



EXPLORING PERCEIVED LONELINESS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS: A CASE STUDY OF LPU

Noyonika Das (12104411)^{1*}, Najeeb Nabi (12111400)², Prabhjot Kaur (12105330)³, Pallavi (12112769)⁴, Anjali Hasija (12103399)⁵, Dr. Anand Kumar⁶

Abstract:

This research was conducted with “How young adults perceive loneliness” as the main motive in mind. It focuses on how a particular group of college students (randomly selected) feel and deal with loneliness. This paper also looks into the factors that might affect loneliness in youth and also tries to mention various solutions that might help reduce the impact of loneliness.

For this study, the questionnaire method was employed and 40 of them was distributed to 40 subjects that included both males and females belonging to various backgrounds and opting various degrees at Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India.

The main findings that the researchers obtained after the study are that when compared according to age, there was not a particular pattern that loneliness followed. It could be different for different age groups. While when compared on the basis of gender, females of all ages (18-22) showed higher sense of loneliness when compared to their male counterparts.

Therefore, all in all it was found that despite being in social situations or relationships, loneliness is a subjective sensation of feeling distant or alone. It is a complicated emotional condition that is influenced by a variety of things, such as cultural standards, social isolation, and a lack of social support. Self-report measures are frequently used to measure perceived loneliness, which is the individual's perception of their own loneliness. Even though experiencing loneliness from time to time can be common and transient, persistent loneliness can have detrimental effects on one's mental and physical health, increasing one's risk for depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease, and cognitive decline. Individual and community actions are needed to combat loneliness, including promoting social connections, creating supportive communities, and eradicating the stigma associated with mental illness.

Keywords: Loneliness, perceived loneliness, college students, young adults, factors, gender, age.

^{1*2.3.4.5.6}Assistant Professor – Geography, Department of Geography UID – 25230, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara – 144402. Punjab

***Corresponding Author:** Noyonika Das

*Assistant Professor – Geography, Department of Geography UID – 25230, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara – 144402. Punjab

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Authors: Noyonika Das, Najeeb Nabi, Prabhjot Kaur, Pallavi, Anjali Hasija

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INTRODUCTION

For third world nations like India, the study of loneliness is a relatively new topic of study among western psychologists. The underlying premise is that issues like loneliness, alienation, dehumanization, etc. appear more quickly in societies where scientific and industrial growth rates are higher and more rapid and where people adhere to a materialistic and individualistic lifestyle, which in turn leads to the destruction of traditions, customs, values, social institutions, and networks of interpersonal relationships. Much earlier than their Eastern and Asian counterparts, western thinkers began to pay attention to the topic of loneliness. India cannot isolate itself from the rest of the world as it did in the past at a time when the entire world believes in globalization and mechanization.

Social psychologists are particularly interested in loneliness because it is a significant personality characteristic in recent psychological literature. Most people probably go through difficult periods of loneliness and isolation at some point in their lives. Because loneliness is often brought on by social shifts in life that ruin intimate relationships. The phrase "the greatest poverty" refers to feeling alone and unwanted. The world is probably a lonely place for more people than we can ever imagine. The quantity and severity of loneliness are thought to rise proportionally as civilizations become more prosperous and developed. It is evident that the emphasis switches from connection to independence as civilizations become more individualistic. Loneliness is a result of the freedom and individualism that typically come with socioeconomic advancement. As a result, it develops into a constant source of annoyance and inappropriate behavior. The inability to discover purpose in one's life is loneliness. When someone feels lonely, they believe themselves to be lacking in close relationships with others. If a person wants deep relationships with others but finds it difficult to build them, they may be lonely. Loneliness can be defined in three different ways. The first method emphasizes the innate urge for intimacy in people. The second approach to loneliness emphasizes people's perspective and evaluation of their social

relationships. The third approach to loneliness recognizes a lack of social support as the primary deficit experienced by lonely people. According to the third perspective on loneliness, the main deficit that lonely people suffer is a lack of social support. It is a widely held belief that most of us experienced some levels of loneliness as we grew up. This is particularly true if one's family has just relocated or if circumstances like illness require extended times of solitude. However, these pleasant events are typically brief and do not appear to be the main factor contributing to adult loneliness. Age, gender, demographics and culture are the few factors that affect perception of loneliness amongst young adults.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Loneliness is a multifaceted phenomenon, often characterized by an unpleasant, painful, anxious yearning for another person or persons (Hartog, Audy, & Cohen, 1980). Although loneliness is an emotionally distressing experience, it can be a valuable signal that the personal relationships of an individual are inadequate in some important ways. This experience has become an increasingly common problem for millions of Americans (Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982). Loneliness was defined as a response to the absence of an adequate positive relationship to persons, places or things (Weiss, 1973; Woodward, 1967).

It is becoming clearer that the factors that contribute to loneliness as well as its positive and negative aspects have an impact on our health and wellness. Perceived social isolation (PSI), another name for loneliness, is a global health concern that affects all age groups, particularly the elderly, and has a more detrimental effect on health than obesity. It is acknowledged that loneliness is a clinically significant cognitive state that has been shown to have detrimental impacts on both physical and mental health (van Beljouw et al., 2014). According to Fortune, The New York Times, The Guardian, and The Times, it qualifies as a contemporary epidemic. In 2018, the UK appointed a "minister of loneliness." The medical treatment of loneliness's physical repercussions, such as cardiovascular issues, and its effects on

mental health, such as psychosocial interventions or medicine, typically antidepressants or anxiolytics, has a limited success rate and is typically indirect. The opposite mindset is solitary or perceived desired social distance (PDS), which is to say, preferring being more by oneself. This condition is also clinically relevant because it may have positive impacts on health. Many stress-reduction techniques, like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), value solitude by attempting to induce some degree of PDS and finding (more) "Alone time" with which to achieve or maintain emotional equilibrium. There are physiological factors and effects that are connected to mental health. Loneliness has been found to independently correlate with (constantly) higher levels of stress hormones, such as circulating cortisol, as well as with the levels of pro-inflammatory compounds, regardless of any links to depression and self-reported and thus perceived stress (Doane & Adam, 2010; Matias, Nicolson, & Freire, 2011)

[Campagne, D.M., (2019). Stress and Perceived Social Isolation]

In a study published by Nilufer Medora and John Woodward in Spring 1986, research was conducted on a total of 104 Indian college students. The objective of this study was to investigate the extent of loneliness experienced by young adults, in this case college students. The study was a descriptive one with the goals of determining the degree of loneliness experienced by late-adolescent college students, how loneliness relates to variables, and how this group differs from other groups. There was neither an ascent nor a decrease in the mean loneliness ratings. This demonstrates unequivocally that socioeconomic level did not affect loneliness scores. This result is consistent with Otto's (1973), as well as Medora and Woodward's, findings (1985). Also, these researchers noted that socioeconomic class had little bearing on loneliness scores. Researchers discovered a statistically significant difference between loneliness scores and feeling happy throughout the previous year (Visser, 1971; Hornung, 1980; Medora, 1983; Medora and Woodward, 1985). The responses to the five-point scale for "feeling about last year" ranged from "extremely joyful" to "very dissatisfied". "The one-way classification test with analysis of variance revealed a statistically significant difference at the .05 level. The results were arranged in ascending order. The least lonely respondents were those who reported being "extremely pleased" over the previous year. The second-lowest loneliness score was achieved by people who reported that they had been "glad". The goal of this study was to

determine how much loneliness Indian university students were experiencing and to compare their loneliness ratings to various characteristics. Another goal was to compare the loneliness scores of this group to those of a few chosen previous studies.

The results imply that adolescents in India experience less loneliness than those in America and individuals from different socioeconomic classes do not have significantly varied loneliness scores. Religious and non-religious groups score equally on measures of loneliness, the levels of loneliness among people with various numbers of siblings are the same, the ordinal rank in the family has a substantial impact on loneliness scores, the correlation between loneliness scores and the number of close friends is also strong and there is no discernible correlation between loneliness levels and friendliness. The degree of self-rated happiness during the previous year is correlated with loneliness ratings.

[Medora, N., & Woodward, J., (Spring,1986). Loneliness Among Students at an Indian University]

A study was conducted by James J. Ponzetti in 1990 that explored loneliness in college students. According to it, poorer self-concepts and lower self-esteem are reported by lonely pupils (Levin & Stokes, 1986; Peplau & Perlman, 1982). This poorer sense of self includes unfavorable assessments of one's own physical characteristics, sexual orientation, general well-being, outward appearance, behavior, and cognitive abilities (Jones, 1982). Also, they feel their lives are being controlled by forces outside of their control and are more introverted (Diamant & Windholz, 1981; Hojat, 1982). It is hardly surprising, given these self-perceptions, that lonely students experience feelings of emptiness, hopelessness, restlessness, alienation, anxiety, and being unloved (Hays & DiMatteo, 1987; Perlman & Peplau, 1981). In addition to being highly alert and watchful to threats in social situations, lonely adolescents often approach interpersonal interactions with skepticism and suspicion (Jones, Freeman, & Goswick, 1981; Stokes, 1985). These students' worries about being harmed or rejected in an intimate connection as well as their doubts about their ability to find fulfilling relationships dominate their thoughts (Wilbert & Rupert, 1986). They think that rather than being in love, they will get married out of loneliness, parental pressure, or a need for stability. They believe that compared to non-lonely students, they have a lower likelihood of getting married before the age of 30, a larger chance of getting divorced, and a lower chance of getting remarried (Jones, 1982). Smaller social

networks exist among college students who are alone (Jones & Moore, 1987; Russell, 1982). Even when they had the same number of friends as nonlonely students, they still reported much less intimacy (Williams & Solano, 1983). Spending more time with females makes both men and women feel less lonely (Wheeler, Reis, & Nezelek, 1983). Loneliness can be explained using the idea of learned helplessness. It implies that when people feel out of control, they start to internalize negative emotions like despondency and mistrust of themselves. These emotions undermine people's self-worth and lead them to believe they are unable to change their circumstances (Boss, 1988). This ingrained helplessness is manifested in lonely college students' propensity to hold themselves accountable for shortcomings in their interpersonal interactions. They lose focus on whatever favorable comments they may receive and become distracted with their own thoughts and feelings. This concentration might make it more difficult for them to deal with the aspects of loneliness that they could learn to manage. As a result, they attempt to interact with people less frequently or less successfully.

[Ponzetti, J.J., (1990). Loneliness Among College Students]

Despite the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the mental and physical health of the general population at all ages, it is projected that younger groups may experience the effects more severely and for a longer period of time. The epidemic's negative effects on mental health include, but are not limited to, wrath and irritability, somatic complaints and depressive symptoms, insomnia, motivational issues, and loneliness. Because young people go through so many social changes at this period of life, it is believed that loneliness and the awful emotions it causes are particularly severe in this age group. Determining how the epidemic has affected young people's mental health and the degree of loneliness they felt during the initial lockdown is therefore crucial. The objectives of this study are to: describe the levels of loneliness in a national sample of Italian young adults (18–34 years old) during the first wave of lockdown in 2020; assess clinical symptomatology, coping mechanisms, and various other factors in young adults reporting low vs. high levels of loneliness; and evaluate the clinical and sociodemographic differences. The largest Italian investigation on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on general population mental health forms the basis for this publication. The COVID-19 pandemic is a "new" kind of catastrophic event that simultaneously affects several towns, cities, and geographical areas without letting us know

who or where the "enemy" is. Although the virus has had a negative impact on the general public's physical and mental health at all ages, it is anticipated that this global calamity will have more severe and long-lasting effects on younger populations. As a result of the epidemic's disruption of their regular educational, intellectual, professional, social, and familial life, young people are in fact dealing with a lot of difficulties. Due to the coronavirus's quick transmission, several preventive measures were needed to limit the infection from spreading to other persons, including physical isolation, face masks, residential quarantines, and lockdown restrictions. Perlman and Peplau (1981) claim that a network of social interactions that is either numerically or qualitatively insufficient leads to loneliness, which is a challenging experience. De Jong-Gierveld, van Tilburg, and Dykstra (2006) claim that loneliness is marked by emotions of emptiness, a lack of control, rejection, a sense of worthlessness, personal danger, and an absence (chronic or temporary) of satisfaction from social ties. Younger men, men, and people from individualistic cultures report feeling more alone than older women, women, and people from collectivist cultures, according to a global study on novel-by-novel disparities in age, gender, and culture among adults (referenced with N = 46,054 participants; Barreto et al., 2020). These results suggest that age, gender, the need for participants to engage (in cross-cultural studies), as well as knowledge of the participants' culture of origin, may all be contributing factors to feelings of loneliness. Additionally, compared to other adult age groups, young adults seem to be more susceptible to loneliness. Loneliness Research conducted during COVID-19 has shown a correlation between mental health symptoms and young people's perceptions of danger and social isolation in Poland. (Okruszek et al., 2020).

[Sampogna, G., Giallonardo, V., Vecchio, V.D., Luciano, M., Albert, U., Carmassi, C., Carra, G., Cirulli, F., Dell'Osso, P., Menculini, G., Murri, M.B., Pompili, M., Sani, G., Volpe, U., Bianchini, V., & Fiorillo, A, (2021). Loneliness in Young Adults During the First Wave of COVID-19 Lockdown: Results from the Multicentric COMET Study]

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

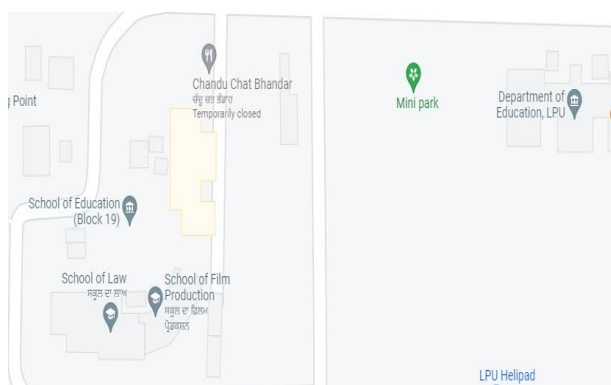
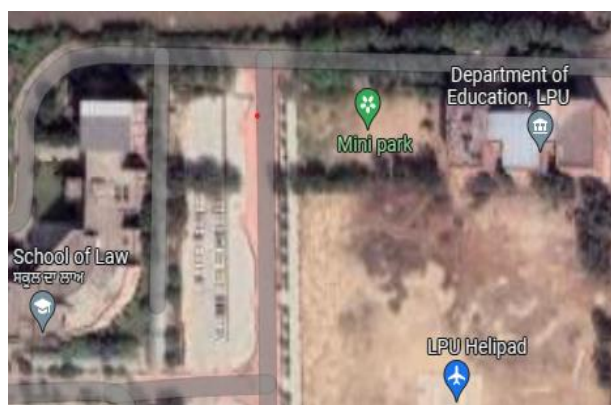
1. Understanding the frequency and manifestations of loneliness among young adults entails.
2. To investigate the causes of young adults' felt loneliness.

3. To determine which interventions and methods are most successful in reducing young people's loneliness.

METHODOLOGY

Sample:

The sample comprised of 40 college going students ranging between the ages of 18 to 22 years. These students were enrolled in various courses, but these could be broadly divided into psychology-based courses and non-psychology-based courses. The study was conducted in the area covering Block 19 (Department of Humanities) and Block 18 (Department of Social Sciences and Languages) of Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab. The mean age of the sample was 20. The group was further divided based on gender, 20 males and 20 females.



SAMPLE AREA (MAP AND SATELLITE VIEW)

Instrument:

For this study, The Perceived Loneliness Questionnaire by Dr. Praveen Kumar Jha (P.G, Department of Psychology, T.P College, B.N.M University, Madhipura) was used for the purpose of collection of data. It consisted of 36 items, each of which had 5 options from which the subject would choose the answer. The 5 options included Totally agree (marked 5), Agree (marked 4), Can't say (marked 3), Disagree (marked 2) and totally disagree (marked 1). There are 8 negative

questions where the marking was opposite: totally agree (1), agree (2), can't say (3), disagree (4) and totally disagree (5).

Procedure:

The Perceived Loneliness Questionnaire was distributed amongst the students. The researchers described the purpose of the study and provided detailed instructions on how to complete the surveys. Additionally, the instructions stated that no names or other forms of identification were required on the inquiry and that all responses would be treated in complete confidence.

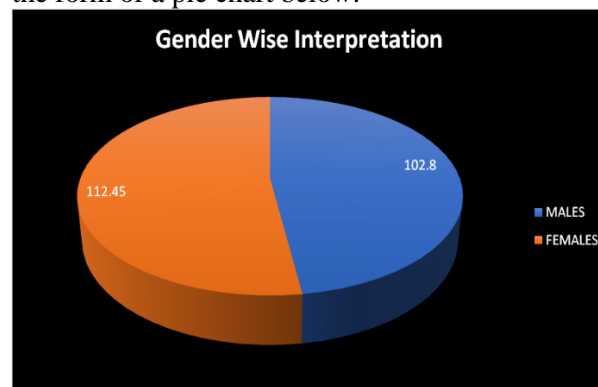
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

1. Gender Wise Score and Interpretation:

After scoring the results with the help of the PLS, we come to find the following data:

GENDER	MEAN LONELINESS SCORE
Male	102.8
Female	112.45

TABLE 1: The results have been represented in the form of a pie chart below:



From the results, we can see that the mean loneliness score is significantly higher in females than in males. While the males scored an average of 102.8, the females scored 112.45. This proves that women tend to be lonelier than men. Studies have shown that women may be more likely than men to experience loneliness for a variety of reasons. Some of the discovered factors are listed below:

Social roles: Women sometimes assume a variety of social tasks, such as providing care for young children or ageing parents, which can be lonely and time-consuming. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to be totally dedicated to their careers or jobs, which can lead to greater opportunities for social interaction.

Social expectations: Women may have higher pressure from society to keep tight connections and

relationships, which might make them feel lonely if they don't have those connections.

Hormones: A woman's mood and sense of wellbeing may be affected by hormonal changes during puberty, pregnancy, and menopause, which may exacerbate feelings of loneliness.

Life events: Women are more likely to encounter certain life events, such as the death of a spouse or divorce, that can cause loneliness.

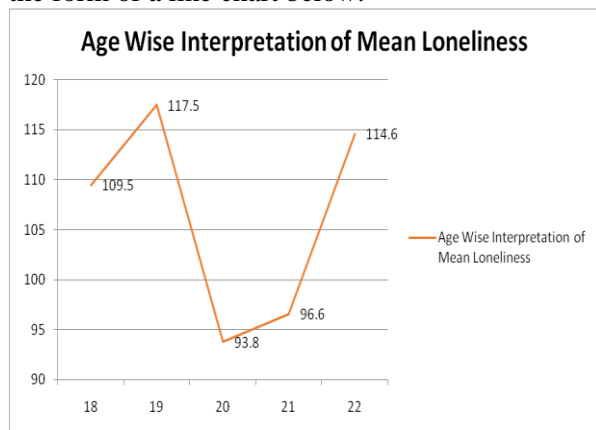
In general, there are probably a number of variables that contribute to women being more vulnerable to loneliness. To assist women maintain social connections and fight feelings of isolation, it is critical to recognize this issue and offer support and tools.

2. Age Wise Scoring and Interpretation:

After scoring the results with the help of the PLS, we come to find the following data:

AGE	MEAN LONELINESS SCORE
18	109.5
19	117.5
20	93.8
21	96.6
22	114.6

TABLE 2: The results have been represented in the form of a line chart below:



3. Percentile Wise Interpretation

According to the scores obtained the following table has been prepared:

Percentile	Male	Female	Percentile	Male	Female
95	128	130	60	107	119
90	125	128	55	103	116
85	124	127	50	97	115
80	124	126	45	97	114
75	117	121	40	96	113
70	112	121	35	95	108
65	109	120	30	92	106

Percentile	Male	Female
25	91	105
20	83	105
15	83	101
10	71	85

From the results, we see that there is no particular pattern that the mean loneliness in young adults follows. We can see that it takes a sudden surge from 18 to 19. The 18-year-olds scored 109.5, while the 19-year-olds felt significantly lonelier with a score of 117.5. Although it might seem that the graph is moving upward, a major drop is observed in the 20-year-olds with a score of only 93.8 and a slight surge in the 21-year-olds with a score of 96.6. Again, we can see that the graph goes under a significant hike with the 22-year-olds scoring 114.6. The following might be the reasons behind such an uneven graph:

- The 18-year-olds were mostly the ones who had just transitioned from high school to university, resulting in feelings of alienation and loneliness. It is also possible that the feeling of loneliness is a result of stepping into adulthood.
- The 19-year-olds showed a high level of loneliness. This might be a result of the oncoming adulthood as they are at the end of their teenage years. This adds to their fear of the uncertain future as they take on bigger responsibilities.
- The 20-year-olds and 21-year-olds show a great dip in the loneliness scale. This might clearly be a result of becoming seniors in the university. As a result of this, this population shows a high tendency to be more involved in student organizations, cultural activities etc. Having been away from home for quite some time, these people have developed their own ecosystem here where they thrive. They do not feel alienated and find a sense of belonging.
- Finally, the 22-year-olds again show a surge in their mean loneliness score, which is similar to what the 18-year-olds displayed. These students are mostly the final year students or the ones who have recently passed out. Their reason for feeling lonely might also be the transition from university to the job sector or higher educational sector as well as the uncertainty that their future holds.

5	70	71
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TABLE 3

The table shows that the men have scored significantly lower than the females. Here, 75th to 95th percentile is considered as highly lonely, 55th to 70th percentile is above average, 50th percentile is average, 30th to 45th percentile is below average and 5th to 25th show low loneliness.

Therefore, according to the assumptions made here and the data collected, we see that amongst the male and female subjects, it is the females who have yet again scored higher than the males in percentile.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Joining a club or organization: One of the best ways to meet new people and develop friendships is to join a club or organization with common interests.
2. Volunteering is a fantastic opportunity to make new friends and give back to the community.
3. Attending events held on campus, including performances, talks, and student activities. This is a fantastic chance interaction with peers.
4. Connecting with classmates by conversing with them.
5. Contact counselling or student services: If students are experiencing loneliness, they should get in touch with the counselling or student services office at the college. They can offer them assistance and resources to make them feel less alone.
6. Taking advantage of the chance to discover new surroundings. Getting outside and strolling around the area where the college is located.

CONCLUSION:

The following were the findings of the study:

1. Loneliness is prevalent in Indian youth, and it is a persistent problem amongst the college going community.
2. Loneliness is a subjective issue, and it cannot be generalized for everyone surviving in the same niche and demographic area.
3. Although a certain pattern can be seen in a particular age group, it is also observed that loneliness as a whole does not increase or decrease with age. It follows a random pattern and is subjective for every age group.
4. The most apparent finding is that females tend to feel significantly lonelier than males irrespective of what age they belong to.
5. Various factors were also assumed that might be the reason behind the feeling of loneliness for the subjects.

6. In the end, the researchers came up with a few recommendations for the students in order to face loneliness.

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