

A study on the loneliness of secondary school students during Covid 19 pandemic period

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Abstract: *Now the entire world is facing a serious threat due to COVID-19 pandemic. Schools remain closed. Students are still at their home. The aim of the present study is to find out the level of loneliness of secondary school students during Covid 19 pandemic period. This study was conducted on a sample of 300 secondary school students belonging to the age group-13-15. A Loneliness Scale was administered through online to collect data for the present study and were analysed. The result showed that most of the students have loneliness during this Covid 19 pandemic period. Further the study revealed that there is significant difference in loneliness of secondary school students with respect to their gender and there exists no significant difference in loneliness of secondary school students with respect to their locality and syllabus. The study suggested that appropriate coping strategies are needed to introduce in order to reduce loneliness and to protect the mental health of secondary school students during this pandemic period.*

Keywords: Loneliness; Secondary School Students; Covid 19 Pandemic.

1. Introduction

Nowadays we are facing a serious threat of COVID-19 pandemic. The Government insisted everyone in the state to follow COVID 19 protocols. COVID-19 pandemic has affected all most all spheres of life including education, particularly school education. Unfortunately school education around the world is facing an unprecedented challenge in the wake of COVID -19. The schools were forced to close abruptly because of the pandemic enforced lock down situation. The COVID19 pandemic has necessitated physical distancing, obligations to keep the announced protocols' and loss of familiar environment. Children remained in their home. The children started to learn from home through online mode. Opportunity to go out became a big problem. With adequate rules and regulations parents went out to earn money. Some of them became lonely.

Loneliness is an unwanted and disturbing feeling. Loneliness is feeling alone in oneself or incomplete or not satisfied enough rather than being physically alone. Unlike loneliness, if being alone is the result of a preferred choice, it may not cause the feeling of loneliness. Loneliness is a common and distressing problem. Even though on different levels, most of the people experience loneliness at least once in their lives .It is described as the discrepancy between the desired relationships and the actual relationships.

The important reasons that may lead to loneliness are: difficulties in meeting new people due to access issues, losing a loved one or friend through death or relocation, lack of close family ties, living alone, an introverted personalities, or feeling like you don't belong, feelings of loss or grief, poor physical health, frailty, mobility issues, a mental health condition such as depression or anxiety, inability to participate in activities due to access issues, mobility, illness, transport, geographic isolation etc.

Long periods of loneliness or social isolation can have a negative impact on our physical, mental and social health. Some signs include:

- Physical symptoms – aches and pains, headaches, illness or worsening of medical conditions
- Mental health conditions – increased risk of depression, anxiety, paranoia or panic attacks
- Low energy – tiredness or lack of motivation
- Sleep problems – difficulty getting to sleep, waking frequently or sleeping too much
- Diet problems – loss of appetite, sudden weight gain or loss
- Substance use – Increased consumption of alcohol, smoking, medications, drugs
- Negative feelings – feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness or thoughts about suicide.

Loneliness is sometimes long lasting feeling of having no alternative to turn to in times of distress and depression. Generally it is observed as a period of heightened cognitive discomfort and uneasiness from being oneself. There are a variety of psychological explanations for perceived loneliness, some disagreeing on the essence of the condition. Loneliness can cause withdrawal from social relations, which then limits opportunities for adolescents to further develop social skills (Qualter et al. 2015). Empirical studies have demonstrated that, across development, loneliness is related to lower self-reported social skills in different age groups (Qualter et al. 2015)

2. Need and significance of the study

Loneliness is a complex and an unpleasant emotional response to isolation, which typically includes anxious feelings about a lack of connection or communication with other beings, both in the present and extending into the future. Loneliness has a serious health risk. There are specific reasons for such loneliness among secondary school students. The broken and 'depthless' family relations, lack of communication among family members and peer group may some of the reasons: These worries may lead to loneliness in general, depression, (Source: Elsevier: Edited by, Vincent van Hasselt, title of the paper: 'Aggressive behavior', psychological journal). No one bothers about their mental health rather all focus on academic performance of the students to measure their capabilities. The academic stress may lead to loneliness, students those who undergo the same may have a tendency to get away from the peer group finally turning as introverts. The nuclear family cult catalyzed the loneliness process among secondary school students and lack of 'joint family' had created a feel that there is no one to hear and attend them. The rise of 'Ego' among

parents, the work pressure that the parents undergo reflected in their behavior and they forgot to empathize with their wards.

Now we are living in the age of Covid 19 pandemic period. Ability to meet the loved ones denied. Parents went out for job. Children became closed in their homes. Students are not able to meet their friend and teachers. Most of the children became lonely particularly the single child. School absence leads to less social interaction and can result in some children completely losing touch with friends. A 2017 systematic review of 40 studies from 1950 to 2016 published in the Journal Public Health found a significant association between social isolation and loneliness and poorer mental health outcomes as well as all-cause mortality. Research studies revealed that social support from friends” and “spending spare time with friends” were the strongest protective factors against mental disorders among adolescents. Studies have found that friendship-related loneliness is more explanatory for depressive symptoms among adolescents than parent-related loneliness. One possible explanation is that friends are the preferred source of social support during adolescence ((Qualter et al. 2015). These issues to be addressed with due respect and priority, if the future ‘academicians’ fail to address these issues, who else will do it for the society and wellbeing of the student community? The sub variables like gender, curriculum, stream of study are treated with due importance .This was the main impulse behind the choice of this study *‘The loneliness of secondary school students during Covid 19 pandemic period.*

1. Objectives of the Study

1. To study the level of Loneliness of secondary school students during Covid 19 pandemic period
2. To study the difference in Loneliness of secondary school students during Covid 19 pandemic period with respect to their Gender (Boys / Girls) Locality and Syllabus (State/CBSE) .

2. Hypotheses of the Study

1. The Loneliness of secondary school students during Covid 19 pandemic period is at average level.
2. There is significant difference among secondary school students in Loneliness during Covid 19 pandemic period with respect to their Gender (Boys / Girls), Locality and Syllabus (State/CBSE).

3. Methodology

The method adopted for the present study was normative survey method. All secondary school students of Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala constituted the population for the present study. The study was conducted on a representative sample of 300 Secondary School schools students of various schools under State and Central Board of Secondary Education. The sample was selected by stratified random sampling technique. A Loneliness Scale was administered through Google form in order to collect relevant data for the present study. The collected data were analysed by means of statistical techniques mean, standard deviation and ‘t’ test.

4. Analysis and Interpretation of data

Table 1
Mean and Standard Deviation of the Loneliness Scores of the Total Sample

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D</i>
Loneliness	300	65.09	8.89

The Table 1 shows that the mean score of Loneliness of total sample is 65.09 and the standard deviation is 8.89.

Table 2
Level of Loneliness of Secondary School Students during Covid 19 Pandemic Period

Sl.No	Level of Loneliness	Total number of students	Percentage (%)
1	High	96	32%
2	Average	129	43%
3	Low	75	25%
Total		300	100

The Table 2 shows that during this Covid 19 pandemic period, 32%, of secondary school students have high level of Loneliness where as 43% and 25% have average and low level of loneliness respectively.

Table 3
Comparison of Loneliness Scores of Secondary School Students on the basis of Gender

Variable	Gender	No.	Mean	S.D	t- value	Significance
Loneliness	Boy	136	63.87	10.05	2.01	Significant at 0.05 level
	Girl	164	66.01	8.02		

The Table 3 indicates that the computed t value is 2.01. The critical value of t with 298 degrees of freedom (df) at 0.05 level of significance is 1.96. The computed t value 2.01 is greater than the critical value. Hence there is significant difference between the mean Loneliness scores of girls and boys at 0.05 level. The mean score of girls (66.01) is greater than that of boys (63.87). Hence it can be inferred that girls are lonelier than boys during Covid 19 pandemic period.

Table 4
Comparison of Loneliness Scores of Secondary School Students on the basis of Locality

Variable	Locality	No.	Mean	S.D	t- value	Significance
Loneliness	Rural	160	65.01	7.39	1.31	Not Significant at 0.05 level
	Urban	140	63.82	6.58		

The Table 4 indicates that the computed t value is 1.31. The critical value of t with 298 degrees of freedom (df) at 0.05 level of significance is 1.96. The computed t value 1.31 is smaller than the critical value. Hence there is no significant difference between the mean Loneliness scores of rural and urban secondary school students. The mean score of rural students (65.01) is greater than that of urban students (63.82). Hence rural students are more lonely than urban students during Covid 19 pandemic period.

Table 5
Comparison of Loneliness Scores of Secondary School Students on the basis of Syllabus

Variable	Syllabus	No.	Mean	S.D	t- value	Significance
Loneliness	StateSyllabus	150	65.67	7.90	0.927	Significant at 0.05 level
	CBSE	150	64.92	6.07		

The Table 5 indicates that the computed t value is 0.927. The critical value of t with 298 degrees of freedom (df) at 0.05 level of significance is 1.96. The computed t value 0.927 is less than the critical value. Hence there is no significant difference between the mean Loneliness scores of State Syllabus and CBSE Syllabus students during Covid 19 pandemic period.

5. Findings of the Study

- Percentage analysis shows 32%, 43% and 25% of secondary school students studying in secondary school students have high, average and low level of Loneliness respectively during Covid 19 pandemic period
- The computed t value 2.01 is greater than the critical value and hence there is significant difference between the mean Loneliness scores of girls and boys at 0.05 level. The mean score of girls (66.01) is greater than that of boys (63.87). Hence it can be inferred that girls are lonelier than boys during Covid 19 pandemic period.
- The computed t value is 0.131 less than the critical value and hence there is no significant difference between the mean Loneliness scores of rural and urban students during Covid 19 pandemic period.
- The computed t value 0.927 is less than the critical value. Hence there is no significant difference between the mean Loneliness scores of State Syllabus and CBSE Syllabus students during Covid 19 pandemic period.

6. Suggestions

From the findings of the study it can be inferred that most of the secondary school students are lonely at home during this Covid 19 pandemic period. Due to the fear of getting Corona virus the students are still at home and they were not able to meet their loved ones. Opportunities for enjoyment were declined due to the spread of Covid 19 pandemic. Involvement and participation in games and sports, group activities and team activities were denied. Based on the findings of the study to lower the level of loneliness in students the following suggestions were made. Allow them to meet and spend time with positive people who enhance student's life. Reading, writing, watching shows, listening to music, doing projects or finding other activities that interest etc. should be encouraged. The parents and teachers should provide a strong support system that will help them to engage in so many activities which makes them happy. The parents as well as the teachers should not put too pressure on the students. Parents should spend ample time with them and give positive reinforcement to their children. Allow them to communicate with others. If needed necessary guidance and counselling should be given to secondary school students.

7. Conclusions

The present study revealed that the rate of loneliness among secondary school students is high during this Covid19 Pandemic period. Earlier studies revealed that loneliness may lead to mental health problems. To stay in touch with other people is the most important thing we can do to combat loneliness during this pandemic situation. To conclude that prevention of loneliness may be a protective factor against depression and other mental ailments. Staying in touch with family and friends during this pandemic period will help to overcome loneliness to some extent. One can also combat loneliness by participating in online exchanges with other people around the world. Start each day with a plan of a few things that will do and be proactive about the situation. All these will help to get through loneliness.

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