

# Pensioners who are resigned to loneliness

By John Bingham, Social Affairs Editor

ALMOST a million older people in Britain do not know even their closest neighbours because they do not want to "get in the way", according to a study of attitudes to loneliness.

The most common reason given by elderly people for not getting to know those living close to them was that younger neighbours "always seem to be so busy" or that they did not wish to be a burden. About 3.5 million people over 65 get no help, support or companionship from those living nearest to them, said

researchers working for Age UK. The findings were published as the charity launched a campaign to promote neighbourliness between generations.

It wants to see the "Great British spirit" demonstrated during the Olympics and Diamond Jubilee celebrations to be translated into practical help for older people this winter.

Based on previous years, it is feared that there could be as many as 25,000 preventable deaths of older people this winter — the equivalent of 200 a day.

Polling suggested that just over a third of the estimated 10.3 million pensioners

who suffer in silence because of a "stiff upper lip".

Studies have shown links between isolation and more rapid decline in health, more falls and a greater likelihood of smoking.

Overall, 700,000 older people describe themselves as "always" or "often" feeling lonely.

One previous survey also found that more than half of older people described the television as their main form of company.

The campaign involves getting people to pledge to call in on their older neigh-

felt unable to rely on neighbours for help and support.

Seven per cent of older people polled said they did not even know their neighbours, the equivalent of about 721,000 individuals. When asked why, almost half

## 3.5m

The number of pensioners in Britain who are said to get no companionship, help or support from those living nearby

hours regularly or help in practical ways such as clearing ice from doorsteps and paths to enable them to get out safely.

Michelle Mitchell, the director general of Age UK said: "The winter can cause misery, avoidable illness and even death for too many older people."

"We're hoping to inspire people to act now to do their bit to lessen the impact of winter for older people this year."

"As we experienced as a nation this summer, it feels good to come together and help each other out."

"Small things and a friendly face can make all the difference."

of those people said that they thought their younger neighbours seemed too busy and a quarter stated that they did not want to be a burden.

Dame Helen Mirren, who is backing Age UK's "Big Winter Pledge" campaign, said: "It's shocking that so many older people die needlessly in the winter months."

"I would urge everyone to get stuck in this winter and help out older friends, neighbours and relatives with Age UK."

The study follows previous research suggesting that the problem of isolation is particularly acute among older men,