

## Social Isolation & Depression among Adolescent: A Comparative Perspective

Priyanka Tiwari and Sonakshi Ruhela<sup>+</sup>

Amity University, Noida

**Abstract:** The present study was undertaken to investigate social isolation and depression amongst adolescent, and to examine the prevalent gender differences in the variable selected. The sample of the study consisted of 300 adolescent (150 boys and 150 girls) in age ranging from 16 – 18 yrs hailing from Delhi region on the basis of Incidental-Cum-Purposive Sampling technique. Social isolation and depression were measured by using Youth Problem Inventory. The findings indicated that there was a positive correlation between social isolation and depression. Significant gender difference was also found in depression and social isolation. Girls were high on rate of depression and social isolation as compared to boys.

**Keywords:** Social isolation, Depression, Adolescent

### 1. Introduction

Social isolation refers to lack of contact with members of one's species. It is characterized by lack of contact with other people in normal daily living. Social isolation involves a combination of low levels of social interaction with the experience of feelings of loneliness. According to Seeman (1996), Social isolation is "..... disengagement from social ties, institutional connections or community participation. This can result in the lack or minimizing of social contact and or communication. A report by Shankar Vedantam indicate that there is tremendous growing number of people reporting of having no one in whom they can confide, no one with whom they can discuss personal troubles. There are number of factors contributing to feeling of social isolation like living alone, not having an intimate partner, lack of contact with family, lack of friendship or low participation in volunteer work association, etc.

In an article "Social Isolation kills, But How and Why?" by James S. House, Director, Survey Research Center and Professor of Sociology, University of Michigan in the year 2001 stated that the article by Brummet et al provides confirmation of the deleterious effects on health of social isolation. It further stated that Social isolation has been shown repeatedly to prospectively predict mortality and serious morbidity both in general population samples and in individuals with established morbidity. The article also establishes that social isolation produces a two- to three-fold increase in risk of mortality, but with little or no variation across moderate to high levels of social relationships. It further stated that a serious deficiency of social relationships is risky to health.

Adolescence is a time of both disorientation and discovery. In search for unique social identity and desire for social approval, teens are frequently upset which may lead them to social isolation. Arnett (1999) stated that in the professional literature; adolescence is frequently portrayed as a negative stage of life—a period of storm and stress to be survived or endured.

Social environments widens as the child enters adolescence. As the social contact with the outside world increases, teens get new experiences and opportunities of meeting others who in return influence his / her social behavior. One of the most difficult development task of teens is related to social adjustments which is

---

<sup>+</sup> Sonakshi Ruhela: + 919810804062  
E-mail address: sonakshi\_ruhela@yahoo.co.in

relating and accepting the view of significant others of the same age group and the constant need for social approval. Teens that lack the adjustment skill are liable to feel isolated in each sphere of life. These teens develop a poor sense of self worth and isolate themselves to avoid the pain of the abuse.

Sullivan (1953) gave loneliness a place of prominence in his theory of personality development. He wrote that in preadolescence, a powerful human need for intimacy first emerges, making teenagers especially vulnerable to the driving force of loneliness

A new study of the American Journal of Public Health underscores the importance of helping teens, especially girls, avoid feeling isolated from friends. The research is based on the largest survey of adolescents and their attitudes and experiences- a project known as the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Dr. Peter S. Bearman, professor of sociology and director of Columbia University's Institute for Social and Economic Research reasoned that Adolescent girls who are isolated from peers or whose social relationships are troubled are at greater risk for suicidal thoughts than are girls with close relationships to other adolescents. The new study involved analyzing information from 13,465 adolescents and found out that having a friend who committed suicide significantly increased the likelihood of suicidal thoughts and attempts for both boys and girls. Bearman also mentions that socially isolated females were more likely to have suicidal thoughts, as were females whose friends were not friends with each other.

In a two-year longitudinal study (Kraut et al., 1998), randomly selected families were given computers and instruction on Internet use. After 1 to 2 years, increased use of the Internet was associated with decreased family communication and reduced size of local social circle. In addition, the participants experienced increased loneliness and depression.

In depression individual is slowed down in their speech and body movements, they feel unable to act or to make decision, they appear to have “given up” and to suffer from paralysis of will. Depression is a real illness and carries with it a high cost in terms of relationship problems, family suffering, and lost work productivity. Depression is more than just sadness. People with depression may experience a lack of interest and pleasure in daily activities, significant weight loss or gain, insomnia or excessive sleeping, lack of energy, inability to concentrate, feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt and recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.

Depression in teens is often described as the invisible illness. Statistically in a school of 1000 students, as many as 100 may experience depression severe enough to warrant a psychiatric diagnosis. Adolescents are less likely to feel depressed or anxious if the peer group provides emotional support (Buhrmester, 1992).

## **2. Objective:**

- To examine the relationship between social isolation and depression amongst teens.
- To examine the gender differences in depression in adolescent.
- To examine the gender differences in the perception of social isolation in adolescent.

## **3. Hypotheses:**

- Social isolation in teenagers leads to depression.
- Girls are more prone to depression than boys.
- Social isolation is higher among girls when compared with boys.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1. Sample:**

The study was conducted on 300 adolescent (150 boys and 150 girls) of Delhi region selected on the basis of Incidental-Cum-Purposive Sampling Method. Their age ranges from 16 – 18 years and were students of class XI –XII from different schools.

### **4.2. Tool:**

Youth Problem Inventory (YPI) of Verma M. was used for the collection of data. The YPI is a self administering inventory for the students of 16 to 20 yrs of age to locate the problems in four areas – Family,

School, Social & Personal, and other sub-areas under each main area. The scale can be conveniently used in its full form as well as in its partial form that is only for a particular area. Here researchers have used two areas namely Social and Personal to meet the purpose of study. Both areas in total have 5 items with three alternative responses for each item. The subjects are required to put a tick mark on any of the three alternatives given for each item of the scale. As it is a power test so there is no time limit. On an average subject takes approximately 5 minutes to complete the test of given area. There is scoring key in the manual of YPI on the basis of which scoring is done. Each area has a different maximum possible score. A high score in an area indicate high problem in that particular area. Reliability of YPI is found to be .80, whereas validity is in the range of .68 - .75.

### 4.3. Result & Discussion:

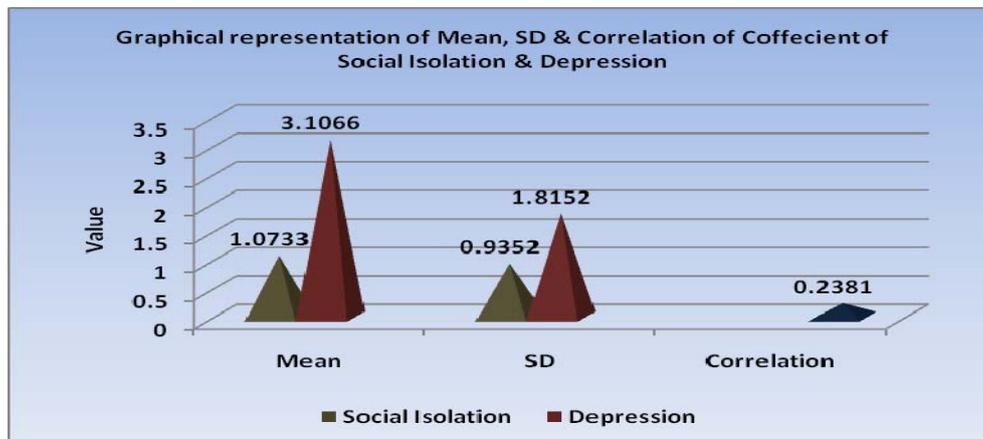
The result of the study was analyzed by using the manual of Youth Problem Inventory and by applying statistical measures of Coefficient of Correlation and t-test. The discussion of each hypothesis is based upon table & graph I, II & III respectively.

Hypothesis -1. Social isolation in teenagers leads to depression.

Table 1: Table showing N, Score, Mean, SD, Coefficient of Correlation, df & Significance level of Social Isolation & Depression

Variable	N	Score	Mean	SD	r	df	Level of significance
Social Isolation	300	322	1.0733	0.9352	0.2381*	298	P > .01
Depression	300	932	3.1066	1.8152			

\*Critical value of r - at .05 = .138, & .01 = .181



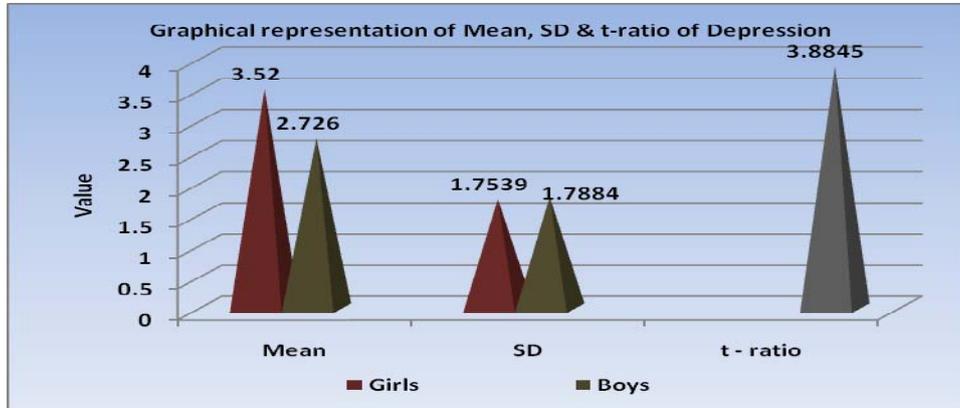
According to hypothesis no. 1, “Social Isolation in teens leads to depression.” This points to the assumption that social isolation is positively correlated with depression i.e. teenagers who find themselves socially isolated are more prone to depression. According to numerical presented in table no. I , it appears that social isolation leads to depression as mean of depression is 3.1066 and that of social isolation is 1.0733. The high mean on depression proves the hypothesis that social isolation in teens has resulted in depression because corresponding to the mean of social isolation (m = 1.0733) the mean of depression (m = 3.1066) is high. The coefficient of correlation between social isolation and depression is 0.2381 (df = 298) which is significant at .01 level of confidence (.181). This shows a positive correlation between the two variables. As hypothesis no. 1 is getting support from the findings so it can be concluded that on the basis of sample studied hypothesis no. 1 “Social Isolation in teens leads to depression” is proved. Studies on social isolation and depression suggest that the relationship between the two is bidirectional.

Hypothesis -2 Girls are more prone to depression than boys.

Table 2: Table showing N, Score, Mean, SD, t-ratio, df & Significance level of depression among Boys & Girls

Variable	N	Score	Mean	SD	t	df	level of significance
Girls	150	528	3.52	1.7539	3.8845*	298	P > .01
Boys	150	409	2.726	1.7884			

\*Critical value of t - at .05 = 1.972, & .01 = 2.601



According to hypothesis no. 2, “Girls will show more depressive behaviour than boys.” This points to the assumption that girls are more depressed than boys. The table suggests that there exist a gender influence on depression. The mean of depressive behaviour of girls ( $m = 3.52$ ) is higher than the mean of depressive behaviour of boys ( $m = 2.726$ ). So girls have shown more depressive behaviour than boys. Hence it can be said that the present findings goes with the hypothesis formulated. In order to see whether the mean difference between the two variable is significant or not t-ratio was calculated the value of which is 3.8845 ( $df = 298$ ). The t- value at .05 level of confidence is 1.972 and at .01 level of confidence is 2.601. Thus the obtained t-value is more than the value at .01 level of significance. Hence it can be interpreted that difference between the two mean is actual and has not occurred by chance. So the hypothesis that girls will show more depressive behaviour than boys is supported by the current findings.

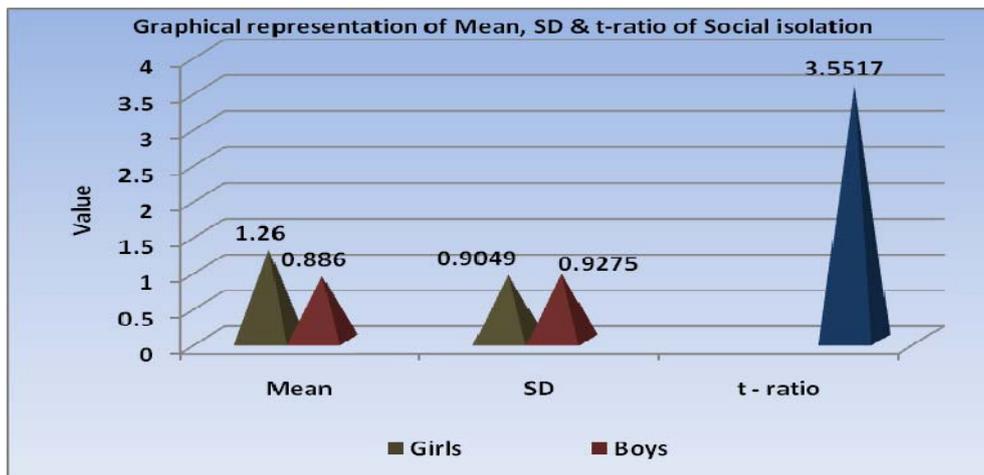
Studies show that the higher incidence of depression in females’ adolescence is because of roles and expectations change dramatically. The stresses of adolescence include forming an identity, confronting sexuality, separating from parents, and making decisions for the first time, along with other physical, intellectual, and hormonal changes. These stresses are generally different for boys and girls, and may be associated more often with depression in females. Some researchers have suggested that men and women differ in their expression of emotional problems. In adolescence, boys are more likely to develop behavioral and substance abuse problems, while girls are more likely to become depressed. Kessler, et al (1994) reported in his findings that 21.3% of females and 12.7% of males suffer from depression at sometimes during their lives. The fact that females have traditionally had lower status, power and income than males, must worry more than males about their personal safety and are the victims of sexual harassment and assault much more often than males.

Hypothesis -3. Social isolation is higher among girls when compared with boys.

Table 3: Table showing N, Score, Mean, SD, t-ratio, df & Significance level of Social Isolation of Boys & Girls

Variable	N	Score	Mean	SD	t	df	level of significance
Girls	150	189	1.26	0.9049	3.5517*	298	P > .01
Boys	150	133	0.886	0.9275			

\*Critical value of t - at .05 = 1.972, & .01 = 2.601



According to hypothesis no. 3, “Social isolation is higher among girls when compared with boys”. These points to the assumption that girls are more socially isolated than boys. The table suggests that there exist a gender difference in social isolation. The mean of social isolation of girls ( $m = 1.26$ ) is higher than the mean of social isolation of boys ( $m = 0.886$ ). So girls have shown more social isolation than boys. Hence it can be said that the present findings goes with the hypothesis formulated. In order to see whether the mean difference between the two variable is significant or not t-ratio was calculated the value of which is 3.5517 ( $df = 298$ ). The t- value at .05 level of confidence is 1.972 and at .01 level of confidence is 2.601. Thus the obtained t-value is more than the value at .01 level of significance. Hence it can be interpreted that difference between the two mean is actual and has not occurred by chance. So the hypothesis that social isolation is higher among girls when compared with boys is supported by the current findings. Reports on social isolation indicate that persistent gender gap in social isolation is shaped by both the structure and the quality of social networks.

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis of the data brings us to the conclusion that a positive correlation exist between social isolation and depression as two individualistic variables of study. It was found that social isolation leads to feelings of Loneliness i.e. defined as caused not by being alone but by being without some definite needed relationship or set of relationships. Loneliness appears always to be a response to the absence of some particular type of relationship or, more accurately, a response to the absence of some particular relational provision (Weiss, 1973) which further results in depression.

A significant difference was also observed in terms of gender and depression. Girls were high on depression rate than boys. A significant difference was also observed in terms of gender and social isolation. Girls scored high on social isolation when compared with boys. Perlman (1982) elaborated that some people are more susceptible to loneliness and social isolation than others.

## 6. References

- [1] Ilardi, Stephen. (2009). Social Isolation: A Modern Plague, Published Ph.D Thesis, Dated: July 13, 2009.
- [2] Kraut, R., Patterson, J., Lundmark, V., Kiesler, S., Mukopadhyay, T., & Scherlis, W. (1998). Internet paradox: A social technology that reduces social involvement and psychological well-being? *American Psychologist*, 53(9), 1017-1031.
- [3] Seligman, Katherine. (2009). Social isolation a significant health issue. Article published in *The Chronicle*, dated: March 02, 2009.
- [4] Serman, T.E. (1996). Social ties and health: the benefits of social integration. *Ann Epidemiol*, 6 (5), 442-451.
- [5] Vedantam, Shankar. (2006). Social Isolation: Article of *Washingtonpost.com*, Dated: June 23, 2006.