

Psycho-Social Correlates of Loneliness among Adolescents – A Study in the City Chandigarh

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Abstract – Social relationships are at the core of human life. Satisfying social relationships are vital for good mental and physical health. As humans we possess a need to belong, which constitutes a fundamental motivation – driving our thoughts, emotions and interpersonal behaviour. This need to belong comprises a pervasive desire to form and maintain atleast a minimum quantity of lasting positive and significant interpersonal relationships. The phenomenon of loneliness is difficult to define, yet it is one of most important dimensions of human behavior. To date, the experts have not agreed upon a definition. Further, there are neither defined theoretical frameworks which explain loneliness nor is there any consensus regarding the causes and consequences. In the present paper an attempt has been made to study the Psycho-social correlates of Loneliness among adolescents in Chandigarh. In view of high prevalence of loneliness among adolescents the study identified the psychological predictors of loneliness by including in its purview depression, hopelessness, negative automatic thoughts, social support (quantitative), social support (qualitative), ten dimensions of family environment, five dimensions of Cattell's second-order anxiety factor, and locus of control.

Key words: Psychology, loneliness, adolescents, depression, hopelessness

INTRODUCTION

In the social sciences, the oldest publication about loneliness is Über die Einsamkeit (Zimmermann, 1785–1786). The attention to the concept of loneliness began in the 1950s and 1960s; with publications by Fromm Reichmann (1959). Several studies suggest that loneliness is a meaningful psychological construct. But what is the nature of this construct? Researchers interested in the problem of loneliness have generally agreed on two characteristics of the loneliness experience. First, loneliness is an aversive experience, similar to other negative affective states such as depression or anxiety. Secondly, research has shown that loneliness is distinct from social isolation and reflects an individual's subjective perception of deficiencies in his or her network of social relationships. These deficiencies may be quantitative (e.g., not enough friends) or they may be qualitative (e.g., lack of intimacy with others). **Perlman and Peplau** formulated a definition of loneliness as “the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships is deficient in some important way, either quantitatively or qualitatively”.

Larose, Guay, & Boivin defined loneliness as a subjective, distressing and unpleasant state in which

individual perceives deficiencies in their social world. Loneliness is a subjective experience that can be related to but is not synonymous with social isolation. It has been described as a sad subjective state resulting from dissatisfaction with one's social experiences. Loneliness as a complex set of feelings and cognitions reflects the distressing and negative emotional experience emanating from the individual's perceived deficiencies in intimate and social relationships. Generally the term “loneliness” tends to evoke thoughts of an elderly person isolated and alone or someone who is cut off from the mainstream of society. However, the experience of loneliness transcends the whole spectrum of human life and is felt by both young and old. Constant reminders of the pervasiveness of loneliness are expressed through popular songs, poetry, advice to the lovelorn columns, and news media coverage of everyday social issues.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. It attempts to study loneliness at adolescence;
2. Keeping in view gender differences in loneliness, it is not desirable to pool data of males and females. The present study lays emphasis on sex-differences in the predictors of loneliness during

adolescence;

3. Keeping in view the multiplicity of factors involved in loneliness, the present study make use of stepwise multiple regression analysis for determining salient predictors of loneliness. The previous investigations have computed only correlations between loneliness measures and several other measures of interest.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample consisted of adolescents who were attending Secondary and Senior Secondary Public Schools in Chandigarh (India). The final sample comprised of 110 males and 110 females between the ages of 15 and 17 years. All participants were staying with their families. Majority of the participants belonged to middle socio-economic status.

The variables of marital status, educational status, employment status and place of residence were controlled in the sense that adolescents were unmarried, unemployed, and belonged to urban area. It is significant to emphasize that in addition to the advantage of homogeneity which resulted from this type of control, there is also an increased danger of bias. However, this type of control is appropriate from the viewpoint of the focal theme of the present study. The participants to be included in this study were also required to be showing:

- a) No evidence of drug addiction or alcoholism, and
- b) Not currently in treatment for diagnosed psychiatric disorder.

Measures

The following measures were employed to test various hypotheses:

(A) Measures of Loneliness

- a) Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980).

(B) Measures of Cognitive Dysfunction

- a) Hopelessness Scale (Beck, Weissman, Lester, & Trexler, 1974).
- b) Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire (Hollon & Kendall, 1980).

(C) Measures of Depressive Symptoms

- a) Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale (Zung, 1965).

(D) Measures of Social Support

Social Support Questionnaire (Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983)

(E) Measure of Family Environment

Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1994)

(F) Measures of Locus of Control

Internal – External Scale (Rotter, 1966)

(G) Measure of Anxiety

IPAT Anxiety Scale Questionnaire (Cattell & Scheier, 1963)

Administration of Tests

The following tests were administered in 'random' order, requiring six different sessions:

1. Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale.
2. Hopelessness Scale.
3. Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire.
4. Zung Self-rating Depression Scale
5. Social Support Questionnaire
6. Family Environment Scale
7. Internal – External Scale
8. IPAT Anxiety Scale Questionnaire.

The tests were administered in small groups of 8 to 12 participants. The doubts of the participants were removed before permitting them to fill out different questionnaires. The general testing conditions were satisfactory. Since efforts were made to establish rapport with the participants in order to elicit reliable and authentic information. Participants were told that the information was being collected purely for research purpose. They were also assured that the information to be collected would remain strictly confidential and presented only in a form in which no person could be identified. The promise of privacy appears to have gone a long way in establishing psychological rapport because a large number of participants contacted the investigator later on and enquired about their performance on different measures. Cooperation of principals and teachers of different schools also helped in eliciting reliable information from the participants. Despite the tedious nature of task involving test administration, participants showed keen interest in filling out different questionnaires.

Scoring of the Tests

The tests were scored by the following procedures suggested by authors of different tests;

- The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale was scored for one measure of global loneliness.
- Hopelessness Scale and Automatic Thought Questionnaire were scored for two measures pertaining to hopelessness and negative automatic thoughts.
- The measures of depressive symptoms were obtained by scoring Zung Self-rating Depression scale.
- Social Support Questionnaire yielded two scores: (a) perceived availability of the number of persons listed (b) satisfaction with the available support.
- The measure of Locus of Control was obtained by scoring Rotter's Internal-External Scale.
- The Family Environment scale was scored for the ten measures referring to cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, independence, achievement-orientation, intellectual-cultural orientation, active – recreational orientation, moral-religious emphasis, organization, control.
- The IPAT Anxiety Scale Questionnaire was scored for five components of anxiety.

Thus, as a result of scoring different tests, the following measures were obtained:

- a) One measure of global loneliness obtained from the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale.
- b) One measure each of hopelessness, negative automatic thoughts and depressive tendencies.
- c) Two measures of social support: perceived availability of number of supportive persons and satisfaction with available support
- d) Ten measures of family environment: Cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, independence, achievement - orientation, intellectual-cultural orientation, active – recreational orientation, moral - religious emphasis, organization, control.
- e) One measure of locus of control
- f) Five measures of anxiety

Analysis

The following analyses were done:

1. To examine the nature of frequency distributions of different measures, the following statistical measures were obtained:
 - (I) Mean,
 - (II) Median,
 - (III) Standard Deviation,
 - (IV) Skewness, and
 - (V) Kurtosis.
- (b) Step wise regression equation involving one measure of global loneliness, one measure of depression ,one measure of locus of control, one measure each of hopelessness and negative automatic thoughts, two measures of social support, ten measures of family environment and five measures of anxiety was formulated to identify the salient predictors of loneliness.

Table 1: Multiple R and R² Change for Different Variables

Males				
Variables	R	R ² Change	F- Value	Level of Significance
Depression	.562	-	-	0.000
Locus of Control	.647	.103	18.935	0.000
Factor C (-)	.688	.055	11.084	0.001
Females				
Variables	R	R ² Change	F- Value	Level of Significance
Factor C (-)	.506	-	-	.000
Negative Automatic Thoughts	.598	.102	16.879	.000
Expressiveness	.640	.052	9.434	.003
Depression	.673	.043	8.272	.005
Active Recreational Orientation	.702	.040	8.250	.005

Table 2: Regression weights for different variables

Variables	β	t	p
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Males			
Loneliness (DV)			
Depression	.562	7.059	0.000
Locus of Control	.348	4.351	0.000
Factor C (-)	.238	3.329	0.001
Females			
Loneliness (DV)			
Factor C (-)	.506	6.102	.000
Negative Automatic Thoughts	.323	4.108	.000
Expressiveness	-.232	-3.057	.003
Depression	.217	2.876	.005
Active Recreational Orientation	.217	2.872	.005

An examination of tables 1 to 2 reveal that for males, with loneliness as the criterion measure, the significant predictors were depression [$t = 7.059$, $p < 0.000$, $\beta = .562$], locus of control [$t = 4.351$, $p < 0.000$, $\beta = .348$], factor C (-) [$t = 3.329$, $p < 0.001$, $\beta = .238$]. For females the picture was somewhat different: loneliness was predicted by depression [$t = 2.876$, $p < .005$, $\beta = .217$], factor C (-) [$t = 6.102$, $p < .000$, $\beta = .506$], negative automatic thoughts [$t = 4.108$, $p < .000$, $\beta = .323$], expressiveness [$t = -3.057$, $p < .003$, $\beta = -.232$], and active recreation [$t = 2.872$, $p < .005$, $\beta = .217$].

RESULTS

The current study reveals the following important findings:

- Male adolescents scored significantly high on loneliness than female adolescents.
- For male adolescents depression (+) contributed to loneliness as significant predictors.
- For male adolescents locus of control (+) contributed to loneliness as significant predictors.
- For male adolescents factor C -(+) contributed to loneliness as significant predictors.
- For female adolescents depression (+) contributed to loneliness as significant predictors.

- For female adolescents negative automatic thoughts(+) contributed to loneliness as significant predictors.
- For female adolescents expressiveness (-) contributed to loneliness as significant predictors.
- For female adolescents active recreation (+) contributed as significant predictors of loneliness.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study was limited to only adolescents in the age range of 15 to 17 years.
- The study was limited to adolescents belonging to urban area.
- The adolescents belong to intact families.
- In the current study correlation design was used. It may not allow to infer cause and effect relationship

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