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Dr. Prabha Vig
Assistant Professor, Dept. of
Life Long Learning and
Extension, Panjab University,
Chandigarh, Punjab, India.

Deepak Singh Gill
Research Scholar, Department
of Education, Panjab
University, Chandigarh,
Punjab, India.

Assessment of Loneliness: A study of Chandigarh adolescents

Dr. Prabha Vig, Deepak Singh Gill

Abstract

The focus of the present research is to explore loneliness among govt. senior secondary school students of Chandigarh City (India). 400 students in the age range of 15 to 19 years comprise the sample for the study. The current study expands on the literature review by taking into account gender and age group. Loneliness scale adapted by Anjali Arora (2008) was used to collect data. It comprises of 35 questions based on loneliness. The reliability for the questionnaire was 0.740. The data was tabulated and analyzed by using SPSS v-17, mean, median, standard deviation and t-test. The findings highlight that the percentages of loneliness among girls are higher than boys adolescents and loneliness was more associated to age group 17 to 19 than 15 to 17 years.

Keywords: Loneliness, Adolescents, Girls, Boys, Age group.

Introduction

Current era comprising of globalization, industrialization and nuclear family trends has increased loneliness trends among adolescents. These days loneliness is conceived as a problem and construed as a human response to have had and lose relationships because of frustrations, poor social skills, expectations and so on. Brennan (1982) [4] visualized adolescents' loneliness as a result of multitude of developmental and social changes that take place during these years. He emanated it as; physical and cognitive growth, disruption of the pre-adolescent self-concept and need for individuation and autonomy. He further inferred that a wide range of circumstances such as shyness, low self-esteem and poor social skills, mistaken expectations about new social relations, and increasing conflict with parents, all increase the likelihood of loneliness. Jylha (2004) [10] observed aging has association with loneliness. His research findings illustrated that it is most common among older than among younger people. Bolton (2012) [2] visualized that the likelihood of expressing self-perceived loneliness increases with age. Based on the research work, Heinrich & Gullone (2006) [8] demonstrated that loneliness reaches its peak in early adolescence, decrease between young adulthood and middle age then rise slightly when one becomes elderly. Ferguson (2011) [6] conceived that men and women are affected differently by loneliness. He further analyzed that older women are more likely to feel lonely than older men. Based on the research Taylor (2002) [27] observed that males tend to respond to threats with a "fight or flight" response whereas females respond to threats with a "tend and befriend" response. She further noted that women successfully respond to social group than men. Similar to these findings Silk (2003) [25] found that females because of their close and enduring relationships with group members do not suffer from loneliness effects caused by dominance rank, group membership and environmental conditions.

Brennan and Auslander (1979) [4] disclosed adolescence as the stage of assuming personal responsibilities towards their actions. They highlighted that this is the stage when adolescents delineates from their parents, teachers and peers which ultimately lead them towards a feeling of loneliness. They further stressed that loneliness among adolescents is linked to negative emotions such as; depression, anxiety and boredom.

Correspondence
Dr. Prabha Vig
Assistant Professor, Dept. of
Life Long Learning and
Extension, Panjab University,
Chandigarh, Punjab, India.

Paplaou, Rusell and Heim (1979) ^[21] recognized occurrence of loneliness when an individual network of social relationships become smaller or less satisfying than the desire of the person.

Parlee (1979) ^[18] stamped loneliness as highest among teenagers and young adults and lowest among older people.

Brennan (1982) ^[4] observed that loneliness reaches at the peak level during adolescent period. He further identified adolescents as loneliest because of poor possession of social skills and lack of interest in others.

Rubenstein and Shaver (1982) ^[24] conducted a research study on loneliness among adolescents and found that of all the age groups, adolescents are loneliest. Adolescents use sad passivity to cope with their loneliness more than any other age group.

Based on the research work and findings of Larson (1981, 1983, 1997) ^[12, 13, 14] highlighted that adolescents' loneliness is affected by intimacy.

Guidubaldi, Parry and Natasi (1987) ^[7] described the effect of parental attachment and loss of relationship with feeling of loneliness among children and adolescents.

Hoza, Bukowski & Beery (2000) ^[9] assessed dyadic loneliness of adolescents. Their analysis reported higher levels of loneliness among boys when compared to girls. They further stressed sex differences as a state of flux because of difference in loneliness.

Heinrich and Gullone (2006) ^[8] described that loneliness reaches its peak in adolescence and it decreases between young adulthood and middle age and again it rise slightly when one grows elderly.

Dhal, Bhatia, Sharma and Gupta (2007) ^[5] characterized that adolescents with high self-esteem suffer from moderate loneliness and have a secure attachment style whereas adolescents with lower self-esteem suffer from high feelings of loneliness and they need a psychological intervention to come out of their loneliness.

Myin-Germeys *et al.*, (2009) ^[17] conceived loneliness among adolescents as a black box of daily life which needs a psychological medicine as an intervention and can be reduced by being bias and increasing ecological validity.

Vanhalst *et al.*, (2012) ^[29] interplayed loneliness with sex differences. Their findings reported that girls have higher levels of loneliness when compared with boys. This means sex differences are in state of flux when loneliness as a variable is determined.

Qualter *et al.*, (2013) ^[22] conducted research to determine trajectories of loneliness during childhood and adolescence: Predictors and health outcomes. The findings of the study stressed that levels of loneliness in adolescence are important for determining development of traits.

Roekel, Scholte, Engels and Goossens (2015) ^[23] classified adolescents with different levels of loneliness. They identified that adolescent's experience higher level of loneliness when they are alone as compared to when they are in company. They further showed that the dynamics of loneliness increases or decreases with presence of classmates; whereas being with friends reduces loneliness.

Pathak *et al.*, (2011) ^[19] reported rise in the prevalence of illness and maladaptive behavior among adolescents. Studies conducted by [Brennan and Auslander (1979), Paplaou, Rusell and Heim (1979), Parlee (1979), Brennan (1982), Rubenstein and Shaver (1982), Larson (1981, 1983, 1997), Guidubaldi, Parry and Natasi (1987), Hoza, Bukowski & Beery (2000), Taylor (2002), Silk (2003), Jylha (2004), Heinrich and

Gullone (2006), Dhal, Bhatia, Sharma and Gupta (2007), Myin-Germeys *et al.*, (2009), Ferguson (2011), Bolton (2012), Vanhalst *et al.*, (2012), Qualter *et al.*, (2013), Roekel, Scholte, Engels and Goossens (2015)] led us to conclude that loneliness among adolescents lead towards psychological, social, emotional and behavioral problems by which an individual create distances and passivity by decreasing social involvement and interactions. This unhealthy behavior of adolescents can be termed as; high and low according to different aspects of loneliness.

Further, going by the above reviews of researchers it was felt that sufficient research work was not conducted to assess loneliness among adolescents and its' perceived relationship with gender and age. Further, there was also dearth of literature to conceive loneliness as; high and low and that to in relationship with variables like gender and age.

On this backdrop, this study has been conducted to estimate the prevalence of loneliness among adolescents studying in Senior Secondary Schools of Chandigarh, (U.T.).

Aims and Objectives

The study specifically addresses the following research questions:

1. To assess the level of loneliness among senior secondary school adolescents of Chandigarh.
2. To find differences in adolescents' loneliness because of demographic variables; gender and age group.

Materials and Methods

The Study Setting

The study is intended to address the population of adolescents studying in senior secondary schools of Chandigarh. The setting for the study consisted of adolescents under two age groups viz; 15-17 and 17-19 years. Choosing these age groups provided a sample of adolescents studying in 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th class of senior secondary schools.

Participants

A list of senior secondary schools located in Chandigarh city and its adjoining areas was obtained from DPI Schools, Chandigarh. Out of which, 10 schools were selected for the study by systematic random sampling method. As each class of the School had two or more sections pertaining to these classes viz; 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th. So, the selection of students was based on the recommendations of class teacher, student's availability and convenience. So, 200 students were randomly drawn from class 9th & 10th and an equal number from 11th & 12th class. Therefore, 400 adolescents were selected as sample for the study, 192 boys and 208 girls.

Tools

Loneliness scale adapted by Arora (2008) ^[1] was used as a tool to collect the data from adolescents. It comprised of 35 statements, 20 positive and 15 negative statements. The consent to each statement was obtained under a five item choice scale covering a variety of situations such as; Always Agree, Agree, Cannot Say, Disagree and Totally Disagree. All the statements used to assess loneliness are related to feelings and thoughts felt by the adolescents in a certain way. Perceived loneliness score for the scale ranges from 35 to 175. The maximum possible loneliness score was 175 which reflect high level of loneliness, whereas score of 35 exhibits lower range of loneliness symptoms.

Data Collection Procedure

For data collection, oral consent was taken from the school principals. Out of 39 Govt. Senior Secondary Schools of Chandigarh and its adjoining areas, 10 Schools were identified for data collection. The loneliness scale was administered to students of the identified class and was asked to respond to each of the items. The subjects were informed to tick (✓) against each item related under 5 point scale.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Level of Loneliness among Adolescents (N=400)

Level of Loneliness	Number	Percentage
Subjects screened	400	100.00
Loneliness present	248	62.00
Boys (N=192)	104	54.16
Girls (N=208)	144	69.23
Age group (15-17) (N=200)	93	46.50
Age group (17-19) (N=200)	155	77.50

Table 2: Differences between Loneliness among Adolescents Based on Gender and Age group

Variables	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Significance
Boys	192	121.57	13.270	1.329	S
Girls	208	123.23	26.527		
15-17 years	200	120.09	14.280	1.839	S
17-19 years	200	124.24	23.330		

The above table composed 192 boys and 208 girls' adolescents. The table-II displays the means, S.D., t-value of loneliness for the participants taken as sample for the study (N=400). The mean score of loneliness for girls 123.23 tends to fall at higher end of the loneliness scale of 105-175 and higher than cutting of the score (35-105). The mean score of the boys falls slightly lower than girls i.e. 121.57 and S.D. 13.270. The results of our descriptive analysis showed that girls fell in the higher range of loneliness (mean= 123.23, S.D. = 26.527) than boys (Mean=121.57, S.D. 13.270). This indicates a significant higher level of loneliness among girl adolescents than boys studying in Govt. Senior Secondary Schools of Chandigarh.

The analysis was also performed to compare differences in adolescents with respect to two age groups of adolescents (15-17 years) & (17-19 years). A comparison of the scores between 15-17 years (M=120.09, S.D.= 14.280) and 17-19 years (M=124.24, S.D.= 23.330) within the sample found significant differences in level of loneliness for the age group the 15-17 years; which was comparatively low to the age group of (17-19 years). These finding shows significant differences exist between the two age groups (15-17 years) & (17-19years).

The observed relationships correspond closely to the research work of Sullivan (1953) [26] who argue that loneliness can be best understood in terms of frustration of intimacy needs. This shows that adolescents in the age group of the 17-19 years' experience loneliness not solely as a desire for company but for a specific form of relationship which requires intimacy (Bowlby, 1969) [3].

The findings of the present study are in line with Killeen (1998) [11], who observed that females are lonelier than males whereas the present findings are not in agreement as reported by Le Roux (2009) [16]. Who observed that male adolescents experience a significantly higher degree of loneliness than female counterparts.

The observed relationship correspond closely to the salient findings of the investigation conducted by Peplau and Perlman (1982) [20], who suggested that 10-18 age groups could be seriously lonely and suffer from emotional and social isolation. Their findings further suggested that the age group of the 18 is a period of complex developmental changes that could be related to separation from the pre-adolescents identity and the concomitant struggle for autonomy and individualism. The findings of the study are also consistent with the study of Thomas (2015) [28] who traced that lonely people show increase of blood sugar, alleviation of stress levels, weakening of immune system and heightening of depression and anxiety feeling. The study further typed that social participation decreases with age that leads towards loneliness.

There were some limitations noted for the study. One of them was that the sample composed of students studying in govt. senior secondary schools of Chandigarh. That was why; the findings could not be generalized for other senior secondary school students studying in rural areas, public schools, private schools of Chandigarh. Secondly, the study was delimited by using only one measurement of loneliness to collect data for the study because according to Lasgaard *et al.*, (2011) [15] loneliness is a long term process which may be uni-directional, bi-directional or transactional by nature. So, attention should be given to changing developmental contacts.

Conclusion

From the above research findings it is confirmed that a significant level of loneliness exist among adolescents of Chandigarh, because 62% of adolescents reported loneliness. It is understood that adolescents experience adolescence as turmoil or a critical phase of life. So, their problems like; poor academic performance, poor coping methods, stress, depression, lack of intimacy with friends contribute towards loneliness.

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