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**PSYCHOLOGICAL CAUSES OF LONELINESS
AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE**

**ПСИХОЛОГІЧНІ ПРИЧИНИ САМОТНОСТІ ОСІБ
ЮНАЦЬКОГО ВІКУ**

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Loneliness is a subjective construct related to the concepts of social isolation, alienation, social connectedness, lack of belonging and social capital. Loneliness is distinct from social isolation, which is an objective measure of the absence of relationships with other people. Loneliness is also distinct from solitude in that loneliness is an unpleasant experience, whereas solitude implies a desire to be alone and is not necessarily a negative experience [1].

Loneliness is a universal emotion that many of us experience at times, whether you lack companionship in your daily life, feel left out and without a connection to those around you, or you've moved across the country away from family and close friends.

There is not one single cause of loneliness. Loneliness can often be a result of life changes or circumstances that include living alone, changing your living arrangements, having financial problems, or death of a loved one [2].

There are various demographic factors that may contribute to loneliness. Although Dr. *Nina Vasan* [M.D., psychiatrist and professor at Stanford University School of Medicine and chief medical officer at Real, an online mental wellness membership site] notes that anyone can feel lonely at any time in their life, a few groups that stand out as having an increased risk of loneliness include «young adults, mothers with young children and the elderly». Immigrants and individuals in the LGBTQ+ community are also at higher risk for loneliness, continues Dr. Vasan [7].

There are different types of loneliness, but in general, loneliness refers to the painful subjective experience of feeling isolated or feeling that one's

relationships are in some ways unsatisfying or deficient (either in quality or quantity).

Individuals who often feel alone tend to have emotion regulation difficulties. Emotion regulation refers to the use of strategies to influence the experience and expression of emotions.

Emotion dysregulation occurs when we use maladaptive emotional regulation strategies. Some examples are hiding one's feelings, avoiding certain feelings (e.g., fear, disgust), ruminating, and catastrophizing.

As a result of these maladaptive strategies, unpleasant emotional experiences (e.g., strong fear, rage, despair) do not get better. In fact, they often become worse – more inappropriate for the situation, intense, long-lasting, etc.

Aside from emotion-regulation difficulties, aspects of social context that are related to loneliness (e.g., feelings of belonging, sense of meaning, and social support) may also contribute to feelings of isolation and solitude.

To understand why, it is important to remember that who we are is defined not only by our own unique characteristics (e.g., being intuitive, introverted, caring, friendly, impulsive, adventurous, and strong).

Specifically, feelings of loneliness occur due to the loss or lack of social identities, given that social identities positively influence our attitudes and behavior and promote health and happiness [4].

The feeling of loneliness is suggested to be linked to brain regions involved in social cognition and emotion regulation, such as the prefrontal cortex and amygdala.

Moreover, a study using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) discovered that individuals experiencing loneliness had more unique and idiosyncratic brain processing patterns compared to those who were not lonely.

Despite living in a hyper-connected era, the paradox of our time is that loneliness is more prevalent than ever. In the face of digital connections, we are grappling with a «loneliness epidemic» [6].

There are some realities that urge greater attention to the experience of loneliness among adolescents and young adults. Firstly, although loneliness can affect an individual at any point in life, recent statistics from around the world report individuals aged between 16 to 25 years feeling higher intensities and more frequent feelings of loneliness (Cigna, 2018; Department for Digital, Culture Media & Sport, 2020). Secondly, very few studies have been conducted to study loneliness among the younger people. Evidence on the risk factors of loneliness and poor well-being that cluster in childhood and adolescence remain scarce. With the adolescence phase being the most risky in terms of the emergence of various mental health problems,

experiencing loneliness may be stigmatising due to the adolescent's strong need to feel connected to others [5].

As for young people, they experience loneliness more often than other age groups (research by Franssen et al, 2020; Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; Qualter et al.) Adolescents can be particularly vulnerable to feelings of loneliness as they are in a developmental state where they gradually become more independent from their families, seek to establish strong peer relationships, and are in the process of developing their social and emotional skills.

Among adolescents and young adults, genetic factors and/or other environmental factors may be linked to the development of loneliness, e.g. a lack of social competence, a lack of social support, parents' separation, social withdrawal, school transfer, low social status, a lack of peer acceptance or exposure to bullying. Loneliness during adolescence or young adulthood may impact personality, with especially neuroticism found to be the strongest correlate of loneliness [3].

Feeling lonely can have debilitating consequences for well-being and mental health. In adolescents, where on one hand sense of belongingness acts as a buffer against emotional and behavioral problems, loneliness has adverse impact on psychosocial development. Relationships play a significant role in our life and this is true for the youth as well. Loneliness has shown a strong effect on well-being, by increasing the absence of well-being and decreasing positive well-being [5].

Young people who feel lonely may even experience feelings such as pessimism, hostility or irritability. If a person cannot understand the origin of these feelings, they cannot understand how to feelings, the person will not be able to understand how to reduce their loneliness over time and reconnect with other people. Therefore, it is important that adults and professionals not only recognise and interpret possible signs of loneliness in adolescents and young people, and that adults and professionals be able to identify, interpret and understand signs that adolescents and young people are experiencing negative feelings that may indicate underlying loneliness [3].

Thus, the main psychological causes of loneliness among young people are individual personality characteristics, genetic and gender factors, and the influence of the social environment.

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