

Influence of basic psychological needs on older adults' sense of home and well-being in their home environment

Background & study set-up:

In Flanders, Belgium, **ageing in place** is the preferred way of growing older. However, only **16%** of the Flemish housing stock is considered accessible when mobility issues arrive. This can negatively impact well-being according to **the self-determination theory (SDT)**. Through a survey with **241 Flemish adults** aged 65 and over, we investigated how the home environment supports, or hinders the fulfilment of the three basic psychological needs of the SDT and how this shapes older adults' well-being and sense of home.

survey with 241 Flemish older adults



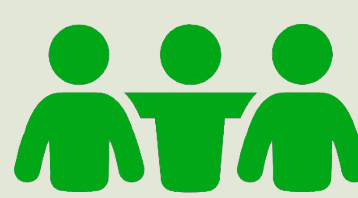
Competence



Over **9 out of 10** respondents indicate that their home is usable, tailored to daily activities, and provides sufficient space for both activities and storage. Despite high usability, **over 10%** have to move items to perform tasks and cannot use certain rooms due to clutter. Additionally, **8%** cannot find things because of the mess, and **approximately 6%** have neglected tasks and must be careful not to trip over belongings.

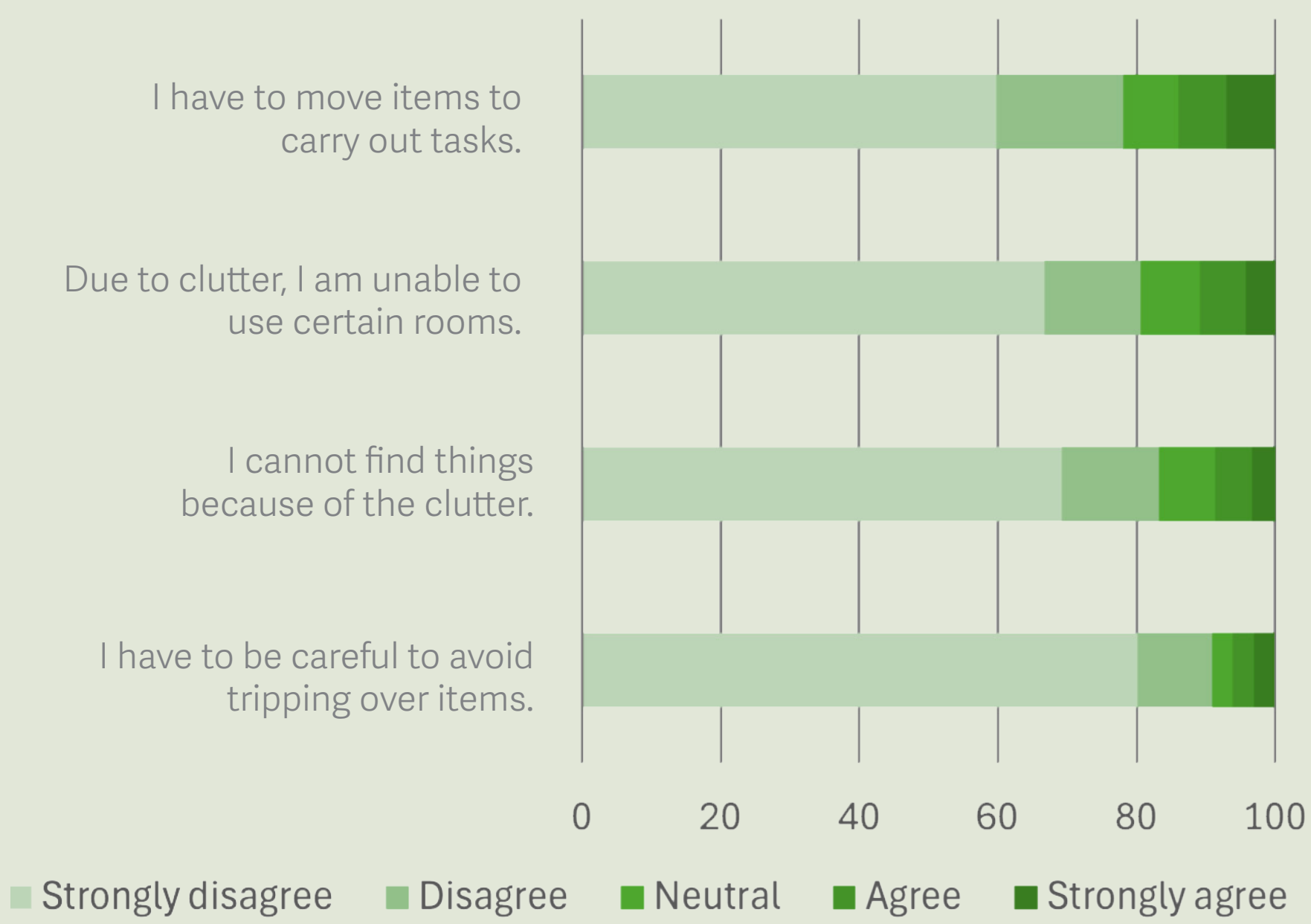


While **over 95%** of respondents state that the immediate surroundings of their home are usable, proximity to specific facilities within a 15-minute walk shows gaps: only **85%** have sufficient access to mobility facilities, **8 out of 10** have sufficient access to care facilities, and **¾** have sufficient access to basic amenities. These gaps are particularly notable given that **18%** of the respondents already have difficulty taking a short walk due to health problems.



Children form the greatest source of support for older adults. Nearly **80%** of respondents can rely on their children (including stepchildren and in-laws). This is followed by friends and acquaintances (**70%**); neighbors, people from the community, and other relatives (**60%**); grandchildren (**less than 50%**); and healthcare professionals (**just over 20%**).

Competence within the home



Self-determination Theory

Autonomy



Personal taste: **9 out of 10** respondents furnished their homes according to their own taste and ideas. **Less than 5%** listen to others regarding how to decorate their home.

Modifications: Regarding home adaptations, **nearly 7 out of 10** respondents want to keep their home as it is, regardless of what others say. Only **16%** indicate they listen to others in this regard.

Paradox in advice: Although **8 out of 10** respondents consider it their own responsibility to stay informed about developments in future-proof housing, **nearly 60%** still rely heavily on the advice of others for improving their homes.

Dependence: While autonomy clearly plays a major role regarding the home, **28%** state that their ability to stay in their home depends on others, and **6%** feel others are to blame when their home is not a place they can enjoy.

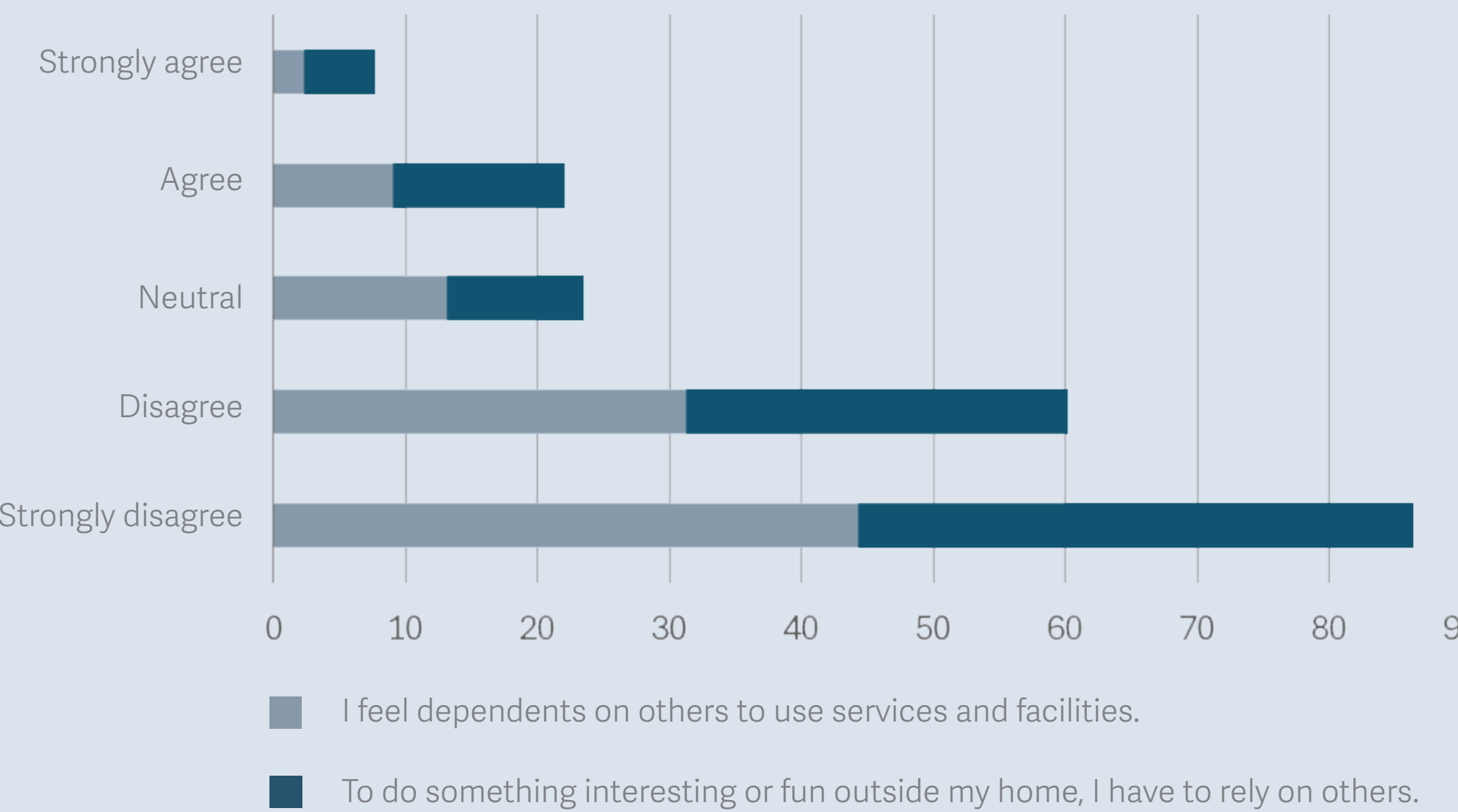


Although **over 9 out of 10** respondents decide for themselves whether to use local services and facilities or attend cultural events, just **over 10%** are dependent on others to use these services, and **18%** must rely on others to do something enjoyable outside the home.



Even though **nearly 9 out of 10** respondents state they independently decide when to accept help, **2 out of 10** admit they cannot say no when help is offered to them.

Autonomy in the neighbourhood



Relatedness



Over 9 out of 10 respondents report having sufficient space to receive visitors, pursue hobbies, and store personal belongings.

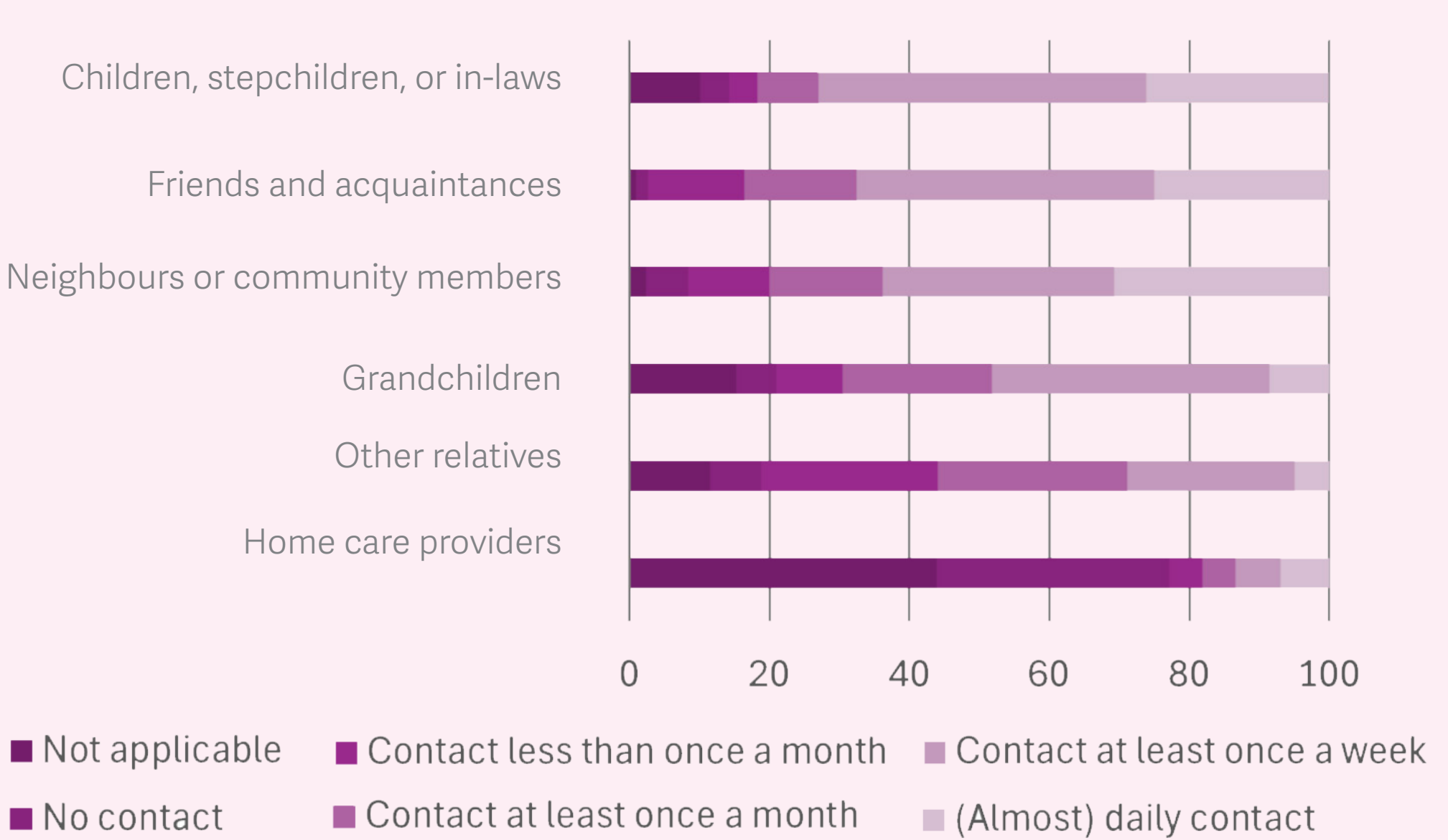


While **nearly 7 out of 10** respondents have access to leisure facilities within a 15-minute walk of their home, **1 in 10** indicate that their health status actively limits their participation in social activities.

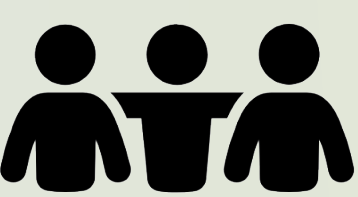
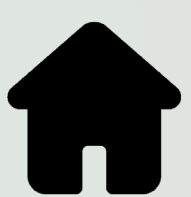


Notably, **over 85%** of respondents express dissatisfaction with their personal relationships. When examining the frequency of social contact, respondents interact most frequently with their children (including stepchildren and in-laws), with **over 70%** maintaining contact at least once a week. This is followed closely by friends and acquaintances, with whom **just under 70%** have weekly contact, and neighbours or community members at **over 60%**. Less frequent weekly interaction is reported for grandchildren at **less than 50%** and other relatives at **less than 30%**, while **14%** of respondents have weekly contact with home care providers.

Relatedness and social contacts



Conclusion:



Findings show that the way living environments contribute to basic need fulfilment **varies between individuals**. Moreover, we demonstrate that basic need satisfaction is influenced not only by the **dwelling**, but also by the **neighbourhood** and **social network**.

This study indicates that a **clearer awareness** of the three basic needs, and an understanding of how the current living situation contributes to each need, can help older adults determine whether **ageing in place or relocating** to another home is the most supportive option for their well-being and sense of home.