

# Effect of Loneliness on the Psychological Well-Being of College Students

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**Abstract**—Loneliness is becoming a fast growing problem among the youth nowadays. There are various reasons that are responsible for loneliness, discussed in this paper. The present study investigates the effect of loneliness on the psychological well-being of college going students. The data was collected on 101 college students who were divided into two groups i.e. Males and Females. They were required to fill a questionnaire through e-mail that had 2 parts. The first part was Ryff's questionnaire of psychological well-being and the second part was UCLA loneliness scale. The findings of the research revealed that there is a significant negative relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being. Also, the difference between males and females regarding both loneliness and psychological well-being did not come out to be significant.

**Index Terms**—Loneliness, psychological well-being, college students.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Loneliness

Loneliness is a part of the human condition that affects all ages. It is a subjective negative feeling related to the person's own experience of deficient social relations. A sense of loneliness is associated with an individual's evaluation of their overall level of social interaction and describes as a deficit between the actual and desired quality and quantity of social engagement [1]. Loneliness can be a reaction to the lack of social relations one needs or even though one has the social relations but they are not intimate or satisfying according to the needs or they lack sincerity and emotions in them. Human beings are said to actively engage each other and the universe as they communicate, and loneliness is merely the feeling of being cut off from this process [2].

The most broadly accepted definition of loneliness is the distress that results from discrepancies between ideal and perceived social relationships. While common definitions of loneliness describe it as a state of solitude or being alone, loneliness is actually a state of mind. It causes people to feel empty, alone and unwanted. People who are lonely often crave human contact, but their state of mind makes it more difficult to form connections with other people. Loneliness has always been considered as a common problem among the older people, but today it is becoming more of a concern amongst the young people. (Mental health Foundation, 2010). Loneliness is a subjective experience. That means that if one thinks that they are lonely then they will feel lonely. Everybody who is alone is not necessarily lonely.

Some people enjoy solitude. Tillich (1959) has stated that "Solitude expresses the glory of being alone, whereas, Loneliness expresses the pain of feeling alone." Larson (1997) in his description of the differences between loneliness and solitude has explained that 'solitude' is to be segregated from others easily, while, 'loneliness' is choosing to be alone.

### B. Types of Loneliness

*Interpersonal Loneliness*: This is the result of losing a significant, or intimate, relationship. When there is a loss of a significant person in one's life, that person starts feeling alone in between a crowd. This may include the loss of a spouse after divorce due to unstable marriage or due to unfortunate circumstances like death.

*Social Loneliness*. This is where a person is on the fringes of a group, excluded from a group, or is actively rejected. This also includes physical absence of meaningful people around a person and withdrawal from social circles.

*Cultural Loneliness*. This is where a person belongs to a different culture and feels that they don't fit, or belong, in the new culture.

*Intellectual Loneliness*. This is where a person intellectually, or educationally remains out of synch with their peers, their family or their social group.

*Psychological loneliness*. This is where a person has experienced a trauma that separates them out from others around them.

*Existential or cosmic Loneliness*. This is an isolating loneliness experienced by a person who is facing death.

### C. Psychological Well-Being

Interest in the area of psychological well-being and positive mental health seems to have peaked between the late 1950's and 1970's. Psychological well-being is a multi-dimensional concept. After factor analysis it was revealed that cheerfulness, optimism, playfulness, self-control, a sense of detachment and freedom from frustration, anxiety and loneliness are indicators of psychological well-being. (Tellegen, 1979; Sinha and Verma, 1992) to manage tensions and negative A person who has a high degree of psychological well-being, excels in all fields, carries higher levels of satisfaction and self-esteem and is able thoughts about oneself or others. It emphasizes positive characteristics of growth and development. In recent times psychologists and social scientists have conducted surveys to measure psychological well-being and subjective well-being among people. Psychological well-being generally means how people evaluate their own life. It means a person's own perspective regarding their social life, relationships, job satisfaction etc. According to Diener (1997), these evaluations can be from two perspectives i.e.

Cognitive and Affective. The Cognitive evaluation includes information based appraisal. This means that the evaluation is mostly fact based, about the amount of satisfaction that a person has with his current life status. The Affective evaluation is the indulgent kind. It is mostly a feelings based evaluation. This kind of evaluation includes how many times a person experiences the feelings of happiness and sadness. The assumption behind this is that people give a lot of importance to good and bad; and hence, they evaluate their life in the same way i.e. good or bad.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of the present research is to find out the effect of loneliness on psychological well-being among college students. There have been various researches on psychological well-being and loneliness; some of them are mentioned here below:

Ref. [3] Rezan and Fulya (2007) conducted a research on 268 university students to determine how university students' loneliness is predicted by their high level of psychological well-being. The result that they derived from the analysis was that psychological well-being was one of the main factors of predicting loneliness. There is close relationship between loneliness and positive relations with other people. In this particular literature, emphasis was laid on linking loneliness with poorer social skills, introversion and lack of social support. The second predictor that they found of loneliness was the 'purpose on life' dimension of psychological well-being. Being clear about one's purpose in life brings harmony and peace of mind in one's life. They derived that persons suffering from loneliness were not happy with life due to different kinds of psychological problems they go through, like, anxiety, depression, social isolation, loneliness etc. The people who had failed to determine their purpose in past or in the present go through high levels of loneliness. Out of the six dimension of psychological well-being, 'purpose in life' contributed as an important predictor of loneliness.

Ref. [4] Seygin, Akdeniz and Deniz (2015), studied that loneliness affects a person's well-being to a great extent. The research based findings showed that interpersonal problem solving and loneliness are significant predictors of subjective well-being. One aspect of the finding shows that when there is lack of interpersonal problem solving skill it lessens the levels of subjective well-being. It was also seen that self-confidence decreases and negativity increases. Researchers have found that interpersonal problem solving positively correlates with well-being in terms of constructive problem solving. Another very important finding was that loneliness as a predictor of subjective well-being is very significant. This means that the higher the subjective well-being levels, the lower the loneliness and the lower the subjective well-being levels, the higher the loneliness. The most important thing that they derived from their research was that when a person has a good ability of solving interpersonal problems, he/she becomes happier. Finding solutions to one's problems lessens the hardships and increases well-being.

Ref. [5] Kalpidou, Costin and Morris, (2011), in their

research have shown how social media affects a person's well-being. They have shown that social networking sites can be one of the causes of loneliness. Facebook has reduced interconnectedness with the community among introverts. The relationship between internet usage as a factor of loneliness was also studied by other researchers. They reported that high level of internet usage resulted in a decrease in social loneliness i.e., on the social networking sites and it resulted in an increase in emotional loneliness i.e. intimate relationships (Moody). The findings of this research showed that there was a relationship between facebook and a person's psychological well-being. Spending a lot of time on facebook affected self esteem negatively. Those students who had a low self esteem tend to use social networking sites more because that helps him/her in increasing their social capital (Ellison et.al.). Apart from this, the first year students who had many facebook friends reported low levels of adjustment and interpersonal communication in college. Adjusting well in a new environment shows a person's strong emotional construct. It is possible that a person has many friends on facebook in the first year, so that he/she feels a part of the in-group. It was also found that lack of adjustment also affected the academic performance of the students. The findings revealed two trends. The first one was that, first year students who have many friends on facebook affects their self esteem negatively, academic performance becomes poor, adjustment quality becomes poor and interpersonal communication becomes difficult. The second trend was the amount of time spent online also affected a person's well-being.

Ref. [6] Doman and Roux in the year (2011), conducted a cross-cultural study on the relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being. The study was conducted in South Africa, which is a multicultural developing country. The purpose of this study was to check the effects of political systems, failed leadership, high incidence of child abuse, rape, sexual molestation, incest, violence and crime on young adults. Its aim was to include these young adults into studies of loneliness and psychological well-being. The target population was students from different cultures at the University of Free State and the research was done in a non-experimental method. The non-experimental hypothesis testing research was used to divide the groups according to criteria. Questionnaire used for loneliness was a self designed one i.e. The Le Roux Loneliness Questionnaire and the Psychological general well-being index. The results that were derived from the research were, that, depression and a sense of positive well-being affect loneliness significantly. They found out that the relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being is very significant. This means that students with high psychological well-being experienced lesser degree of loneliness while students with low psychological well-being experience loneliness to a greater extent. The most important finding of this research paper was the sub-scale of psychological well-being i.e. depression and sense of positive well-being resulted as major causes of loneliness.

Ref. [7] Kumar (2014), studied the relationship between pro-social behavior and psychological well-being among adolescents of 14 to 16 years. The tests used were Ryff's

psychological well-being scale and pro-social tendencies measure (Carlo and Randall, 2002). The results that were derived from this revealed that psychological well-being is positively correlated with pro-social behavior. He found out that the dimensions of psychological well-being i.e. Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal growth, Positive relations and Purpose in life are positively correlated with the dimensions of Pro-social behavior i.e. Public, Anonymous, Dire, Emotional, Complaint and Altruism. Both the variables are positively related to each other. A person with higher pro-social behavior has higher psychological well-being and vice-versa.

The present generation is very easily exposed to vast information on the internet. The academic pressure is increasing nowadays, due to which competition among peers, siblings and cousins, is increasing. Tiwari and Ojha (2014) [8], conducted a study on adolescents of 15 to 19 years. The purpose of this study was to examine and compare various dimensions of general well-being and emotional maturity among adolescents. The findings of the study were that there is a significant difference between the general well-being and emotional well-being of boys and girls. Girls are emotionally more unstable than boys and hence they tend to socialize less. However, later on they found out that girls have higher emotional well-being and boys have higher physical well-being. Major finding of this study was that sex differences exist only in emotional and physical well-being.

Kim, LaRose and Peng (2009)[9] conducted a study through which they found out that people who were going through loneliness, or who did not have good social skills, developed a compulsive internet habit which had negative outcomes on their psychological well-being. They lagged behind in completing their daily responsibilities such as school, work, daily errands etc. They found that such negative activities led them more towards loneliness. Although previous researches have proven that using the internet makes a person overcome loneliness to some extent but this study found that it has more negative effects than positive.

Jackson, Soderlind and Weiss (2000)[10], conducted a research on college students of University of Wisconsin, to study the impact of specific personality traits and quality of close relationships on loneliness. They collected data from 180 liberal arts students. The research was divided on the basis of timeline. They were asked to fill self report measures about optimism, shyness, social support and loneliness and they were called back again after 6 weeks to complete the same measures. The results showed that lower levels of optimism before 6 weeks predicted a high level of loneliness after 6 weeks. Participants, who were shy and unsupported, reported higher levels of loneliness as compared to other students.

Depression and loneliness are two very important phenomenon of a person's life that affects both physical as well as mental health. Each person in their life, go through feelings of loneliness or symptoms of depression at some point in their life, but their occurrence in the old age can be very dangerous for the individual. Vijayshri and Farooqui (2014) [11], conducted a research to determine the relationship between depression and loneliness. The target

population that they chose was 320 participants of 60-85 years. They divided the data into two groups, 160 old people who lived with families and 160 old people who lived alone. The tests that they used were UCLA for loneliness (1996) and BDI (1996) to determine the existence of depression and loneliness. They found out that depression and loneliness were positively correlated. The old people who lived with a family had positive correlation and the old people who lived alone had a negative correlation. Both the groups had significant differences regarding loneliness and depression.

Jahan and Khan in the year, (2014) [12], conducted a study on persons above 65 years of age from different cities and old-age homes in India. The purpose of this study was to study the effect of daily spiritual experiences on psychological well-being of elderly people. The sample of 200 was divided into 100 males and 100 females. Daily spiritual experience scale and Ryff scale of psychological well-being were used. The findings of the research showed that daily spiritual experiences affected global psychological well-being significantly. It was relevant for both categories i.e. elders who lived in old age homes and those who did not. Relationships with other people depend on daily spiritual experience. It helps in enhancing our personal relationships with others.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Sample

The present study comprised of 101 college students out of which, there were 51 males and 49 females. The study was conducted on college students of 18-22 years of age and their mean age was calculated to be 20 years.

#### B. Tools UCLA Loneliness Scale

The tool used to measure loneliness among the students was the *UCLA-R loneliness scale* by Russell (1982). It is a 20 item scale with a four point rating scale ranging from Never to Always. The scores ranged from 20 (i.e. low level of loneliness) to 80 (i.e. high level of loneliness) showing that higher the score higher the loneliness. High internal consistency has been reported with a coefficient alpha .94.

#### C. Psychological Well-Being Scale

The tool used to measure psychological well-being among the college students was Ryff's Psychological well-being scale (Ryff and Keyes, 1995). This scale consists of eighteen items rated on five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), giving a potential range of 18-90. Out of eighteen items, six items are reverse scored. The scores of the items that correspond to the negative poles are reversed prior to calculating the total score, so that the higher the total scores, the higher the level of reported well-being. The reliability of the instrument is 0.89.

#### D. Procedure

The questionnaire was divided into two parts in Google forms. Part one consisted of the UCLA-R Scale and part two consisted of psychological well-being scale. Instructions about the demographic information and how to

fill up the questionnaire were mentioned in the questionnaire itself. The questionnaire was then circulated among university students via email and then the responses were collected.

### E. Statistical Analysis

Descriptive analysis and Pearson correlation were carried out using SPSS package.

Well-being means living one's life happily. It is the feeling of being satisfied with one's own life and to be happy about their achievements. Psychological well-being is very important for a person to stay mentally healthy. A person with high psychological well-being has the ability to work wonders for themselves. High level of psychological well-being shows that a person is at peace with himself and others, which is very important. Today's world has become highly competitive for the youth. There is a constant race going on about achieving the first place and becoming the best. In such circumstances it becomes difficult for some young adults to cope with their families' expectations and sometimes their own. This leads some students to suffer from problems like social isolation and loneliness. Psychological well-being helps in removing the feeling of loneliness. When a person is psychologically healthy, he/she feels good about oneself. It helps in enhancing social relationships with others which in turn lowers the degree of loneliness. Psychological well-being enhances positive relationships with others and helps in coping with loneliness.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of loneliness on the psychological well-being among college students. The results that were derived from the study are discussed below.

TABLE I: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND LONELINESS

Variable	Mean	SD
Psychological well-being	63.45	6.47
Loneliness	39.44	8.80

Table I, shows the mean and the standard deviation values of the two variables that was calculated through SPSS. Psychological well-being has a mean of 63.45 and a standard deviation of 6.47. Loneliness has a mean of 39.44 and a standard deviation of 8.80.

TABLE II: CORRELATIONS BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND LONELINESS

Variable	Psychological well-being	Loneliness
Psychological well-being	1.00	
Loneliness	-0.540**	1.00

\*\*,  $P < 0.01$

Table II shows the correlation between loneliness and psychological well-being. A significant negative relationship was observed between both the variables stating

that, higher the loneliness, lower the psychological well-being.

A number of studies have been carried out by various researchers that exhibit an inverse relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being. In a study by Rezan and Fulya (2007) it was found that lack of knowledge about one's own life leads to low psychological well-being and loneliness. Also people suffering from loneliness were not found happy with life due to the psychological problems that they were facing like anxiety, social isolation and loneliness.

In another study by Lim and Kua (2011), it was observed that elder people who lived alone had a poor mental health status and quality than compared to those who lived with others. Due to lack of social integration, loneliness prevailed in elders who lived all by themselves. Loneliness has a great impact on elders' psychological well-being. These researchers found out that those elders who felt that their children have not been able to meet their unfulfilled needs are affected more negatively than other elders. There have been many studies carried out on student populations also, that depicts how loneliness affects their psychological well-being. According to Doman and Roux (2011) a higher rate of negative things around a person, it affects their psychological well-being and leads them to loneliness, i.e. when the psychological well-being is low, the degree of loneliness increases dramatically.

In another study by Gross, Juvonen and Gable (2002), the results showed that the students who had friends in school and outside school, used the internet to build better relationships with them, and the ones who were socially isolated, lonely and those who found it difficult to communicate with others face to face, used the internet to build relationships with known or unknown people. The study showed that such kind of people who are lonely in the real world and try to seek comfort in the virtual world affects their well-being negatively. Hence, this study also proved that the more they use the internet to find social relations, the more negatively it will affect their psychological well-being.

TABLE III: GROUP (GENDER) DIFFERENCES: T-TEST

	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Psychological well-being	-.666	99	.507
Loneliness	1.567	99	.120

Table III shows that there is no significant difference between males and females on both the variables of psychological well-being and loneliness.

### A. Limitations

The present research paper has shown that there is a significant negative relationship between psychological well-being and loneliness i.e. loneliness results in poor psychological well-being. But, there are some limitations in this paper. The sample size that was taken was very small. Due to this small size, the difference between male and female did not come out as significant. The researcher here, has taken the entire sample from one region of India, Gujarat. In future, to make the study more reliable, samples can be taken from different regions of India.

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