

## The Interplay of Loneliness and Depression Exploring Their Effect on Self Esteem of Adolescents

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### Abstract

*Based on the current theories of Loneliness and depression and their link with each other are expected to yield results which are going to affect the self esteem of adolescents. The present study was conducted in senior secondary schools of Chandigarh for adolescents for the age group of 13 years to 18 years (N=400). The study examined the directions of effect between loneliness and depression and their effect on self esteem. In addition to this, the robustness associations were tested by examining their self esteem under four dimensions; personal, social, family and academic. Self Esteem inventory by Stanley Coopersmith (1987); Anjali Arora (2008) for loneliness and Anita Vulic-Prtoric (2005) for depression adapted versions were used. The data was collected from 200 boys and 200 girls studying in 10 senior secondary schools of Chandigarh. Results indicated that loneliness and depression influenced one another by concurrently affecting the levels of self esteem. Educational implications were discussed and suggestions were made for the further research.*

**Keywords:** Loneliness, Depression, Self-Esteem, Adolescents, Gender

### Introduction

The contradictory nature of self in adolescents fluctuates with situations and time. Further, it varies with sex because of social support, socialization process and gender disparities. These aspects were studied by Harter (1986); who perceived that adolescents' loneliness and depression affect the self esteem at different levels. Different researchers typed loneliness with chronic, social deficit and situational arising from an end of relationship (Beck and Young; 1978) whereas Fromm-Reichmann (1980) conceived loneliness as individualistic which occurs in short bouts and experienced periodically as a consequence of minor social deficiency, characterized by hopelessness and unutterable futility. These effected the value and worth of an individual by lowering their self esteem (Kostelnik; 1988). This low self esteem results one to become useless, lonely and ultimately depressed. Guindson (2002) linked self esteem of adolescents with self acceptance and self worth and combined with dimensions such as; anger, discouragement, attitudes and so on. Cherry (2010), Mogonea (2014), linked self esteem of adolescents with appraisal of one's own appearance, behavior and self conscious. Carrying these views forward, Van Ness (1995) advocated that negative experiences have damaging effect on the self esteem of adolescents.

Emery (2014); Doeselae et al (2016); considered adolescents self esteem in relation to shame, despair, anxiety, frustration, unhappiness and so on which occur due to loneliness, depression and negligent behavior. Going by the previous researchers, we found that self esteem of adolescents was strongly related to loneliness and depression but their relationship to demographic variables were not explained so far. Keeping this in mind, the undertaken research

conceived gender as demographic variable of the study and its effect was studied on loneliness and depression on self esteem.

Further, the researcher felt that loneliness and depression are going to shape up by the effect of gender and age which have not been unveiled so far.

### **Links between Loneliness, Depression and Self Esteem**

On the basis of research work conducted by Rubenstein, Shaver and Peplau (1979), it was found that lonely and disturbed adolescents feel disappointed and frustrated with different human relationships for most of their lives. This is because they are prone to the feelings of loneliness. They further highlighted that the feelings related to loneliness appear in them because their awareness to reveal discrepancy between the search for intimacy and the failure to satisfy them.

Peplau et al (1982) specified that loneliness lowers a person's self esteem, particularly when loneliness is chronically experienced and attributed to personal characteristics or defects. They further stressed that individuals with low self esteem gets engaged with certain behaviors and cognitive processes that impede towards dissatisfaction of social relationships and consequently increase the feeling of loneliness.

Seeley and Andrews (1993) emphasized that low self esteem contributes towards development of depression. They further stressed that low self esteem means the development of a poor or negative self-image.

Schachter et al (1995) noticed depression with types such as; high, medium and low and correlated with loneliness variance.

Based on the research work, Kernis, Waschull, Greener and Anderson (1998) conceived self esteem under two levels; high and low. They further highlighted that low self esteem exhibit significant relationship with depressive symptoms such as; addiction and loneliness.

Lewinsohn and Rohde (1998) posited the association between loneliness, depression and lowered self esteem. Their study further noted that depressive symptoms were associated with students academic problems; loneliness, economic problems and relationship difficulties.

Furnham and Cheny (2000) revealed that self esteem act as an important predictor of happiness because higher levels of self esteem lower the levels of depression.

Vulic, Soric and Macuka (2005) particularized depression with a set of emotions and behaviours comprising of; sadness, unhappiness, blue feelings, poor appetite and insomnia etc. They further highlighted that depression among adolescents is strongly associated to psychological difficulties, school problems, low self esteem and increased risk for anxiety, suicide, substance abuse etc.

Beck and Alford (2009) defined depression with attributes such as; a) specific alteration in mood like sadness, loneliness, apathy b) negative self concept associated to self reproaches and self blame c) regressive and self punitive wishes such as desire to escape hide or die d) vegetative changes like anorexia, insomnia, loss of libido and e) change in activity level like; retardation and agitation.

Yacob, Juhari, Talib and Uba (2009) found that loneliness and self esteem have moderate significant relationships with depression.

Bansal et al (2015) conceived depression as precipitated live events and changes visualized during childbirth, menopause, financial difficulties, job problems, a medical diagnosis (cancer, HIV, etc.),bullying, loss of a loved one, natural disasters, social isolation, relationship troubles, jealousy, separation, and catastrophic injury. Adolescents may be especially prone to experiencing depressed mood following social rejection.

Based on their research Fang and Sun (2018) found that loneliness and depression make individuals more vulnerable to generalized pathological internet use because of the reasons like; people experience loneliness because of their anxiety when interacting with people, when they decrease their interactions they suffer more from loneliness.

Musettiand Corsano (2018) conceived loneliness as a result of psycho-pathology factors like; maladaptive cognitions.

Gao, Guo, Tian, Si and Wang (2018) explored the mediating effects of loneliness, depression and self esteem. Their study observed that loneliness and depression reduce self esteem.

Going by the above reviews, we can say conclude that adolescent criteria for loneliness and depression changes with different psychological factors associated to it. Therefore, to reduce the risk of low self esteem becomes important to be studied. Further, the robust positive relationship between loneliness, depression and its association with self esteem shows close connectivity between them.

## **Objectives**

The study was conducted in light of the following hypotheses:

1. To investigate gender differences among adolescents for their loneliness,depression and self esteem.
2. To explore the inter-correlation among loneliness, depression and self esteem.

## **Methodology and Procedure**

### **Participants**

The sample of the study comprised of (N=400) adolescents withdrawn from 10 Senior Secondary Schools of Chandigarh (Table-1) Male adolescents (N=200) and Female adolescents (N=200). The age range varied from (13-18) years adolescents studying from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> standard.

**Table-1**  
**(List of Selected Schools)**

Sr. No.	Name of the School	No. of Male Adolescents	No. of Female Adolescents
1.	Govt. Model Sr. Sec. School, Sec-10, Chandigarh	20	20
2.	Govt. Model Sr. Sec. School, Sec-16, Chandigarh	20	20
3.	Govt. Model Sr. Sec. School, Sec-19, Chandigarh	20	20
4.	Govt. Model Sr. Sec. School, Sec-22, Chandigarh	20	20
5.	Govt. Model Sr. Sec. School, Sec-23, Chandigarh	20	20
6.	Govt. Model Sr. Sec. School, Sec-32, Chandigarh	20	20
7.	Govt. Model Sr. Sec. School, Sec-35, Chandigarh	20	20
8.	Govt. Model Sr. Sec. School, Sec-37, Chandigarh	20	20
9.	Govt. Model Sr. Sec. School, Sec-40, Chandigarh	20	20
10.	Govt. Model Sr. Sec. School, Sec-45, Chandigarh	20	20
<b>Total Sample (400)</b>		<b>200</b>	<b>200</b>

### Measures

Three standardized scales with personal information sheet were used to collect the data from 200 male and 200 female adolescents. The instruments used were adapted according to Indian situations and environment. It was ensured that the adapted scales do not lose their psycho-metric properties and their reliability and validity was also determined.

**Table-2**  
**(List of Tools)**

S. No.	Name of Inventory	Prepared By	Reliability
1.	Self Esteem Inventory (SEI)	Stanley Coopersmith (1987)	.80
2.	Loneliness Scale (LS)	Anjali Arora (2008)	.74
3.	Depression Inventory (DI)	Adapted and Standardized by investigator (Anita Vulic-Prtoric, 2005)	.71

### Procedure

The data was collected from a sample of 400 adolescents (200 males and 200 females). Multistage random sampling was used to identify 10 senior secondary schools of Chandigarh and from these schools 200 males and 200 female adolescents were selected as sample representatives. For the data collection, the personal information datasheet with three scales was administered to adolescents. After collecting the responses of the participants, scoring was done.

## Results

Data was analyzed using the Statistical package for social science, SPSS version 17.0. Means, standard deviations, t-test and the correlations were performed to find relationships between variables under study.

**Table-3**  
(Gender Differences with Respect to Self Esteem, Loneliness and Depression of Adolescents)

Variables	Male Adolescents		Female Adolescents		t-ratio
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Self Esteem	77.53	8.115	69.35	9.177	9.443**
Loneliness	98.68	24.463	119.13	15.309	10.022**
Depression	62.45	11.725	74.59	14.893	9.054**

\*significant at the 0.05 level

\*\*significant at the 0.01 level

Table-3 discloses that female adolescents differ significantly from male adolescents as loneliness, depression and self esteem indicating that female adolescents were more inclined towards loneliness and depression which was affecting their self esteem. This confines that female adolescents were more prone to depression and loneliness because of changing scenario for the future which demands certain behaviors and cognitive processes that impede towards dissatisfaction of social relationships and consequently increase their feeling of loneliness and depression.

**Table-4**  
(Correlations for Total Sample, Male and Female Adolescents)

Group	Variables	Loneliness	Depression
Total Sample (N=400)	Self Esteem	-.138*	-.175*
Male Adolescents (N=200)	Self Esteem	-.199**	-.254**
Female Adolescents (N=200)	Self Esteem	-.200**	-.344**

\*significant at the 0.05 level

\*\*significant at the 0.01 level

In Table-4, a negative and significant correlation were also found between loneliness and self esteem; depression and self esteem referring that with the increase in two independent variables on the study there will be decrease in self esteem among female adolescents studying in senior secondary schools of Chandigarh. It can be further concluded that female adolescents who were found to possess high loneliness and more of depression are found to have lower self esteem and vice versa.

**Table-5**  
**(Inter-Correlations for Total Sample, Male and Female Adolescents)**

Group	Variables	Loneliness	Depression
Total Sample of Adolescents (N=400)	Loneliness	1	.582**
	Depression	.582**	1
Total Sample of Male Adolescents (N=200)	Loneliness	1	.586**
	Depression	.586**	1
Total Sample of Female Adolescents (N=200)	Loneliness	1	.432**
	Depression	.432**	1

\*significant at the 0.05 level

\*\*significant at the 0.01 level

Further, female adolescents have higher positive association between loneliness and depression; this in-depth & intense correlation suggests that they have less frequency of contacts with friends and peers which made them more depressed.

In totality, we can conclude that male and female adolescents reveal intense & significant inter-correlations between loneliness and depression; viewing the value loadings, we can conclude that loneliness, and depression stem from each other close attachments or associations.

## Discussion

The findings of the study profess that loneliness when connected with depression contributes towards lowering of self esteem among adolescents. Visualizing the gender differences, gender plays a significant role in prevalence of loneliness and depression. The high prevalence of loneliness along with depression was noted in female adolescents (N=200) indicating the severity of the loneliness and depression among girl adolescents in the age group of 13-18 years. Further, focusing on the relationship between loneliness and depression the findings elucidate that both has significant and positive and intense association with each other indicating that loneliness force adolescents to become more depressed. This intense and in-depth correlation between the two variables further suggest that this effect their social contacts, behavior and persona of the students by making fluctuations in their self esteem ranging from (25-100) points.

## Conclusion

Gender differences contribute towards loneliness and depression rates throughout adolescence, especially for girls. Based on reviews and conducted research, we can say that a chain exists between loneliness, depression and self esteem of adolescents studying in 10 senior secondary schools of Chandigarh. Emphasizing the psycho-social aspects, we can say that gender

differences occur among adolescents due to variety of factors viz; environmental diversity, domain of physical attractiveness, incapability to make decisions which govern their life, loss of interest in others, worthless feeling and trouble to have fun; emotional disturbances, thinking critically all the time, selfish motives and so on. In other words we can say that the interplay of loneliness and depression with self esteem moderating role of gender was studied which suggest that female adolescents in the emerging scenario has to pay the cost of the social taboo and social values to overcome their anxiety and peer pressure which in turn make them lonely and depressed. This create problems in their life by negating factors like; trust issues with opposite gender, trouble to have fun and party around, stupid to become modern and so on. The results of the present study provide an insight to understand the feelings, emotions of adolescents by studying their self esteem under dimensions viz; social self and personal self.

The results of the study further observed that there was significant negative correlation between self esteem and loneliness; self esteem and depression; indicating that girls remain disturbed with vague thoughts, feelings and beliefs associated with expression of love, physical fitness and social remarks. Further, loneliness and depression are also significant positively correlated with each other with different engender situations indicating that loneliness and depression lower the self esteem of adolescents by different levels.

In a nutshell, we can say that loneliness leads to depression and both of them lowers the self esteem of adolescents.

### **Educational Implications**

1. The findings no doubt give necessary insight to parents, teachers and administrators to learn how female adolescents can combat their depression and loneliness in them by learning new skills of 21<sup>st</sup> century. This in turn will prepare them to fight with help fo high self esteem.
2. The findings of the present study connects gender with loneliness and depression by suggesting that teachers and parents to create empathy among adolescents.

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