

## Mental Health and Loneliness During Covid-19

Mandeep Kaur<sup>1\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

In 2020, the world was brought to a standstill with the spread of Coronavirus. Lockdowns were imposed all over the world and people were asked to stay at homes. In such conditions, when people were exercising "social distancing", a sense of loneliness was felt among people who were separated from their loved ones for extended periods. Many people stuck in their temporary residences experienced an immense state of solitude and loneliness. These conditions had a direct impact on the mental health of people. People often tend to neglect their mental health. When put under such stressful conditions, the effects of the environment on people's mental health can be drastic. With the feeling of loneliness among people at its peak, right now is the optimum time to measure the relation of loneliness with the variable of mental health. This study was conducted to see the effect of loneliness on mental health. The data was collected from 35 young adults aged 18-35 years. The standardized scales were used for this purpose. The result obtained indicated a negative correlation between loneliness and mental health as expected. Spending more time with loved ones directly helps maintain a healthy mental state.

**Keywords:** *Mental health, Loneliness, Covid-19*

"Life doesn't make any sense without interdependence. We need each other, and the sooner we learn that the better for us all." — *Erik Erikson*

Sometimes you cannot be prepared for the coming times. Things just happen out of nowhere, often taking you by surprise. Something similar happened when Coronavirus started spreading across the world in 2020. Due to its high contagiousness, a quick solution was devised to contain the spread and resulting mortalities- people were required to stay at home. Colleges, schools, and workplaces were shut down for extended periods. Human beings, part of the highly social species that was used to living outside all the time since the beginning of time, were forced to stay locked inside their houses. People were not prepared for it. They had a hard time adjusting to the changes and the process took a big toll on their mental health. Adjusting to a new lifestyle, changing routines, the stigma of an unknown disease and the uncertainty of their future are just a few of many factors that affected people at that time. At a time when everyone should be together to feel the safety and strength to face the circumstances, lockdowns and travel restrictions have put walls between people. Although this is all being done for their safety, the impact of these

<sup>1</sup>M.A., Department of Psychology, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, India

\*Corresponding Author

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conditions is unimaginable and the repercussions will be felt for a long time. Vindegaar, Benros (2002), in a study found that there is an overall decrease in the psychological well-being of the people. The patients with preexisting disorders are feeling even a greater decline in their symptoms.

One of the researchers also says that the best way to deal with the current crisis will be to provide psychological help to the people to prevent their conditions from escalating. If physical interventions are not possible, the medium of online services could be used. (Talevi, Socci, Carai, Carnaghi, Faleri, Trebbi, Bernardo, Capelli, Pacitti, 2020)

### **MENTAL HEALTH**

Mental health is defined by the World Health Organization as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his or her community."

Mental health is even more important than physical health. There is no point in aiming for only physical health without paying vital attention to mental health. Prince, Patel, Saxena, Maj, Maselko, Phillips & Rahman, (2007) quoted that almost 14% of all diseases are attributed to psychological disorders. This clearly indicates the need to pay attention to the mental health status of a person. Brundtland (2000), in Bulletin of the World Health Organization, quoted that the ten topmost causes of disability all over the world are related to mental health. These are major depression, Schizophrenia, Bipolar disorder, Alcohol use, and OCDs.

It is also known that different genders are more prone to different types of disorders. Rosenfield and Mouzon (2012), it is more likely that females are more prone to internal disorders such as depression and anxiety while males are most likely to exhibit external disorders such as substance abuse.

One external factor that has a direct effect on mental health is the environment. The spread of COVID-19 virus in the world brought unprecedented circumstances. Research by Cullen, Gulati, & Kelly (2020) on mental health during COVID-19 saw that almost 50% of the respondents indicated that these environmental factors had an impact on their psychological health. A number of them also reported increased anxiety and severe depression. People from all age groups were affected. A study conducted on college students by Zhai & Du (2020), found out that one in five students reported signs of mental health crises during the time of COVID-19. They put forward that considering the situation of students, better attention must be paid to mental health services.

### **LONELINESS**

Loneliness in general is described as an emotional state and not just a physical state. It indicates the state of aloofness and seclusion. Loneliness, as defined by the APA dictionary, is an affective and cognitive component creating distress or disquiet from the feeling of being alone or solitary.

There are many effects of loneliness on a person. A study by Cacioppo, Hawkley (2009) found that loneliness is an unhealthy state with irreversible serious effects on health. It affects physical as well as psychological health, sleep and even increases organism wear and tear.

## Mental Health and Loneliness During Covid-19

During COVID-19, due to the lockdowns imposed all over the world by the governments, people were forced to stay at home and work from home. A study done during this time proved that loneliness increased considerably during the pandemic caused by restrictions put on by governments. The feeling of loneliness was also correlated with larger thoughts of suicide and depression. (Cacioppo, Hawkley, Crawford, Ernst, Burleson, Kowalewski, Malarkey, Van Cauter, & Berntson, (2002))

Luchetti, Lee, Aschwanden, Sesker, Strickhouse, Terracciano, & Sutin (2020), did a longitudinal study to check the increase in loneliness among people over the time of lockdown. They found that people residing all by themselves and with chronic conditions indicated feeling aloofness.

The time was even tougher for people who caught the disease and were asked to self-isolate for 14 days. Li and Wang (2020), reported that people with COVID-19 reported more loneliness than other people. Also, over one-third of the participants felt lonely during the times of COVID-19 and reported loneliness often or sometimes. The proportion of psychiatric disorders also increased in combination with loneliness. Females and the younger generation were more prone to the risk of mental disorder and loneliness. Living with a companion and having employment decreased their probability. (Killgore, Cloonan, Taylor, & Dailey (2020))

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this study is to see a correlation between mental health and loneliness.

### *Hypothesis*

There will be a negative correlation between loneliness and mental health.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Sample*

The study was conducted on 35 people from Amritsar and Chandigarh city. The data was collected from young adults of age 18-35 of both genders.

### *Measure*

- **Perceived Loneliness Scale:** The scale was developed by Jha, 1997. It comprises a total of 36 items and is scored on 5 points Likert scale. The response varies from totally agree to totally disagree. A score of 5 indicates high loneliness and a score of 1 indicates low loneliness. Hence, a high score will be seen as high loneliness. The total range of scores is from 36 to 180.
- **Mental Health Continuum:** This scale was developed by Keyes in 2002. It is a 14 item tool. The answer is on a 6 point Likert scale. It follows the tripartite model. The types of well-being it measures are- Emotional, Social, and Psychological. Low scores indicate the unhealthy status of a person.

### *Procedure*

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through Google forms. The participants were thanked for their cooperation and help. Standardized psychological tests were administered to the participants.

## RESULTS

The response of the participants was analyzed. Mean, Standard deviation, and Correlations were calculated to analyze the relation between loneliness and mental health. The data was computed in the tables given below.

*Table 1: Showing Mean and Standard deviation.*

	mental health	Loneliness
N	35	35
Mean	43.0	104
Standard deviation	15.2	17.3

*Table 2: Showing Correlation*

	Loneliness		mental health
Loneliness	—		
mental health	-0.561	***	—

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## DISCUSSION

The result indicated a clear-cut negative correlation between loneliness and mental health ( $r=0.561$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). The hypothesis regarding the negative relation of two variables, i.e., if one increases the other one should decrease, was accepted. This follows the general understanding that an increase in the feeling of loneliness in a person does not have a positive effect on their mental health.

## CONCLUSION

It is quite evident that people who have a feeling of being alone feel that they have nobody to share with find fewer opportunities to grow and lesser reasons to be happy. Humans are social animals. We learn to live in societies and any reason that makes us feel that we are being neglected has a negative effect on our well being. It is well-proven by now that people who have several friends and a bigger social circle are better at dealing with their adversities. Singer (2018), published an article in the Journal of Aging on the effect of isolation on mental health. He very clearly pointed out that loneliness has the same effect on health as any serious medical condition can have. All the physiological processes are also affected by the persons' continuance in condition. The researchers have been aware of this reason for a long time now. Rook (1987), pointed out that companionship is very important and plays a major role in the well-being of the person. Over time, it was also found that it is important to have healthy relationships because sometimes toxic relationships can have even more negative effects than loneliness. It is important to keep connecting with the people around us and checking on them. Even if we are locked down at home, let us not lock the relationships and instead use technology to keep in touch with the people around us. Everyone is going through similar conditions and we need to feel that we are together in this. Those who feel that they are lonely and lack meaningful relations try to contribute to society by being selfless, as sometimes that works. People who contribute more to society feel more involved in it. Humans have mastered communication in its most evolved form. It is better if we use that weapon judiciously and develop a sense of oneness among society.

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***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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