

## A Study of Loneliness in Relation to Well-Being Among Adolescents

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**Abstract:** *In the present scenario of changing social structures, social values, industrialization, and globalization, feeling of loneliness is becoming a serious problem among adolescents which may impact their well-being. The present study was conducted to examine the association between loneliness and well-being among high school students. The sample of the study involved 90 adolescents (males = 45, females = 45) between the age range of 13 and 17 years. Loneliness was assessed by the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale and well-being was measured by Well-Being Manifestation Measure Scale, which has six dimensions i.e. Control of self and events, Happiness, Social involvement, Self-esteem, Mental balance, and Sociability. The data were analyzed by using Pearson correlation coefficient and independent sample t-test. The results showed that there was significant negative relationship between loneliness and well-being. Among the subscales of well-being, only happiness, self-esteem, mental balance, and sociability were significantly negatively related to loneliness. The results also showed that there were no gender differences on any variable except on sociability dimension of well-being, which indicates that girls were significantly higher on sociability than boys. The study implicates the development of intervention strategies for reducing the feeling of loneliness so as to prevent its negative impacts on adolescent well-being.*

**Keywords:** *Adolescents, Well-being, Loneliness*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Because of the changes in the social system like changing social structure and social values, industrialization, urbanization and globalization, feeling of loneliness has become a serious problem among adolescents. Adolescents feel lonely when they perceive low level of social support, ignored, negatively evaluated, or rejected, by their family, peers, and other persons in the society which has an adverse effect on their psychological development and their well-being.

Studies show that in comparison to any other age group loneliness is a more prevalent and serious problem among male and female adolescents (Boldero & Moore, 1990; Mahon, Yarcheski, & Yarcheski, 1994; Pretty, Andrews, & Collett, 1994; Woodward & Frank, 1988). According to Peplau and Perlman (1982), loneliness is the feeling of lacking a social relationship network. Woodward (1988, p. 4) defined loneliness as "a feeling of being alone and disconnected or alienated from positive people, places and things." Recently, Liu, Gou, and Zuo (2014) defined loneliness as a painful subjective experience or psychological feeling, which is characterized by the lack of satisfactory relationships.

Psychological well-being among adolescents in relation to loneliness has been the less focused area in psychological research. According to Bhimwal (2007) well-being is a multidimensional construct comprising of physical, mental and social components. Well-being is more than the absence of mental illness and can be measured by several psychological and social indicators like life satisfaction, depression, anxiety, self-esteem, etc. (Klanscek, Ziberna,

Korosec, Zorc, & Albrecht, 2014; Kovess-Masfety, Murray, & Gureje, 2004; all cited in Varga, Piko, & Fitzpatrick, 2014). As described by Bar-On (1998), self-regard, interpersonal relationships, independence, problem solving, assertiveness, reality testing, stress tolerance, self-actualization and happiness are the most important components of psychological well-being in adolescents.

Masse, Poulin, Dassa, Lambert, Belair, & Battaglini (1998a) developed a scale for measuring psychological well-being (i.e. Well-Being Manifestation Measure Scale) and defined psychological well-being as a measure of control of self and events, happiness, social involvement, self-esteem, mental balance, and sociability. Ryff (1989) operationalized psychological well-being as self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth which parallel the dimensions of Well-Being Manifestation Measure Scale.

Hawkey et al. (2003, as cited in Heinrich & Gullone, 2006) in a study showed loneliness to be related to less positive and more negative feelings during social interactions. Moreover, loneliness was significantly correlated with less intimacy, comfort, and understanding, and more caution, distrust, and conflict. They also demonstrated that these effects of loneliness on social interaction quality were present even after controlling for depressed affect and neuroticism. Lasgaard, Goossens, Bramsen, Trillingsgaard, and Elklit (2011) among 1009 high school students found that peer-related and family-related loneliness were associated with depression, anxiety, and suicide ideation, whereas peer-related and romantic loneliness were associated with

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social phobia. In contrast, only family-related loneliness was associated with deliberate self-harm and eating disorders.

Corsano, Majorano, and Champretavy (2006) found that social relationship promotes psychological well-being in adolescents and reduces malaise. In a recent study conducted by Mami and Ghanbaran (2014) on undergraduate students showed a significant negative relationship between feelings of loneliness and mental health. They also found that secure attachment style results in enhancing general health and avoided anxious ambivalent styles and feeling of loneliness leads to reduced mental health. Among adolescents, Chipuer, Bramston, and Pretty (2003) found that loneliness is an important predictor of life satisfaction.

Different research studies also showed that loneliness among adolescents is related to high level of social anxiety, depression (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006), low self-esteem (McWhirter, Besett-Alesch, Horibata, & Gat, 2002), poor social skills (Inderbitzen-Pisaruk, Clark, & Solano, 1992), poor self-rated health (Page & Suwanteerangkul, 2009), and in severe cases deliberate self-harm as well as suicidal ideation and attempts (Laskaard et al., 2011; Schinka, Van Dulmen, Bossarte, & Swahn, 2012). Schinka, van Dulmen, Mata, Bossarte, and Swahn (2013) investigated the psychosocial predictors and outcomes of loneliness trajectories from childhood to early adolescence. They found that the loneliness trajectories predicted self-reports of social skills deficits, depression, aggression, and suicidal ideation at age 15.

The present investigation was undertaken to explore the relationship between loneliness and well-being among adolescents.

In the present study an attempt has been made to see how loneliness is related to well-being among high school students. The investigator has also tried to look the relationship of adolescents' loneliness with six dimensions of well-being, i.e. Control of self and events, Happiness, Social involvement, Self-esteem, Mental balance, and Sociability.

**Objectives:** The specific objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To examine the relationship between feeling of loneliness and well-being among adolescents.
2. To examine gender differences in the feeling of loneliness and well-being.

## II. METHOD

**Sample:** The sample consisted of 90 high school students whose age group ranged from 13-17 years with a mean age of 14.567 (SD=1.006) years. Out of these 90 subjects 45 were boys and 45 were girls. All subjects were drawn randomly from schools of Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. All students belonged to middle and high middle class families.

**Tools:** The following tools were used to achieve the objectives of the present study.

**Well-Being Manifestation Measure Scale (WBMMS):** For measuring psychological well-being, WBMMS developed by Masse et al. (1998a) was used. The scale consists of 25-items on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Almost

always). This scale has six factors or subscales which are: control of self and events, happiness, social involvement, self-esteem, mental balance, and sociability. Masse, Poulin, Dassa, Lambert, Belair, & Battaglini (1998b) found an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.93 for the questionnaire, and a range of 0.71 to 0.85 on the subscales.

**Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale:** Loneliness was measured by using the revised form of UCLA Loneliness scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980), which contains 20 items (e.g., "I have nobody to talk to"), including 10 reversed items (e.g., "I can find companionship when I want it"). The loneliness scale was coded from 1 to 4, (opposite in reversed items). Scores on the scale can range from 20 (indicating the lowest level of loneliness) to 80 (indicating the highest level of loneliness).

**Procedure:** Questionnaires were administered on high school male and female students. Participants were instructed to read the demographical information and all questionnaires and fill it properly. The subjects took 10 to 20 minutes for filling the questionnaires. After the collection of data, responses were scored individually for each subject.

**Data Analysis:** SPSS 16.0 of Windows software was used for the statistical analyses. The data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficient, and independent sample t-test.

## III. RESULTS

Means, Standard Deviations, Standard Error of Mean and obtained range of scores with possible score of the variables are displayed in Table 1.

**Table -1** Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N=90)

Variables	Loneliness	Dimensions of Well-being					Total/Global Well-being	
		Control of self and events	Happiness	Social involvement	Self-esteem	Mental balance		Sociability
Mean	46.189	13.267	18.889	14.600	14.056	15.011	15.044	91.711
SD	7.183	3.197	3.439	2.836	3.066	3.185	2.669	12.664
SEM	.757	.337	.363	.299	.323	.336	.281	1.335
Obtained Range	28-63	6-20	12-25	8-20	7-20	7-20	9-20	61-115
Possible Score	20-80	4-20	5-25	4-20	4-20	4-20	4-20	25-125

Correlation coefficients between global well-being and its six dimensions (i.e. Control of self and events, Happiness, Social involvement, Self-esteem, Mental balance, and Sociability) with loneliness are presented in Table 2.

**Table -2** Correlation coefficient of Loneliness and Well-being (N=90)

Variables	Dimensions of Well-being						Total/Global Well-being
	Control of self and events	Happiness	Social involvement	Self-esteem	Mental balance	Sociability	
Loneliness	-.171	-.293**	-.115	-.531**	-.342**	-.369**	-.431**

Note. \*\*p<0.01, two tailed.

It is observed from Table 2 that adolescents' overall/total well-being was significantly negatively related to loneliness. Out of six dimensions of well-being only four dimensions that is Happiness, Self-esteem, Mental balance, and Sociability were significantly negatively related to loneliness.

**Table -3** Mean, SD and t-values showing gender differences on different variables.

	Boys (N = 45)		Girls (N = 45)		t-value (df = 88)
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Loneliness	47.489	6.894	44.889	7.306	1.736
<b>Well-being:</b>					
Control of self and events	13.711	3.231	12.822	3.135	1.324
Happiness	19.200	3.678	18.578	3.194	.857
Social involvement	14.689	2.678	14.511	3.012	.296
Self-esteem	13.600	3.158	14.511	2.936	-1.417
Mental balance	14.733	3.172	15.289	3.209	-.826
Sociability	14.356	2.986	15.733	2.126	-2.522*
Total Well-being	91.978	13.195	91.444	12.252	.199

Note. \*p<0.05, two tailed.

As seen in Table 3, there were no significant gender differences in study variables except in Sociability dimension of well being. The mean score of Sociability for girls was significantly higher than that of boys.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present investigation was to examine the impact of loneliness on wellbeing among high school students. It was found that loneliness was significantly correlated with overall wellbeing and some of its subscales, that is, happiness, self-esteem, mental balance, and sociability.

As the results showed loneliness was negatively related to happiness (which was one of the subscales of well-being). Recently, Parija and Shukla (2014) also found in their study that low loneliness and high extraversion had a negative effect on depression and online flow experience, and a positive effect on subjective happiness and satisfaction with life. A lack of social relationship reflects loneliness, this finding is consistent with some previous studies conducted by Gudmundsdottir (2007) and Holder and Coleman (2009) who showed how social relationships are important for happiness.

The finding that high level of loneliness is linked to poor self-esteem are supported by earlier findings with adolescents (e.g., Brage & Meredith, 1994; Brage et al., 1993; Larson, 1999; McWhirter et al., 2002; Prinstein & La Greca, 2002).

The present study also revealed that loneliness was significantly negatively related to mental balance of adolescents. Similar findings were reported by Reich, Schneider, and Spinath, (2013) who urged that, if need to belong is not satisfied, feeling of loneliness increases, which in turn, has a negative effect on the mental well-being of adolescents (as cited in Varga et al., 2014).

Another finding that high level of loneliness is linked to poor sociability are supported by Cacioppo et al. (2000) study, who conducted a study by using hypnosis and found that loneliness can also lead to social skills deficits. They manipulated feelings of loneliness in their experiment and found that the induction of loneliness gave rise to reduced social skills and sociability, and also to decreased levels of self-esteem and optimism, and to increased levels of anxiety, anger, negativism, and fear of negative evaluation.

Finally the present study found that the loneliness was significantly negatively related to global well being of adolescents, which is supported by previous findings (Corsano, Majorano, & Champretavy, 2006) indicating that social relationship promotes psychological well-being in adolescents and reduces malaise. Mami and Ghanbaran (2014) study also showed a significant negative relationship between feelings of loneliness and mental health. Similarly, Chipuer, Bramston, and Pretty (2003) found that loneliness is an important predictor of life satisfaction.

To see the gender differences on loneliness and well-being is another objective that was examined in this study. Analysis shows that both boys and girls were having almost similar levels of loneliness and well-being. It was only the girls who reported the higher level of sociability as compared to boys.

The results of this study find support from the study conducted by Brage, Meredith, and Woodward (1993) who also found no gender differences in adolescent loneliness. However, a recent study conducted by Panicker and Sachdev (2014) in India suggest contradictory results indicating higher level of loneliness among boys.

#### V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrated that adolescents' loneliness was significantly negatively related to well-being which indicates that presence of high level of loneliness among adolescence may lead to decrease their wellbeing. So it is necessary to attend earlier the sign and symptoms associated with adolescents' feeling of loneliness to prevent them from developing poor well-being. Thus, appropriate programs and intervention strategies are needed to improve the relationship and social network which reduced loneliness and positively influence adolescents' well-being.

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