Research Paper

Loneliness and Satisfaction with Life among Young Adults Belonging to Nuclear and Joint families

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Objective: Loneliness has become a global health problem and different aspects of family has found to have significant association with it. This study tries to analyze the difference in loneliness and life satisfaction among young adults belonging to nuclear and joint families. It also tries to examine the gender difference present in nuclear and joint families for both variables *Method:* The sample consisted of 136 young adults belonging to nuclear and joint families. It included equal number of males and females. The UCLA Loneliness Scale (version 3) and The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) were used to collect the data. An independent sample t test was conducted to find the difference and Pearson Product moment correlation was used to find the association between variables. *Results:* No significant difference was found in loneliness and life satisfaction. It was also found that no gender differences existed, for both variables, between nuclear and joint families but loneliness was higher in females of joint families and compared to males. Similarly, no significant difference was found in correlation between both families. *Conclusion:* Results show no difference in loneliness and life satisfaction between nuclear and joint families which is consistent with findings of other studies examining same age group but inconsistent with studies focusing on other age groups like adolescents and geriatrics. These findings indicate that age group might be the reason behind inconsistent results found across different studies.

Keywords: *Loneliness, Satisfaction with Life, Family Type, Nuclear Family, Joint Family*

Decades of research has found that family has a huge impact on individual's behavior and their mental health. Different areas of family that have been in constant interest includes Family environment, parent-child relationship, family conflict, family violence etc. In this paper we will be focusing on family types which is a relatively less studied area and is significantly affected by culture. Sharma (2013) redefined family structure according to current times. He proposed seven types of structure, Proton (Single individual), Electron (no married couple), Nuclear (single married couple with/without their children), Atom (nuclear family with any other family member but no other married couple), Molecular (exactly two married couple from any different generations with/without unmarried people of any other generation), Joint (two or more married couple of single

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generation or three or more couples in multiple generation), Quasi (for couples in living). This paper's focus will be on nuclear (single married couples with/without their children) and joint (two or more married couples of single generation or three or more couples in multiple generation) family structure.

Data from Kantar indicates that in 2022, 50% of the 318 million houses in India were nuclear, an increase from 37% of households in 2008. This is a big change compared to 2008. The difference between nuclear and joint family structure is not just about the number of people living together, it's also about the role of individuals, Academic achievement (Bilal et al., 2013), Healthcare awareness (Bansal et al., 2014), Financial support (Parihar et al., 2017), Emotional competence (Suthar, 2014). Ramchandra and Salunkhe (2014) conducted a study in selected rural areas, focusing on the psychosocial problems of the geriatric population in nuclear versus joint families. With a sample size of 100 elderly individuals, the study identified a higher prevalence of visual problems, hypertension, arthritis, and other diseases in nuclear families compared to joint families. The authors emphasized the impact of family type on the health status of the elderly, underscoring the need for familial and societal support during this life stage. Considering this it is necessary to understand the effect of family type on other mental health issues.

Recently WHO declared loneliness as a global health threat. It has also launched an international commission to address this issue. Research has found that loneliness is significantly associated with younger age (Barreto et al., 2021), gender where male reported more loneliness (Barreto et al., 2021; Chen & Chung, 2007), lower economic status (Kung et al., 2022), marriage (Stack, 1998), inter-parental conflict & weaker family cohesion (Johnson et al., 2001), lower self-reported general health & more self-reported physical symptoms (Segrin et al., 2012), social support (Zhou et al., 2016), unstable attachment style (Fujimori et al., 2017), decreased social support (Pehlıvan et al., 2011), social connectedness (Chen & Chung, 2007), individualism (Barreto et al., 2021). Most of these researches indicate that there is significant association between loneliness and different aspects of family.

Ayla and Kanwal (2018) conducted a study in the Haripur district of Pakistan, focusing on individuals aged 50 and above. Their research, involving 246 participants, revealed a significant association between family structure and loneliness. Elders in nuclear family systems reported higher levels of loneliness compared to those in joint family systems. The collective care provided in joint families was identified as a mitigating factor against loneliness in the elderly. Additionally, the study highlighted a gender disparity, with females experiencing higher levels of loneliness than males. In a follow up study the researchers explored the influence of family structure on social and emotional loneliness among elders in Haripur, Pakistan. Their study, involving the same sample size and age group, corroborated the previous findings. Emotional and social loneliness were identified as more prevalent in nuclear family systems, particularly among the elderly. Shifting the focus to young adults, Agrawal et al. (2023) conducted a study with 134 participants aged 18 to 22 in India. Their research, utilizing the UCLA loneliness scale, found no substantial difference in the levels of loneliness between young adults from joint families and nuclear families. This suggests that family structure may have varying effects on loneliness across different age groups. Contradictory to this finding, Sultana et al. (2019) found that university students from nuclear families exhibited higher loneliness scores compared to those in joint families. However, gender did not emerge as a significant factor affecting loneliness in this context. Narain (2021) mentioned in her study that strong bonds, irrespective of nuclear or joint

family structure, were associated with low levels of loneliness among adolescents. Nikhat (2017) explored the effect of perceived loneliness on achievement motivation, self-esteem, and locus of control among adolescents. With a sample of 300 adolescents aged 16-17, the study revealed that adolescents from nuclear families experienced higher perceived loneliness compared to their counterparts in joint families.

The collective evidence from these studies suggests a consistent association between family structure and loneliness across different age groups in South Asian contexts. The bulk of research focuses on older adults and studies focusing on young adults yield contradictory results (Sultana et al., 2019; Agrawal et al., 2023). While the elderly in nuclear families appear more vulnerable to loneliness and depression, the impact on young adults and adolescents is less clear. Keeping this in mind, samples of this research will be restricted to young Adults. Gender differences in relation to loneliness and family type will also be examined which is a relatively understudied area.

As we shift from disease models towards a more optimal functioning approach, satisfaction with life has become a major topic for research. Especially since it has been found that satisfaction with life is a component of subjective well-being (Diener et al. 1999). Life satisfaction is the cognitive assessment of an individual's life done by themselves (Shin & Johnson, 1978), it's a subjective evaluation which an individual does with his own idea of life. It has been found that life satisfaction is positively associated with many health behaviors in young adults (Grant et al., 2009). Erik Erikson believed that adulthood is a stage of 'intimacy vs. isolation' where our main task is to develop quality relationships and researchers have found that perceived social support is associated with the individual's family structure (Shamim et al., 2013). Mehendale et al. (2017) investigated life satisfaction and resilience amongst parents who live with their married children and who do not live with their married children. The study revealed that whether parents live with their married children or not doesn't make a significant difference. Mangai (2019) also found that there is no significant difference in the level of satisfaction among couples of joint family and nuclear family. His sample consisted of a total of 78 married individuals, with an equal distribution of 39 men and 39 women. Additionally, the sample consisted of 39 individuals from joint families and 39 from nuclear families. All ranged in age from 25 to 48 years.

Contrary to the above findings Qureshi et al. (2023) found that older adults from nuclear families exhibit less life satisfaction as compared to those from joint families because there are fewer members to fulfill their needs and provide support. Similarly, Lodhi, (2019) assessed the level of satisfaction and its predictors among joint and nuclear family systems in Pakistan. The study consists of a total of 2063 participants, 1050 from joint families and 1010 from nuclear family systems. Participants aged 18–30 were more in joint families, and those aged 31–40 were more in nuclear families. It was found that satisfaction levels were higher in joint families than in nuclear families for both groups. High level of education and high (SES) socio-economic status played a very important role as a predictor of satisfaction. Swarnalatha (2007) used the interview method to assess the level of satisfaction among elderly women. Data was collected from 400 older women (60+). A high level of satisfaction was observed in nuclear families (31.9%), while it was 26.4% in joint families.

The wide range of research that have been provided emphasizes the intricate relationship that exists between satisfaction with life and family structure in various cultural and demographic contexts. Qureshi et al. (2023) and Lodhi (2019) offer opposing viewpoints, indicating that older adults and people in joint families may experience higher levels of

satisfaction due to increased support networks. Mehendale et al. (2017) and Mangai (2019) suggest that living arrangements within families have little impact on satisfaction levels among parents and couples, respectively. These contradictory results highlight the need for more investigation to fully comprehend the complex dynamics of family systems and its affects. The relationship between life satisfaction and family type in adults is a relatively understudied area. Much of the research focuses on older adults and relatively less is known about the association of family structure with life satisfaction in adults.

METHODS

Objective

- To study the difference in loneliness and life satisfaction among nuclear and joint families.
- To study the difference in loneliness among male and female of nuclear and joint families.
- To study the difference in life satisfaction among male and female of nuclear and joint families.

Hypothesis

- **H1:** There would be significant difference in loneliness and life satisfaction between nuclear and joint families.
- **H2:** There would be significant difference in loneliness and life satisfaction among male and female of nuclear and joint families.
- **H3:** There would be significant difference in correlation between loneliness and life satisfaction among nuclear and joint families.

Participants and Sampling

The data was collected using convenience sampling method. Thisstudy includes a total sample of 136 college going young adults from nuclear (n = 68) and joint family (n = 68) were evenly divided, consisting of female (n = 34) and male (n = 34) having age range of 18 to 25 years old. Sample collection was done through both online mode (Google form) and physical mode (questionnaire).

Instruments

- **The UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3):** UCLA Loneliness scale developed by Daniel W. Russell is used to measure the level of loneliness. It has 20 items total—11 positive and 9 negative—that are assessed on a 4-point Likert scale; higher scores correspond to feelings of loneliness. The first question on the scale is, "How often do you... feel part of a group of friends?" The response format, which ranges from Never (1) to Often (4), reflects the frequency of feelings. The total score is the sum of the 20 items, which have a range of 20 to 80. The scale's validity is supported by associations with self-reported loneliness and associated emotional states, as well as by involvement in a "loneliness clinic". It was found that the UCLA-3 has internal consistency estimates ranging from .89 to .94 (Lasgaard, 2007; Russell, 1996)
- **The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS):** The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), created in 1985 by Ed Diener and Robert A. Emmons, is a measure used to assess general life satisfaction. The scale, which consists of five items, is designed to capture an individual's subjective assessment of their life as a whole. Each item is scored from 1-7 where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. All items responses are summed to find total score which ranges from 5 to 35. Total score

from 25–29 is considered high Life satisfaction and score between 15–19 are slightly below average, whereas score of 5–14 and 30–35 suggest extremely low or high Life satisfaction, respectively.

Statistical Analysis

Once the study was finished, the data was subjected to statistical analysis. SPSS version 29 was used for the analysis of the data. Independent sample t-test, which assumes equal variances, was used to compare the data after the descriptive statistics were first calculated using the raw data.

RESULTS

The research includes total 136 participants belonging to nuclear (n= 68) and joint family (n= 68) consisting of equal numbers of females (n= 34) and males (n= 34). Participants age ranged from 18 to 25 (M=20.86, *SD*= 1.855). The demographic profiles of participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic profile of participants

Characteristics	N	%
Age		
Mean (SD)	20.86(1.855)	
Gender		
Male	68	50.0
Female	68	50.0
Family type		
Joint family	68	50.0
Nuclear family	68	50.0
Socioeconomic status		
High	5	3.7
Middle	127	93.4
Low	4	2.9
N	136	100

The table 2 shows the difference between loneliness and life satisfaction for young adults in nuclear and joint families. It was evaluated by conducting an independent sample t-test. It is found that there is no significant difference in loneliness between nuclear (*M* = 48.24, *SD* = 9.75) and joint (*M*= 47.84, *SD*= 10.36) families; t(134) =.23, *p*= .82, 95% CI [-3.02, 3.81]. Similarly no significant difference is found in life satisfaction between nuclear family (*M*= 19.87, *SD*= 6.22) and joint family (*M*= 20.13, *SD*= 5.70); t(134) = -.26, *p*=.80, 95% CI[-2.29, 1.76].

Table 2 *Result of independent sample T test on loneliness and life satisfaction between nuclear and joint family*

Variables	Nuclear Family		Joint Family		t(134)	p	Cohen's d
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
Loneliness	48.24	9.75	47.84	10.36	.23	.82	0.04
Life Satisfaction	19.87	6.22	20.13	5.70	-.26	.80	0.04

It is evident from Table 3 that there is no significant difference in loneliness between males ($M = 47.97$, $SD = 10.59$) and females ($M = 48.50$, $SD = 8.996$) of the nuclear family; t(66) = -.22, p =.82, 95% CI [-5.29, 4.23].Additionally, for life satisfaction, there was no statistically significant difference shown between males (M = 19.65, SD = 6.305, N = 34)and females (M = 20.09, SD = 6.215, N = 34) in nuclear families; t (66) =-.291, p =.77, 95% CI [-3.47, 2.59].

Table 3 Comparison male and female of nuclear family for loneliness and life satisfaction

	Males of Nuclear Families		Females of Nuclear Families				
Variables	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**t(66)**	**p**	**Cohen's d**
Loneliness	47.97	10.59	48.50	9	-.22	.82	0.05
Life Satisfaction	19.65	6.30	20.09	6.21	-.29	.77	0.07

Table 4 indicates that loneliness is higher in females ($M = 50.24$, $SD = 10.28$) of the joint families as compared to males ($M = 45.44$, $SD = 10.02$) although there is no significant difference is present between them, t (66) = -1.947, p =.056.

Regarding life satisfaction, the males (M = 21.03, SD = 5.540, N = 34) and females (M = 19.24, SD = 5.790, N = 34) have no significant difference; t (66) = 1.305, p =.196.

Table 4 *Analyze differences in loneliness and life satisfaction among male and female joint family members.*

	Males of Joint Families		Females of Joint Families				
Variables	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**t(66)**	**p**	**Cohen's d**
Loneliness	45.44	10.02	50.24	10.28	-1.95	.06	0.47
Satisfaction with Life	21.03	5.54	19.24	5.79	1.30	.2	0.32

A Pearson correlation analysis was done to examine the association between loneliness and life satisfaction in nuclear and joint families. As indicated in table 6, a significant medium correlation was found in nuclear families $r(68)$= -.41, $p<$ .001, 95% CI [-0.59, -0.19]. Additionally, as shown in table 6, a small but significant correlation was found between loneliness and life satisfaction in joint families r(68)= -0.32, $p=$ .008, 95% CI [-0.52, -0.088]. No significant difference is found in correlation between nuclear and joint families using Fisher's transformation (*z= -0.64, p= 0.52*)

Table 5 Pearson Correlation between loneliness and life satisfaction in nuclear family

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	1	2
1. loneliness	68	48.24	9.75	--	
2. life satisfaction	68	19.87	6.22	-.41**	--

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 Pearson Correlation between loneliness and life satisfaction in joint family

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	1	2
1. loneliness	68	47.84	10.36	--	
2. life satisfaction	68	20.13	5.70	-.32**	--

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the research was to investigate the difference between loneliness and life satisfaction among young adults belonging to nuclear and joint family systems. As shown in table 1, the hypothesis was tested by including 136 college students from both nuclear and joint families (68 nuclear and 68 joint), the sample contained an equal number of males and females. The UCLA Loneliness Scale (version 3) created by Daniel W. Russell and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) created by Ed Diener and Robert A. Emmons were used for data collection. The data was analysed using SPSS.

As denoted by table 2 the mean score shows a moderate degree of loneliness and average level of life satisfaction present in both nuclear and joint families. The findings suggest that there is no statistically significant difference in life satisfaction and loneliness between young adults from nuclear and joint families, thus our first hypothesis is rejected. This finding is consistent with Agrawal et al. (2023) who also discovered no significant difference in the levels of loneliness experienced by young adults from nuclear and joint families. Similarly, Mehendale et al. (2017)'s found no significant difference in life satisfaction of parents with relation to family type.

Table 3 and table 4 show that no significant gender difference was found for loneliness and life satisfaction in both nuclear and joint families. Surprisingly, in joint families, females had a higher mean score for loneliness as compared to males. Hence, our second hypothesis stands rejected. Previous studies, such as Sultana et al. (2019), have found that gender does not significantly impact loneliness. Likewise, Mangai's (2019) research on couples from nuclear and joint families, with an equal number of men and women (39 each), showed no significant difference in life satisfaction. The current study's findings similarly indicate a lack of significant gender difference between loneliness and life satisfaction among individuals from both nuclear and joint family backgrounds.

Pearson Product moment correlation was conducted to find correlation between loneliness and life satisfaction in nuclear and joint families. Results are presented in table 5 and table 6. Low positive correlation was found in nuclear families and a negligible correlation was present in joint families. There was no significant difference in correlation between nuclear and joint families. Therefore, our third hypothesis is rejected.

Findings from this study indicates that there is no difference in loneliness and life satisfaction among young adults of nuclear and joint families. This is consistent with other literatures present on similar age group (Ex, Agrawal et al., 2023; Mehendale et al., 2017) but different results are found for different age groups. For example, Kaura & Sharma (2015) found significant difference in loneliness among adolescents of nuclear and joint families, Ayla & Kanwal (2018) found that geriatrics belonging to nuclear families experienced more as compared to geriatrics belonging to joint families. Similarly, Mehendale et al. (2017) found no difference in life satisfaction of parents with respect to their family type. Possible reasoning behind these results may be the subjective differences present across different age groups.

This study focuses on age group of young adults which is also referred as emerging adulthood, were individual's transition from adolescents to adulthood. It's the age of forming independence and examining one's individuality. Here, individuals look at a wide range of options for both personal and professional connections in order to make long-lasting choices. By trying with these many possibilities, young people come to a greater

awareness of who they are, what their strengths and limitations, values and beliefs, and how they fit into the society in which they live. Furthermore, a lot of young adults move away from home for the first time to work, attend college, or live with friends or a partner (Arnett, 2000). It is seen that having independence is very important for students (Morton & Markey, 2009), that's why communication become less between the child and family during adulthood then adolescent (Fuligni & Masten, 2010). Also young adults form high social expectance for themselves by comparing them to other peer in order to fit in (Emma M. Kirwan et al. 2023) so it might lead to loneliness because they don't have everyday support from their family (Arnett, 2000). It was found by Kasprzak (2010) that practical support and relationship with friends were the strongest predicator of satisfaction with life among other variables like relationship with family members and social support. This might be the reason why loneliness and life satisfaction among young adults are not affected by their family type.

This study is not without any limitation. First of all, this study was focused on college going young adults belonging to urban area and caution should be taken before generalising it to the other areas of India and other age groups. Furthermore, most of the participants belonged to middle socioeconomic status.

Future studies can analyse both variables in relation to other age groups and can also look into the effect of different cultures on similar topic. This can be done using a longitudinal research method that would yield important insights into how life satisfaction and loneliness feelings change over time in nuclear and mixed family systems. To understand the subjectivity pertaining to this topic, qualitative research techniques can be used which would enable a more thorough investigation of the complex viewpoints and experiences that young adults have in various family situations. Examining the effects of technology and social media will provide us a more thorough understanding of the elements influencing young people' well-being in their social and familial contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study found that there is no significant difference in loneliness and life satisfaction among young adults belonging to nuclear and joint families. Similarly, no gender difference is found for both variables in nuclear and joint families. The reason behind these findings might be attributed to the subjective experience of individuals belonging to the age group of young adult which is considered as a big milestone in individual's life as many leave there families to pursue their careers which results in less proximity between individuals and their families. This indicates the need to further study loneliness and life satisfaction in context with different ages.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.