. We asked participants 'Did you look after anyone in the past week (including your partner or other people in your household)? By "look after" we mean the active provision of care.' We also asked to whom they gave this care. Overall, 5% of men and 7% of women aged 58 years and over report that they provided informal care for a family member or friend in the last month. This proportion was similar for men and women, although Figure 6.5 shows that a higher proportion of women aged 58-74 years report being carers compared to women aged 75 years and over, while there is no difference between age groups for men.

Figure 6.5. Proportion of adults aged 58 years and over report they cared for someone in the last month by age group and sex



When we identified the main recipients of care for those who provided family care in the past month, 32% of men and 25% of women report the main recipient of care was their spouse; 14% and 13% respectively report it was their child; 20% and 13% report it was their grandchild; and 26% and 37% report it was another relative (Figure 6.6). A further 8% of men and 12% of women report that the main person whom they provided informal care for is a friend or neighbour (Figure 6.6).

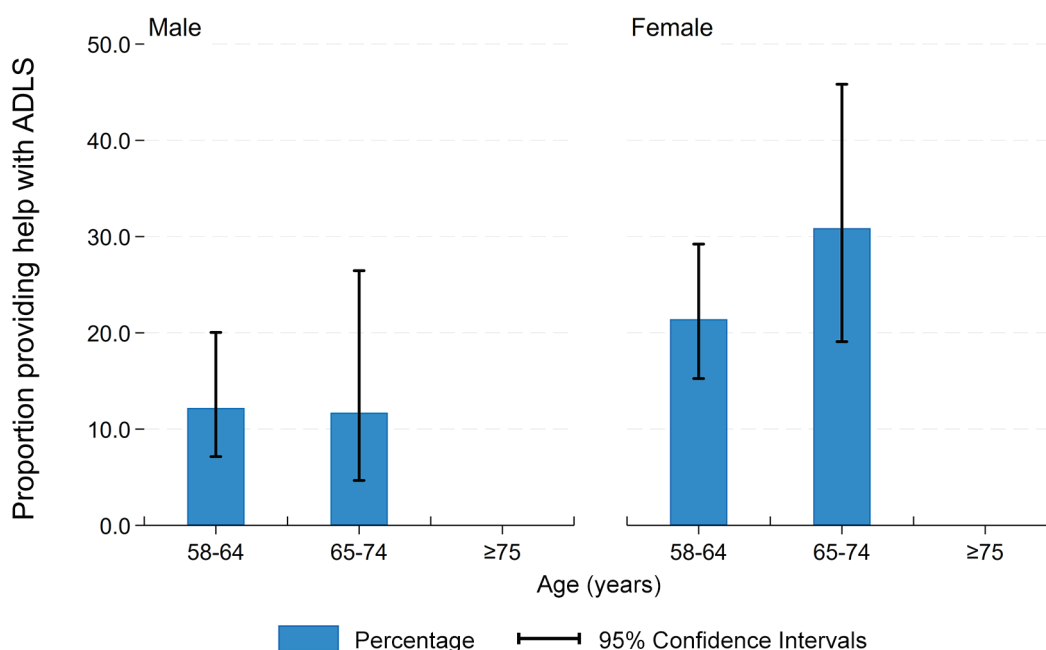
Figure 6.6. Main care recipient for those who report they cared for someone in the last month



6.2.2 Providing help to parents with basic activities of daily living

Overall, 8% of men and women aged 58 years and over had living parents. We asked these participants if they provide help with activities of daily living (ADLs) to their parents. This decreases by age from 19% of those aged 58-64 years to 5% of those aged 65-74 and less than 1% of those aged 75 years and over. Figure 6.7 shows that, of those who had living parents, 12% of men and 21% of women aged 58-64 years, and 12% of men and 31% of women aged 65-74 years, provided help with ADLs to their parents.

Figure 6.7. Proportion of adults aged 58 years and over with living parents and over who provided help with ADLs to their parents by age group and sex



6.2.3 Providing help with Instrumental activities of daily living (household activities)

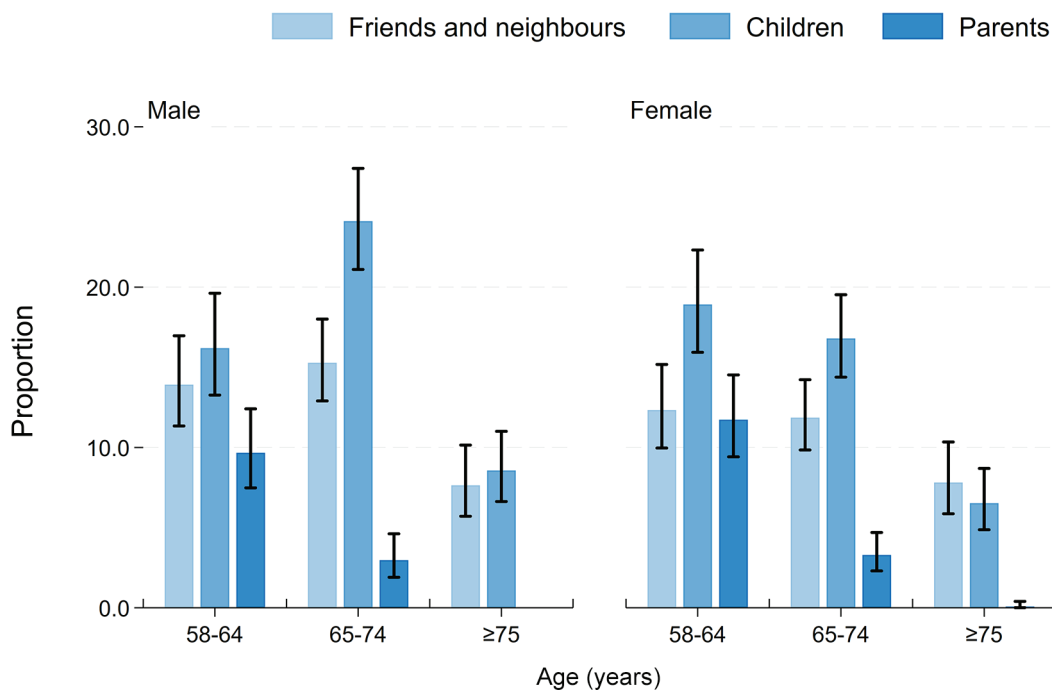
We also asked participants if they provide help with other household activities (IADLs) to their parents, other relatives, children or friends and neighbours. These included help with household chores, errands, shopping, transportation and filling out forms.

As noted above, 8% of the population aged 58 years and over had living parents; 42% of men and 50% of women who have living parents report they regularly helped them with household chores and tasks. This represents 5% of all women and 4% of all men aged 58 years and over. Figure 6.8 shows that this varied by age and was 10% of men and 12% of women aged 58-64 and decreased to 3% of men and women aged 65-74 years.

Overall, 8% of men and 7% of women report they help their children with household tasks. Figure 6.8 shows that this varied by age group for men and women. While 16% of men and 19% of women aged 58-64 report helping their children with household tasks, this increased to 24% of men aged 65-74 but remained at 17% for women in this age group, and decreased to 7% and 5% respectively for men and women aged 75 years and over.

The older population also help their friends and neighbours with household tasks. Figure 6.8 shows that 14% of men and 12% of women aged 58-64, and 15% of men and 12% of women aged 65-74, report helping their friends and neighbours with household tasks. A lower but still substantial number (8%) aged 75 years and over also report providing friends and neighbours with this help.

Figure 6.8. Recipients of help with household activities (IADLs) by age group and sex of provider

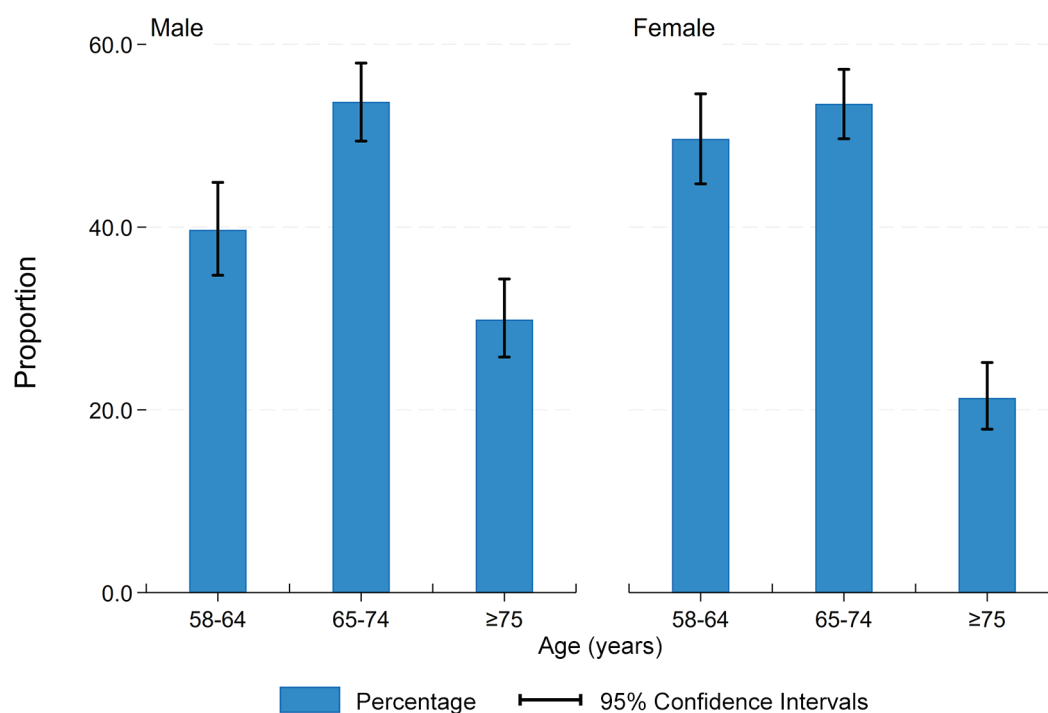


6.2.4 Providing help with grandchild care

We asked participants if they had looked after a grandchild in the past month for more than an hour, and if so, for how many hours in the past month.

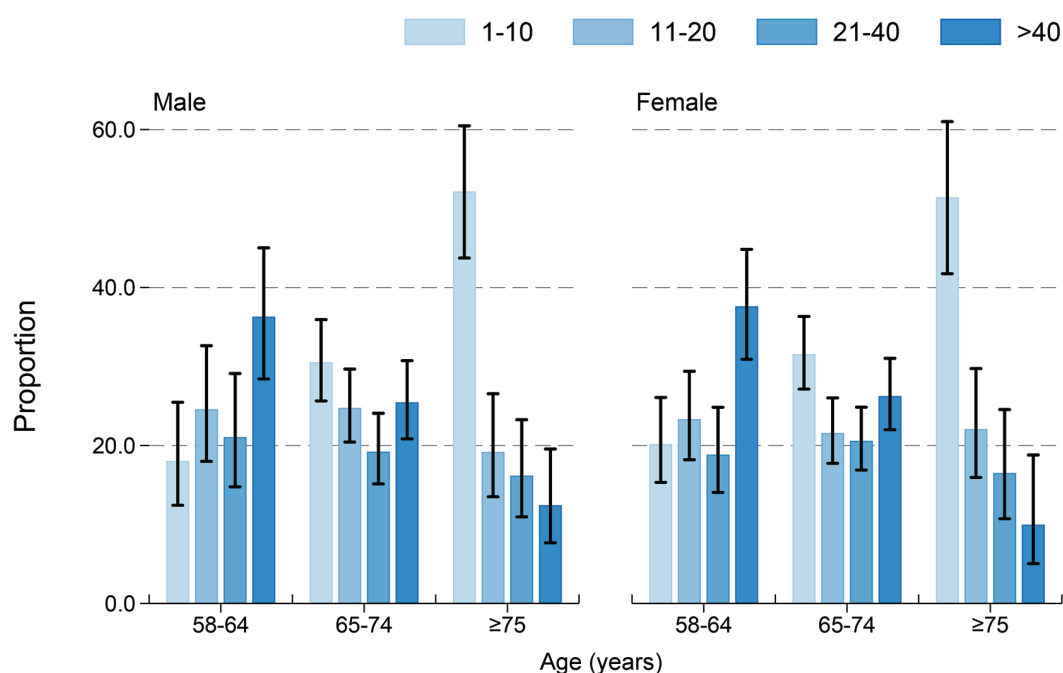
Grandchild care is very common in the older population, and 42% of older adults report that they looked after their grandchild in the last month. This increased from 40% of men aged 58-64 to 54% of men aged 65-74 years, while for women the proportion remained similar at half of all aged 58-64 year (50%) and 65-74 years (54%). Figure 6.9 shows that the proportion who report looking after their grandchildren, although reduced, still remained high in both men (30%) and women (21%) aged 75 years and older.

Figure 6.9. Proportion of adults aged 58 years and over who provided grandchild care in the last month by age group and sex



The numbers of hours that grandchild care was provided for varied by age of grandparents. The median number of hours in the last month for those who provided care was 20 hours (interquartile range 10-40 hours). Figure 6.10 shows the distribution of hours spent looking after grandchildren among those grandparents that report at least one hour of grandchild care in the past month. Overall, one in three grandparents report looking after their grandchildren for 1-10 hours in the past month, one in four (23% of men and 22% of women) report 11-20 hours and a further one in four (25% of men and 27% of women) report looking after grandchildren for more than 40 hours in the past month. This varied by age group; grandparents aged 58-64 years were more likely to report providing more than 40 hours of grandchild care (36% of men and 38% of women) compared to those aged 75 years and over (12% of men and 10% of women). One in four adults aged 65-74 years (25% of men and 26% of women) also report providing more than 40 hours of grandchild care in the past month. Adults aged 75 years and over were more likely to report providing between 1-10 hours in the past month (52% of men and 51% of women).

Figure 6.10. Distribution of hours spent looking after grandchildren in the last month amongst those who report at least one hour by age and sex



6.3 Engaging in the community

In TILDA, information about three different types of social participation – volunteering; active and social leisure activities; and organised groups – is collected at each wave.

6.3.1 Volunteering

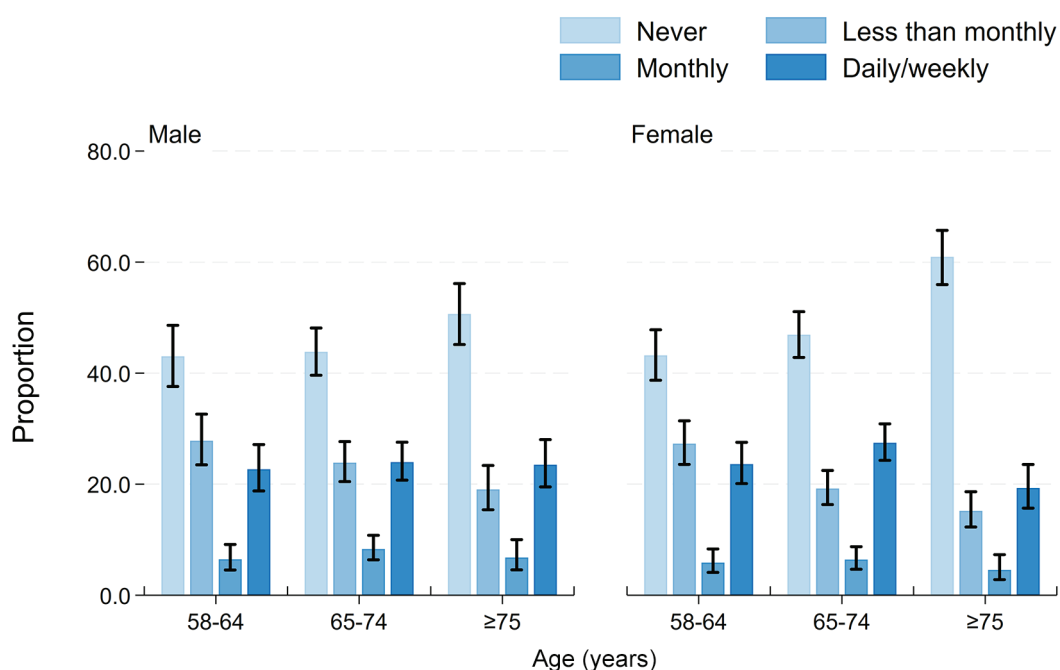
Ireland has one of the highest rates of volunteering in the European Union. (5) The work of volunteers benefits hundreds of thousands of people in all age groups throughout the country. Evidence suggests volunteering also benefits the volunteers, contributing to better physical and mental wellbeing as well as overall quality of life.

As part of the SCQ, TILDA participants are asked whether they volunteered at any time during the last year and, if so, how often they did so: at least once per week; at least once per month; a few times a year or less; and never. TILDA participants are also asked if they did any voluntary work in the last month as part of the CAPI interview and, if so, what are the main reasons they do voluntary work.

Adults aged 58 and over volunteer for a wide range of organisations; examples include the GAA and other sports or social groups or clubs, a church-connected group, a self-help

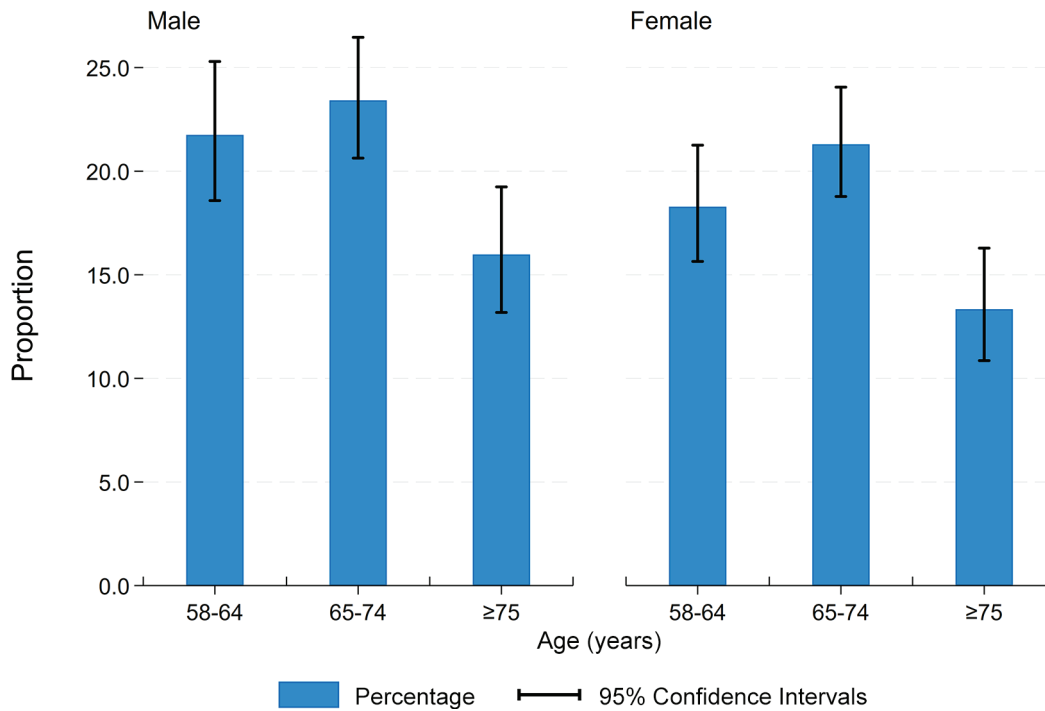
or charitable body or other community group, or a day care centre. Overall, 55% of men and 51% of women report that they volunteered in the past year. Volunteering decreased with age in women: 57% of women aged 58-64 report volunteering in the past year, and this decreases to 39% of women age 75 years and over (Figure 6.11). In men, rates of volunteering remained similar in all age groups: 57% of those aged 58-64 years and 51% of men aged 75 years and over report volunteering in the past year. Overall, 17% report they volunteer daily or weekly, while a further 13% report monthly and 22% less than monthly. Frequency of daily or weekly volunteering increased in women aged 65-74, from 15% of those aged 58-64 to 20% of 65-74 years; this decreased to 16% of women aged 75 years and over. The proportion of men who report volunteering daily or weekly remained the same regardless of age (17%).

Figure 6.11. Proportion of adults aged 58 years and older who report volunteering in the past year by age group and sex



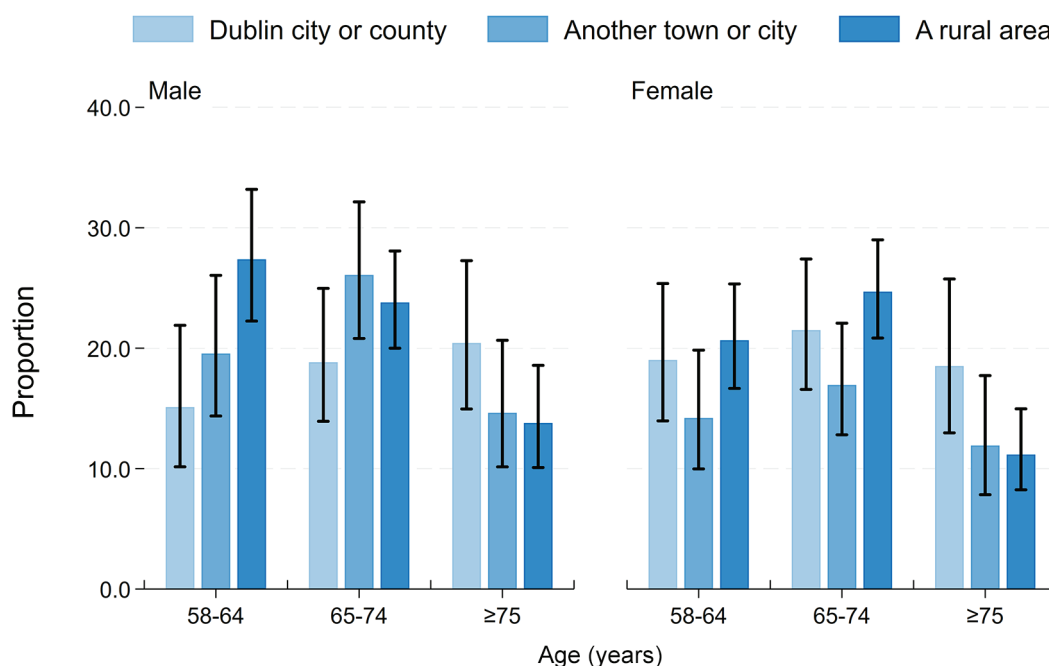
One in five adults (19%) aged 58 years and over report that they volunteered in the past month. Volunteering in the past month was more common in younger age groups. 22% of men and 18% of women aged 58-64, 23% of men and 21% of women aged 65-74 and 16% of men and 13% of women aged 75 years and over report that they volunteered in the past month (Figure 6.12).

Figure 6.12. Proportion of adults aged 58 years and older who report volunteering in the past month by age group and sex



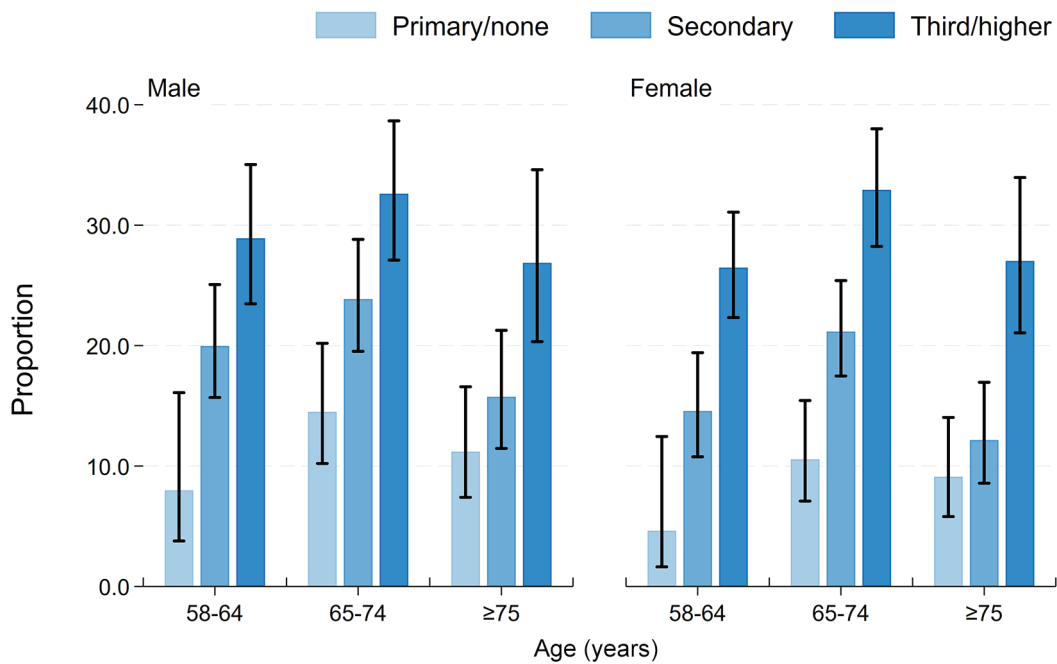
Volunteering varied according to age and place of residence. A lower proportion of men aged 58-64 years who lived in Dublin report volunteering in the past month (15%) compared to men who lived in a rural area (27%), while the proportions were similar in other age groups (Figure 6.13). A lower proportion of women aged 75 years and over who live in a rural area report volunteering in the past month (11%) compared to those who lived in Dublin (19%), while the proportion was similar in other age groups.

Figure 6.13. Proportion of adults aged 58 years and older who report volunteering in the past month by age group and area of residence



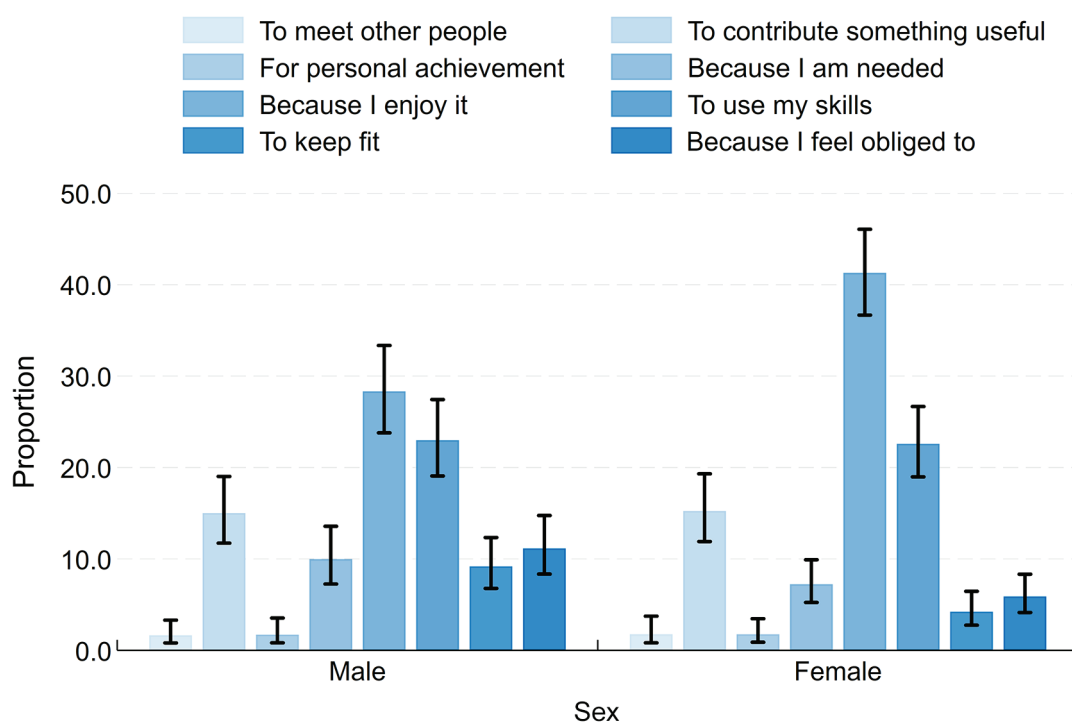
Volunteering also varied by educational attainment. Figure 6.14 shows that a higher proportion of both men (30%) and women (29%) with a third level education report volunteering in the past month compared to those who had either a secondary level education (21% men, 16% women) or a primary level education (12% men, 9% of women).

Figure 6.14. Proportion of adults aged 58 years and older who report volunteering in the past month by age group and educational attainment



When we asked why people who volunteered did so, the most common reason given was they enjoyed it (28% of men and 41% of women) (Figure 6.15). The second most common reason was so that they could use their skills (23% men, 23% women) and the third was so they could contribute something useful (15% men, 15% women). Other reasons included: Because I am needed (10% men, 7% women), to keep fit (9% men, 4% women) and because I feel obliged to (9% men, 6%).

Figure 6.15. Reasons why adults aged 58 years and over volunteer



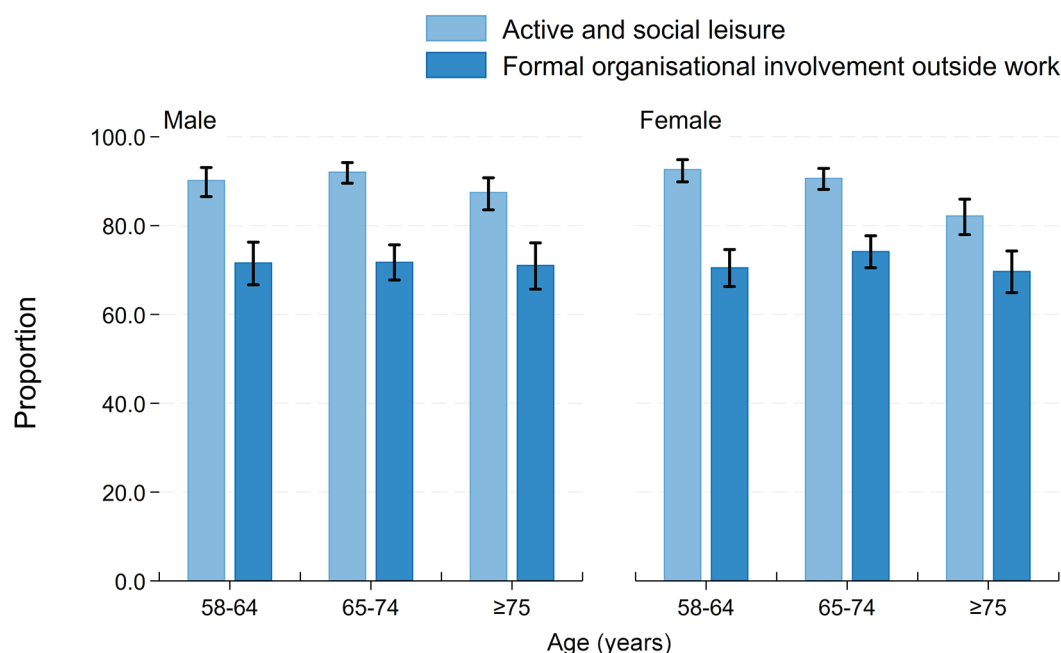
6.3.2 Active and social leisure activity

Information about active and social leisure activities is collected as part of the SCQ. Active and social leisure activities include going to films, plays or concerts; attending classes or lectures; playing cards, bingo, games in general; going to the pub; eating out of the house; and taking part in sporting activities or exercise. Participants are asked if they are a member of organisations, clubs or societies. Organisations include political party, trade union or environmental groups; tenants' groups, resident groups, neighbourhood watch; Church or other religious groups; charitable associations; education, arts or music groups or evening classes; social clubs, GAA or gym exercise classes.

People aged 58 years and over continue to lead active and social lives. Overall, 90% of adults participate in active and social leisure activities each month, while 72% participate in organised groups such as sports groups, book clubs, or charitable organisations. Figure 6.16 shows that social participation rates are similar in men and women. There is a decrease in monthly active and social leisure activities among those aged 75 and over. Participation in organised groups is the same for both men and women of all age groups. These activities provide a means for people to maintain friendships and pastimes, and generally to remain engaged. The activities also support the economy. Participation in

social and leisure activities has many benefits including better physical and mental health, and improved cognition.

Figure 6.16. Proportion of adults aged 58 years and over who participated in active and social leisure activities and organised groups by sex and age group



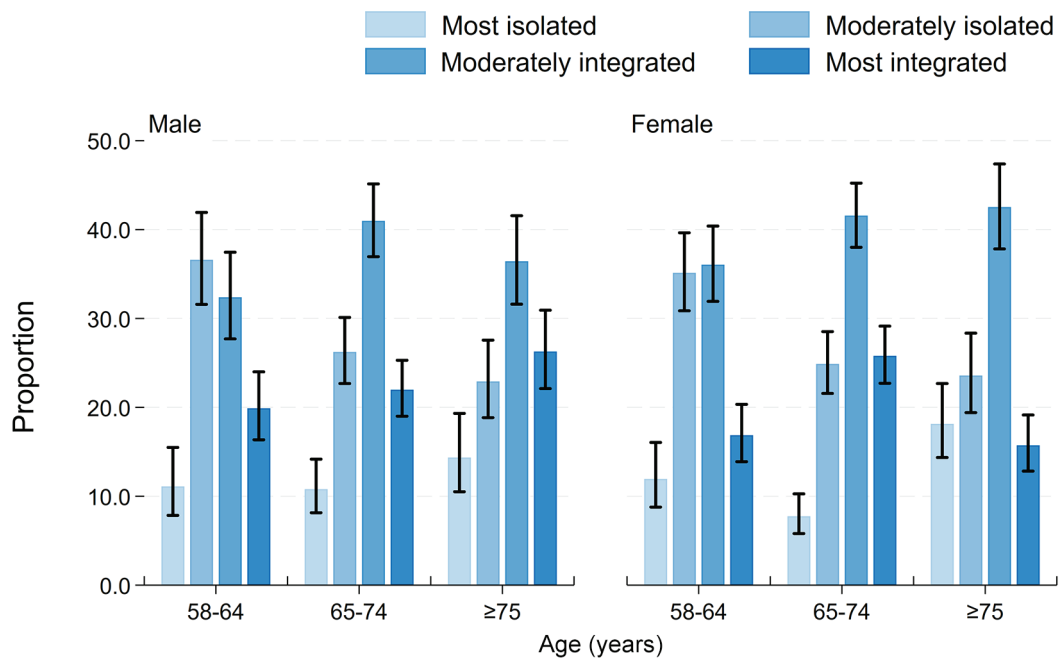
6.4 Social engagement and integration

TILDA collects information on the size of an individual's social network to measure social isolation. The size of social networks was measured using the Berkman-Syme Social Network Index (SNI). (6) This index is scored on a 0-4 composite scale that captures four types of social connection: (1) marital status; (2) close ties with children, relatives and friends; (3) membership of a church group; and (4) membership of voluntary organisations. A score of 0-1 identifies individuals as 'most isolated', with a score of 4 indicating 'most integrated'.

Many people aged 58 and over maintain large social networks. Overall, one in five (21%) adults aged 58 years and over has four or more regular contacts. These networks are maintained through participation in a wide range of organisations and attendance at religious services (Figure 6.17). A higher proportion of women aged 75 years and over are in the most isolated group (18%) than women aged 58-64 (12%); the proportion in the most integrated group however remains the same (16% in 75 years and over). One in four men are in the most integrated group (23%), and this was maintained in each age group,

where 20% of men aged 58-64 years, 22% of men aged 65-74 years and 26% of men aged 75 years and over are in the most integrated group.

Figure 6.17. Proportion of adults aged 58 years and over socially integrated in the community by age group and sex



6.5 Conclusion

This report demonstrates that, far from later years being simply a time characterised by decline and increased dependency, older adults aged 58 years and over continue to make valuable contributions to society, with many characterised by active citizenship and participation in the lives of their families and their communities. The vision for positive ageing set out in Ireland's National Positive Ageing Strategy (7), which includes a broad suite of areas targeted for action including, economic, social, cultural, community and family life, and solidarity between generations, provides a useful benchmark against which public policies and decisions, even in times of public health urgency, should be continuously assessed.

Some recent trends in public discourse contribute to formation of a narrative which represents the older population of Ireland as somewhat dependent on others, living closeted lives. Other elements of this narrative suggest that the majority is unwell and therefore require much care, restricted movement and confinement indoors. On the contrary, the findings of this report underscore the vibrant and important contribution that adults aged 58 years and over continue to make to society in Ireland.

The information presented in this report was collected one year before the COVID-19 pandemic began. It is highly likely that many of the activities described here have since been severely curtailed, if not cancelled entirely. Given the extent of these activities among the older adult population and the benefits of them to older adults, their families and the wider community, research into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the usual activities of older adults is important. Previous research has shown that the activities described here benefit the mental and physical wellbeing of older adults. (2-4) The removal of opportunities for these activities is likely to negatively to affect older adults' wellbeing. Moreover, it is probable that some groups of older adults will feel the effects of these changes more than others. It is likely that a reduction in family and social contacts will also result in increased loneliness amongst the older population, particularly those who are living alone. Loneliness has been considered an important issue for public health and has been shown to be associated with poor health and wellbeing even before the pandemic. (8)

The lack of availability of childcare for working families normally provided by grandparents may also exacerbate inequalities in the economic impact of the pandemic, as those most financially dependent on informal or familial support will be disproportionately affected. Similarly, frontline and essential workers who have continued going out to work during

the pandemic will not have had these family supports for childcare and household help normally available to them. With this evidence in view, and because caring for grandchildren and volunteering may not be taking place at the same scale because of recent physical distancing restrictions, support structures and assistance for families and communities who rely on the older generation to provide care will be required. This chapter helps to inform the extent of this current need in Ireland.

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