

Personality Correlates of Loneliness

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The present attempts to investigate the relationship of loneliness with some important personality dimensions of young adults. For this purpose, a sample of 100 students, 50 males and 50 females with mean age 22.2 years and SD 0.66, were administered revised UCLA –Loneliness Scale. 60 students (30 males and 30 females) who had a high score on loneliness were further assessed on the measures of Eysenck's Personality Questionnaire (Revised), Rotter's internal-External Scale, and IPAT- Anxiety Scale Questionnaire. It was broadly conjectured that there would be significant relationships between loneliness and extraversion, neuroticism, anxiety and locus of control. Data was processed using correlational analysis. The results obtained provided support to the hypotheses proposed in the study.

The pervasiveness of loneliness as a theme in poetry, fiction and drama attests to its importance in human experience. Countless authors have offered passing insights and also provided illuminating descriptions of feelings of loneliness, and agony associated with loneliness.

To date, the experts have not agreed upon definition of loneliness. There is, however, a general consensus among researchers about the inevitability of loneliness (Medora & Woodward, 1986). Thomas Wolfe (1941), an American novelist, in his book 'The Anatomy of Loneliness', writes "*The whole conviction of my life now rests upon the belief that loneliness, far from being a rare and curious phenomenon, peculiar to myself and to a few other solitary men, is the central and inevitable fact of human existence*".

In general, loneliness is a psychological mode caused by the weakness of personal communication and socialization skills (Arnett, 2007). Loneliness, a common psychological problem, is typically defined as the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships is

deficient in some important way, either qualitatively or quantitatively; can be linked to anxiety, reduced social competence, and suicide risk (Cacioppo, Hawkey, Crawford, Burleson, & Kowalewski, 2002). Mijuskovic (1977) viewed loneliness as a universal condition of man who is intrinsically alone and lost. The definition used in most of the recent research and used as basis for the popular UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau & Cutrona, 1980) has emphasized cognitive and emotional components. The cognitive aspect is the person's conclusion that he or she has fewer or less initial social relationships than desired or expected. Furthermore, this conclusion is associated with negative emotional tone ranging from mild discomfort to intense pain (Fromm-Reichmann, 1959). Thus, there is a general consensus among researchers that when speaking of loneliness, what becomes immediately evident in the individual is a forlorn subjective experience of emptiness and loss. The nostalgic longing for closeness with the people he or she loves is a typical trait for every young adult.

Over the past two decades, social, economic, and demographic changes have

altered the life course trajectories of young people between their late teens and twenties. There have been changing trends in the transition to adulthood and roles of individuals especially during early adulthood. Though the period of young adulthood may vary across various cultural groups, it is generally regarded as the age of instability; the most self-focused age of life; the age of feeling in-between, in transition; and the age of possibilities, when people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives and establishing occupations. During these years, young people become less dependent on their parents and become gradually an adult. In addition, they must develop the social skills. These developmental tasks may bring "loneliness" which is very influential on emerging adults' daily life in its wake.

Seligson (1983), however, referred to loneliness as, "one of the least satisfactorily conceptualized psychological phenomenon" and explain the paucity of research in this area by the failure of the scientific community to recognize loneliness as a separate and unique psychological entity. Loneliness has been linked to poor social skills (Deniz et al, 2005), poor interpersonal relationships, low self-esteem (Peplau & Perlman, 1982), shyness (Jones, Rose & Russell, 1990), and poor social adjustment (Jones and Carpenter, 1986). Lonely participants have shown to be less extraverted (Hojat, 1980; Russell et al, 1980), to be more anxious, depressed and neurotic (Shepherd and Edelmann, 2005; Russell et al, 1980; Hojat, 1982). Lonely people experience subjective distress because they perceive themselves as being alone and cut off and they evaluate their social relationships as deficient. This leads to high levels of anxiety and finally to alienation from society.

Moore and Schultz (1983) examined loneliness in adolescents. 45 male and 54 female adolescents in the age range of 14-

19 years participated in the study. Results showed loneliness to be positively related to state related and trait related anxiety, an external locus of control, depression, self-consciousness and social anxiety and negatively related to self reported attractiveness, likeability, happiness and life satisfaction. Lonely adolescents were also willing to take social risks. Upmanyu, Upmanyu, and Dhingra (1992) studied loneliness among adolescents in relation to personality and cognitive measures. Loneliness correlated positively and significantly with hopelessness and negatively with locus of control and extraversion. The relationship revealed that male adolescents with internal locus of control, less social contact and higher amount of hopelessness were significantly more lonely.

Thus, the review of literature reveals that there are quite a few studies available which explore the relationship between loneliness and personality traits in adolescents. But loneliness in young adulthood has not been studied extensively. There are only a few studies which investigate the relationship between emerging adults' loneliness and personality traits. Suh, Diener, Oishi, and Triandis (1998) found the two of the Big Five dimensions, neuroticism and extraversion to be most related to adults' loneliness. Cheng and Furnam (2002), in their study, found that psychoticism was a direct predictor of loneliness. In a study, Xueqing (2008) examined 281 female impoverished students and 145 non-impoverished students. Correlative analysis showed significant negative correlation between extraversion and loneliness, while a significant positive correlation between psychoticism, neuroticism and loneliness. Atak (2009) in his study examined association between Big Five personality traits and loneliness among Turkish Emerging adults. Correlational analysis showed that three Big Five personality dimensions which are neuroticism

(positively) and Extraversion and Agreeableness (negatively) are moderately correlated with emerging adults' loneliness. Regression analysis showed Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism are most important predictors of emerging adults' loneliness.

Our society's emphasis on self fulfillment and achievement, the importance we attach to close relationships and a decline in stable close relationships, are the reasons loneliness is common today. Loneliness and personality traits are, thus, important study areas of psychology literature. As a result, the present study modestly looks into the relationship of young adults' loneliness with some important Eysenckian personality dimensions, anxiety and locus of control.

On the basis of theoretical analysis and relevant review of literature, it was hypothesized that:

1. There will be a negative relationship between loneliness and extraversion;
2. There will be a positive relation between loneliness and neuroticism;
3. There will be a positive relation between loneliness and psychoticism;
4. There will be a positive relation between loneliness and anxiety; and
5. There will be a positive relationship between loneliness and external locus of control.

Method

Sample:

A sample of 100 students, 50 males and 50 females, in the age group of 22 to 24 years participated in the study. The mean age of the group was 22.2 years with a SD of 0.66. The sample was randomly selected from the different departments of Panjab University, Chandigarh.

Tools:

Revised UCLA-Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau & Cutrona, 1980): It is a 20-item instrument designed to measure self-reported experiences and behaviours theoretically related to loneliness. The scale includes 10 positively worded items and 10 negatively worded items. Respondents indicate on a 4-point scale ranging from never (1) to often (4) how often each statement is true for them. The scale yields a single score reflecting self-report of current loneliness. Russell et al (1980) reported a good reliability (>.90) for the test. Upmanyu et al (1992), in a study with adolescent sample, reported Cronbach alpha of .90.

Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised (Eysenck, Eysenck & Barrett, 1975). It comprises of four dimensions, namely, psychoticism(P), extraversion (E), neuroticism (N) and lie scale (L). The test-retest reliabilities of EPQ-R are quite favourable, lying between .80 to .90.

Internal-External Scale (Rotter, 1954): It is a forced choice questionnaire consisting of 29 items having two options each. The scale includes six filler items and remaining 23 items assess the extent to which subjects believe reinforcement is contingent on individual's action. Test retest reliabilities range from .49 to .61 for 2 months and .60 to .83 for 1-month intervals (Rotter, 1966).

IPAT Self Analysis Anxiety Scale Questionnaire (Cattell & Scheier, 1963): It comprises of 40 items distributed among five anxiety-measuring factors according to each personality components' centrality as a source or expression of anxiety. The five dimensions measured in the test are defective integration (Q_3), ego weakness (C), paranoid insecurity (L), guilt proneness (O), and frustration tension (Q_4). Each question has three alternative answers. Any single item contributes to only one of the five components.

Results and Discussion

The results depict a significant negative correlation of -0.28 ($p < .05$) between measures of loneliness and extraversion. Lonely people may have less rewarding interpersonal contacts and interactions with others and may have less extensive social networks from which they receive support. Therefore, extraversion may influence loneliness negatively by allowing more effective use of social support as a coping strategy (Caspi, 2000). Atak (2009) in his study found a significant correlation of -0.18

Individuals high on loneliness manifest feelings of unworthiness, guilt, proneness to emotionality, tension, irritability and jitteriness. Such individuals score high on frustration tension. Thus, this interferes with interpersonal relations and lead to a relational deficit. In a study, Long and Martin (1998) found that anxious personalities were more likely to be lonely. Moore and Schultz (1983) examined loneliness at adolescence and the results showed loneliness to be positively related to state and trait anxiety, self consciousness and social anxiety.

Table 1. Correlation between Personality dimensions, Anxiety and Locus of control

	E	N	P	External Locus of Control	TotalAnxiety	Q ₃	C	L	O	Q ₄
Loneliness	-.28*	.37**	.18	-.23*	.42**	.34**	.49**	.26*	.35**	.39**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

between extraversion and loneliness. Many researches reveal that lonely participants have shown to be less extraverted (Hojat, 1982; Russell et al., 1980).

Neuroticism is significantly associated with loneliness, yielding a correlation coefficient of 0.37 ($p < .01$) between neuroticism and loneliness. The general nature of neuroticism is assessed as emotional instability, inadaptability, depressive moods, weak dependable attitudes, guilt proneness, worry and lack of optimism. People who score high on neuroticism, thus, may be expected to describe higher level of loneliness. As regards this expectation, it was found that people higher in neuroticism experienced more negative emotions in a longitudinal study (Deiner & Deiner, 1995). In a study conducted by Atak (2009), a significant correlation of 0.28 was found between neuroticism and loneliness. Suh, et al (1998) also found one of the Big Five dimensions, that is, neuroticism to be most related to adults' loneliness.

Results further show that there exists a positive correlation of 0.18 between loneliness and psychoticism. Psychoticism refers to behaviour that is impersonal, hostile and anti-social. A high scorer on psychoticism is described as an isolated and solitary individual, who is hostile to others, is aggressive even to loved ones and who sufficiently lacks in feeling and empathy. High apathy and aggression is likely to repel or force away those individuals who are capable of providing social support. It, thus, leads to a feeling of relational deficit. Cheng and Furnam (2002), in their study, found that psychoticism was a direct predictor of loneliness.

Loneliness has also been found to be significantly correlated with anxiety. The correlation between loneliness and total anxiety is 0.42 which is significant at .01 level. The correlation of loneliness with different dimensions of anxiety scale questionnaire (defective integration, ego weakness, paranoid insecurity, guilt proneness, and frustration tension) ranges from 0.26 to 0.49.

External locus of control also interferes with lonely individuals' interpersonal relations. The results reveal a significant negative correlation of -0.23 ($p > .05$) between loneliness and external locus of control. As compared to the individuals with internal orientation who perceive an event as contingent upon one's behaviour, individuals with external orientation perceive reinforcement following any action as a consequence of chance, fate or as under the control of powerful others. Thus, such individuals would never take a step forward towards improving their condition of loneliness. The findings of the present study are in line with the results of the study conducted by Upmanyu, Upmanyu and Dhingra (1992) in which loneliness was correlated negatively with external locus of control.

Emerging adulthood is an exceptionally full and intense period of life. In the emerging adulthood years, people have a life plan, and these plans may change plenty of times during the emerging adulthood. These instabilities may bring anxiety and neuroticism, and thus loneliness.

Directions for future research are warranted on the basis of findings from this study, and its main limitations. The findings of the study are relevant only for young adults experiencing loneliness. But replications are needed with diverse samples to allow for the evaluation of generalizations to a wider range of individuals. Moreover, future researches should explore the role of loneliness and personality on mental health across different age groups and cultural backgrounds. There is also a need to impart to individuals effective ways of coping with daily issues and problems either pertaining to academic matters, career or the social, since elements of loneliness and personality could react differently on mental health.

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