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Relationship Between Loneliness and Social Media Engagement

ABSTRACT : “Youth is associated with various emotions and experiences that can negatively affect young adult’s health and well-being, loneliness being of them. Experiences of loneliness can have a negative impact on your adults psychological well-being and quality of life. The aim of the study was to investigate young adults experiences and perceptions of loneliness and its association with social media.”

Introduction : One of the greater health risk today’s society is loneliness, especially young people World Health Organization. WHO, 2023. Loneliness is considered a global public health concern WHO, 2023 and for rate of experiences of loneliness among girls in particularly high.

During the past 20 years smartphones and social media have become increasingly popular and more easily accessible, and a large portion of young adults peer communication today occurs through social media (Twenge et al., 2019). Some researchers have found that social media can be beneficial in maintaining relationships (Cauberghe, et al., 2021); Nowland et al., 2018, Thomas et al., 2020). Other researchers have found an association between young adults high social media use and lower mental health (Gao et al., 2020; Geirdal et al., 2021) or increased levels of loneliness (Bonsaksen et al., 2021; Helm et al., 2022). As Seen in previous research, the use of social media can be associated with a decreases in impersonal social interaction and increase in perceived loneliness among young adults (Twenge et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2018).

Moreover, the manner in which young adults communicate with peers and family changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, with communication either primarily or even solely transpiring via social media, which has been linked to an even further increase in young adults experience of loneliness Espinoza & Hernandez, 2021;

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Fardghassemi et al., 2022).

Human beings have a natural need to belong to a community and are social in nature, and those who experience difficulties in establishing and preserving relationships can experience loneliness (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). A complex and multidimensional concept, we find there is no single definition and describes the concept of loneliness in its entirety. Loneliness can be described as an unpleasant feeling (Perlman & Peplau, 1998) that arises when a person lacks social relationships (Mathews et al., 2016; Peplau & Perlman, 1982) or is dissatisfied with their current social relationships, whether in terms of quality or quantity (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). Loneliness can also be defined as an involuntary, subjective and unpleasant experience that negatively affects a person's well-being (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006).

How a person experiences loneliness can vary and change during different periods of their life. (Von Soest et al., 2020). Experiences associated with loneliness can vary in intensity and duration and even evoke strong negative emotions such as sadness, emptiness, meaninglessness or anger (Rich Madsen et al., 2021). Loneliness can be associated with a sense of shame or can become an invisible stigma, making it difficult to confide in others (Rich Madsen, et al., 2021). Loneliness can even incapacitate, leaving a person unable to influence their own situation (Hemberg et al., 2022). Genetic predisposition, personality traits or behaviour can entail that some individuals are more vulnerable to experiencing loneliness (Perlman & Peplau, 1998).

While classifications and definition somewhat differ, loneliness can be divided into three different types; emotional, social (R.S. Weiss, 1987), and existential (Garnow et al., 2022); Hemberg et al., 2022).

- Emotional loneliness can be associated with the lack of an intimate attachment figure (Perlman & Peplau, 1998) or the absence of a partner, close friend, or other meaningful relationship (Hemberg et al., 2022; R.S. Weiss, 1987).
- Social loneliness can be associated with the disintegration of a person's social role (R.S. Weiss 1973) or a lack of social networks that results in an experience of not belonging (Hemberg et al., 2022; R.S. Weiss, 1987).
- Perhaps the most difficult form of loneliness, existential loneliness can be associated with perceived alienation, a sense of emptiness, or lack of meaning in life and is linked to the individual (Garnow et al., 2022; Hemberg et al., 2022).
- Existential loneliness can only be influenced by the individual experiencing it, while emotional and social loneliness can be corrected in part via external factors (Garnow et al., 2022).

Not everyone who experiences social isolation experiences loneliness (Baloyannis, 2015, Rich Madsen et al., 2021), thus a distinction should be made between involuntary and voluntary loneliness (Hemberg et al., 2021; Ruiz – Casares, 2012). When self-chosen, Voluntary loneliness can be nurturing and liberating or even health-promoting because it can provide a “breathing space” or renewed strength, voluntary loneliness can also provide a person insights that can lead to self-development (Hemberg et al., 2021, Ruiz – Casares, 2012).

Loneliness occurs in all age groups but its most prevalent and has the greatest impact on young people's development when compared to other age groups (Fardghassemi et al., 2022; Heinrich & Gullone, 2006, Von Soest et al., 2020). Young people actively seek a community where they feel accepted as individuals and risk experiencing loneliness when they do not find their place in society. Failure to resolve loneliness among young people can lead to significant anxiety about the future and can lead to difficulties in developing healthy and sustainable relationships (Kekkonen et al., 2020; Mikkelsen et al., 2020).

Loneliness can exacerbate various somatic and mental health problems (Christiansen et al., 2021, and involuntary loneliness is on the rise around the world, especially among young people. Fardghassemi et al., 2022; Twenge et al., 2021). Preventing and reducing experiences of involuntary loneliness is fundamental to health and well-being (Christiansen et al., 2021; Lempinen et al., 2018).

Various measures introduced during the COVID-19 Pandemic such as social distancing, lockdown and Quarantine have led to increased experiences of loneliness (Houghton et al., 2022; Marchini et al., 2021). Young peoples everyday lives changed drastically because of such measures. Which in turn was detrimental to their mental health and development (Houghton et al., 2022; Marchini et al., 2021). Young people became even more lonely because, For examples, they were not allowed to go to school (Houghton et al., 2022; Rogers et al., 2021). Young people also experienced an increase in depressive symptoms and anxiety and a deterioration in well-being during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Branquinho et al., 2020; Geirdal et al., 2021; Houghton et al., 2022). While the Pandemic has clearly negatively impacted young peoples well-being, the long-term effects on their development and well-being are as yet unknown (Branquinho et al., 2020; Houghton et al., 2022).

Social media and its impact on young peoples experiences of loneliness : Young people spend more and more time online today, even more than before during to the COVID – 19 Pandemic, and the way they socialize with friends has changed. Already previously a major problem, loneliness has increased drastically since smartphones became more accessible and popular, and young people today can spend more time on social media than they do in face-to-face contact with friends or family (Twenge et al., 2021). In-person communication occurs increasingly in frequently and contact with friends now a days often takes place via online communication (Lyyra et al., 2022). Online communication can be positive if a person has difficulties expressing themselves face-to-face, and some young people may find it easier to open up via a screen (Lyyra et al., 2022). While existing uncomfortable discussions and situations is easier online than in real life, online conversations can become more superficial and therefore do not always satisfy a persons need for attachment (Lyyra et al., 2022; Twenge et al., 2019).

Research indicates that young people who spend more time online tend to have poorer mental health, quality of life and well-being (Gao et al., 2020; Geirdal et al., 2021, Martilla et al., 2021). More time Online can also lead to a greater sense of loneliness when compared to those young people who spend less time online (Gao et al., 2020; Geirdal et al., 2021; Morttila et al., 2021). For young people without a strong offline social network, social media is perceived as being something negative because the relationships created through social media are more often short-lived and rarely satisfy the friendship needs of the individual (Lyyra et al., 2022). Conversely, For young people with a rewarding offline social network, Social media is perceived as being something positive because it can facilitate regular contact with friends (Lyyra et al., 2022).

Although high or problematic social media use can be harmful, the use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic has been seen to have reduced young peoples experiences of loneliness (Chen et al., 2022; Espinoza & Hernandez, 2021; Sundquist & Hemberg, 2021). Those who continuously communicated with friends Via social media during the COVID-19 pandemic also have reported feeling better, linked to receiving support from their social network during a difficult period in their life development (Espinoza & Hernandez, 2021).

Nevertheless, the increased use of social media has also led to more than half of young people developing a social media addiction, which involves using social in an

exaggerated and compulsive way (Chen et al., 2022; Kitis et al., 2022). Social media addiction can lead to isolation from family or friends (Kitis et al., 2022). Moreover, because many young people may not recognize that they have a problem and they rarely seek help, which not only makes their addiction difficult to overcome but also potentially dangerous (Kitis et al., 2022).

Despite serving a positive purpose during the COVID-19 Pandemic when social distancing was enforced (Espinoza, & Hernandez, 2021), more social media addiction and PSMU among young people is being seen even though restrictions have now eased on a global level (Rogers et al., 2021). Compared to peers who do not spend as much time on social media, young people with PSMU can feel more socially isolated (Primack et al., 2017). PSMU has been associated with increased experience of loneliness, and dependence on social media makes loneliness an even more difficult pattern to break (Chen et al., 2022). Problematic use of social media can ultimately lead young people to a sense of being increasingly alone, because they spend less and less time with their friends off-line (Ang et al., 2018, Bekar et al., 2022; Mortila et al., 2021, Twenge et al., 2021) Nonetheless, social media can even help young people sustain social relationships, thereby making it easier to manage loneliness (Cauberghe et al., 2021, Nowland et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2020).

Online communication and social media use are continually and rapidly changing, thus it is difficult to draw an evidence. Based conclusion on how social media affects young peoples experiences of loneliness without first investigating their perspectives. To date, there has been scant research on young peoples experiences of loneliness in relation to social media use, especially from the perspective of young adults.

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