



A Comparative study on Loneliness and Psychological Distress among Young Adults Living with Family and Living away from Family

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Abstract: Mental health is a growing concern in today's fast - paced world. There are many factors influencing psychological - wellbeing but loneliness and psychological distress have emerged as major area of study. Loneliness is a feeling of isolation and emptiness due to lack of meaningful connections. Whereas, psychological distress includes symptoms of anxiety, depression, emotional discomfort that affect daily activities. This study explores the relationship between loneliness and psychological distress among young adults living with family and those living away from family. A sample of 60 participants (30 in each group) was assessed using A sample of 60 participants (30 in each group) from southern region of India was assessed using two standardised instruments: UCLA loneliness scale (version 3) and Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10). The results revealed Individuals living away from their families reported significantly higher levels of psychological distress and loneliness compared to those residing with their families. These insights could help develop strategies to improve mental health of young adults

Keywords: *Loneliness, Psychological Distress, Young Adults*

1. Introduction

"The most terrible poverty is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved"

Mother Teresa

Loneliness is an unpleasant emotion that causes distress and discomfort in individuals due to being socially isolated. It is a feeling of not having friends or not being able to connect to others around and feeling sad about it. The feeling of being disconnected, feeling pressured,

being social compared and moving through transitions between life stages are a few causes of loneliness among young adults.

On the other hand, Psychological distress is also an unpleasant feeling caused due to external events. It can significantly impact the wellbeing of an individual. Psychological distress can be caused due to sudden unexpected events like death of a loved one, social isolation or loneliness, trauma etc.. Psychological distress and loneliness are serious mental health concerns in the modern society. According to research, individuals living away from family face more loneliness and psychological distress as compared to individuals living with the family. Humans rely on safe surroundings to survive and thrive. Issues like social isolation or loneliness increase the feeling of vulnerability which alters psychological processes which impacts the physiological process, sleep quality, and increased mortality (Hawley and Cacioppo, 2010).

A community based study was conducted in Gujrat, India in 2024 involving 250 elderly participants. It was found out that 40% individuals experienced moderate to severe loneliness. The study also showed poor health behaviours, such as poor diet, lack of sleep, and reduced exercise (National Library of Medicine, 2024). Another study was done in U.S by National Health Interview Survey in 2021. It was found that adults living alone reported higher rates depression (6.4%) compared to those living with others (4.1%). This trend was consistent across various demographics, including gender, race, and income levels (National Health Interview Survey, 2021).

1.1 Loneliness

“Loneliness is the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person’s network of social relationship is deficient in some important way, either quantitatively or qualitatively” (Perlman and Peplau, 1981). According to Rogers (1970, 1973), “Loneliness occurs when individuals, having dropped their defences to get in touch with their sleeves, nonetheless expect rejection from others.”

A study was conducted on college students to examine the relationship between loneliness and individual dimension of distress using Symptom Checklist- 90 and UCLA-R Loneliness Scale. It was found that there is a significant correlation between loneliness and interpersonal sensitivity (low self-esteem) and depression. Results supported that self-blame and self-devaluation were strongly correlated to loneliness (Jackson & Cochran, 2012).

A study was conducted on a sample of 220 Latin undergraduate students to examine the relationship between loneliness and psychological distress. Ecological momentary assessment approach was used and the students reported their loneliness levels and

psychological distress twice a day for two weeks. It was found that students experienced higher than usual levels of loneliness and greater sadness, stress, and anxiety at both the moment-to-moment and day-to-day (Yung et al., 2021).

A study was conducted on 80 students (40 borders and 40 day scholars) from university to investigate the level of depression and anxiety and the role of social support by using convenience sampling method. Aga Khan University Anxiety Depression Scale AKUADS and Multidimensional Scale for Perceived Social Support were used. 't' test was applied to find the results. It was found out that the level of depression and anxiety was higher in boarders as compared to day scholars and it was seen, support was low in boarders as compared to day scholars (Iqbal, 2015).

A study was conducted among young student hostellers from various colleges in Kerala Perceived loneliness scale by Jha and Adjustment scale by Anderson, Guan and Koc. The statistical tools of Karl Pearson product moment correlation coefficient, ANOVA and t- test were used. It was found out that there is significant influence of perceived loneliness on overall academic adjustment. It was concluded that perceived loneliness does have an impact on academic adjustment (Dr. George and Vinod, 2023)

1.2 Psychological Distress

According to Mirowsky and Ross (2002) psychological distress is largely defined as “a state of emotional suffering characterized by symptoms of depression (e.g. lost interest; sadness; hopelessness) and anxiety (e.g. restlessness; feeling tense). Cuijpers (2009) defined psychological distress as “non-specific symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression. High levels of psychological distress is indicative of impaired of mental health and may reflect common mental disorders, like depressive and anxiety disorders.”

A study was conducted on 2,871 adults to study psychological distress during the COVID-19 lockdown. Three subsamples were taken- 18-30, 30-50, >50 using online questionnaires during lockdown. It was found out young adults reported lower levels of living space, occupational activity, social contact and alcohol use but higher levels of anxiety, depression and uncertainty than older adults (Glowacz & Schmits, 2020).

A study was conducted on young adults from three different universities to examine the relationship between college career stage, negative life events, and psychological distress using a survey method which included life events inventory and several psychological distress scales. It was found that younger students were more likely than older students to be angry and hostile. It was also assumed that younger students lacked psychological resources of maturity,

and they adopt such coping strategies which are ineffective in stressful situations (Jackson and Finney, 2002).

Another study was conducted on 80 adolescents (40 hostellers and 40 day scholars) in the age group of 11-17 i.e. students from grade 6 to grade 11. UCLA loneliness scale, Screen for child anxiety related disorders and 11- item Kutcher adolescent depression scale was used. It was found that scores in all domains including panic disorders and loneliness were higher in adolescents living in hostels (Nayar et al., 2018).

1.3 Purpose

The purpose is to study a comparative study on loneliness and psychological distress among young adults living with family and young adults living away from family

1.4 Hypothesis

H1: There is a significant difference between young adults living away from family and living with family on loneliness.

H2: There is a significant difference between young adults living away from family and living with family in psychological distress.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample

A total sample of 60 young adults (N=60) was collected from various colleges across Bangalore.

2.2 Measure

UCLA loneliness scale (version 3): It was developed by psychologist Daniel Russell in the year 1996. It was a 20 item scale and included response rate as (1= never; 4= always) that assessed how often a person feels disconnected from others.

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10): It was developed by professors Kessler and Mroczek in the year 1992. It involved 10 questions and included response rate as (1= none of the time; 5= all the time) related to the emotional state of an individual.

2.3 Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the responses were obtained through google forms. Each participant was thanked for their help, cooperation and for taking out time for filling up this form. The data was obtained using psychological standardised instruments.

3. Results

Table 1: Showing independent sample t-test

		Statistic	df	p
Psychological distress	Student's t	1.90	58.0	0.062
Loneliness	Student's t	3.17	58.0	0.002

Note. $H_a \mu_{\text{Live away from family}} \neq \mu_{\text{Live with family}}$

Table 2: Showing group descriptives

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Psychological distress	Live away from family	30	31.8	33.0	9.97	1.82
	Live with family	30	26.7	24.5	10.80	1.97
Loneliness	Live away from family	30	51.4	49.5	11.40	2.08
	Live with family	30	42.7	42.5	9.83	1.79

4. Discussion

The current study explored the relationship between loneliness and psychological distress among young adults living with family and away from family. The sample comprises of 60 young adults living with family and living away from family from various schools and colleges located in southern regions of India. Data was collected using UCLA loneliness scale (version 3), and the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) to access the respective constructs of loneliness and psychological distress. The study aims to understand how these psychological factors affect the well - being of young adults based on their living situations.

Table 1 shows the results of the independent samples of t-test and reveal that there is a significant difference between young adults living with family and living away from family in the variable loneliness. However, there is no significant difference between the two groups in terms of psychological distress. For Loneliness, the t-statistic is 3.17 with a p-value of 0.002, indicating difference between the two groups. This suggests that being physically distant from family may lead to increased feelings of isolation. In contrast, for Psychological distress, the t-statistics is 1.90 with a p-value of 0.06, indicating no significant difference between young adults living with family and those living away from family. While young adults living away from family reported slightly higher average distress scores, this difference did not reach

significance, indicating that other factors may also influence psychological distress beyond living arrangements alone.

Table 2, shows the group descriptive statistics highlighting the psychological profile of 60 participants between the following variables : loneliness and psychological distress. The data reveals that individuals who live away from family report higher levels of both psychological distress and loneliness. The mean for psychological distress for those living away from family was 31.8 as compared 26.7 for individuals living with the family. Similarly, the mean was higher in the group living away that was 51.4 than in the group living with the family which was 42.7. In conclusion, there is significant differences between individuals living with family and those living away from family in both the variables tested.

These findings are in line with the existing studies that emphasizes the protective support of familial support in mental health. Presence of a family provides a sense of belonging, emotional support as well as social support which can reduce the feelings of loneliness and psychological distress. On the other hand, being away from family may reduce social support, leading to increased vulnerability to psychological challenges.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explored the relationship between loneliness and psychological distress among individuals living with family and those living away in southern regions of India. There was significant difference in loneliness and psychological distress between both the groups. Loneliness and psychological distress was higher in individuals living away from family as compared to those living with the family. The findings of this study highlight the impact of living arrangements on mental health. This suggests that the presence of family serve as a protective factor, providing emotional and social support. These findings also support other studies, such as those by Nayar et al. (2018) and Iqbal (2015) which also found strong association among the variables between two groups.

In India, where family bonds are deeply valued, these outcomes are absolutely meaningful. They underscore the need for mental health interventions that consider living situations and social support systems.

Limitations of the study include the relatively small sample size of 60 young adults and the potential cultural differences influencing the variables, which may limit generalizability. Adding to that, the use of self-report measures could introduce bias. Factors such as socioeconomic status, peer support, personality traits, or quality of family relationships were not controlled for, which may have influenced the results. Future studies should explore the

family dynamics, quality of family relations, coping mechanisms to gain more understanding of how living situations shape emotional wellbeing.

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