



## Perceived Loneliness Among Early Adults in Computer-Mediated in IT Field Jobs

K.P.VIJAYAKUMAR

Ph.D. Doctor Fellow, Department of psychology, PSG College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore -14

### ABSTRACT

The study relates to the personality variable 'loneliness', which is found as a feature among early adults in computer-mediated IT jobs, who are coerced to stay on the computer during the course of their job. It is a well-known fact that the time spent on computers by this community may exceed forty hours per week. While the computers provide much accuracy, speed, storage, and information at our finger tips, psychologists and sociologists alike raised much concern over the harmful impact caused by the excess computer use and the internet. Though different from aloneness, loneliness is a negative mood which tends to create serious consequences to one's psychological well-being. The study was conducted among 100 IT employees in the age group of 22-40, out of which 60 were men and 40 women. The study revealed that the employees experienced high loneliness; and as hypothesized high and low loneliness had no association with regard to gender and marital status.

### KEYWORDS

Computer-mediated communication; Early Adults; perceived loneliness; IT jobs

Like in the western world countries, loneliness as a personality variable drew greater attention of social psychologists in India also. The modern man is in the grip of loneliness for various perceived reasons. The extremely competitive world; work culture with only profit motive; attention required in many areas; wreckage of traditional values; great strides in scientific and industrial development coupled with advancement in Information technology; belief in individualistic way of life all have in ample to create social aloofness, alienation and dehumanization of mankind. Other aspects globally, like the differentiation between the haves and have not, environmental issues, loss of compassion, poverty, radicalism and no time for leisure can also contribute to the cause of loneliness. These various issues and many more spread its tentacles around the modern man which makes him highly prone to loneliness. Loneliness is a negative mood, which can gradually lead to the more serious depression, and it is one of the negative components to psychological well-being.

According to peplau and Perlman (1982) 'loneliness is the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relations is deficient in some way'. In social relations one experience belongingness, support, and thereby it creates a reassurance to life. Weiss (1974) proposed six basic provisions of social relationships including **social integration, attachment, reliable alliance, reassurance of worth, guidance and opportunity for guidance**. Young (1982) opined that to feel lonely is to feel excluded from a group, unloved by those around you, unable to share your private concerns, or different and alienated from those in your surroundings. Freedom from loneliness is of much importance for one's psychological well-being. Man has an inherent need to have somebody in his quality world and for his social reinforcement. Some people seek aloneness and go on solitary quests to seek spiritual inspiration. As Becker (1962) pointed out the 'most difficult realization for man is the possibility that life has no meaning'. Man has to contemplate and ponder over of what life is meant to be, to lead a contented and happy life. 'Loneliness is increased by personal characteristics that may be detrimental to the initiation, development and maintenance of good quality interpersonal relationships or makes an individual adopt strategies to overcome social deficit'. Peplau & Perlman (1979). These characteristics include **introversion, shyness, low self esteem**; (Cutrona 1982 ...) **lack of social skills**; (Jones et.al,1982) **fear of intimacy**; (weiss 1982) **negative evaluation of interpersonal relationships**; ( Jones, Samson 1983) **depression and anxiety**; (Hanson...) Impatience

(Rubenstein and Shaver 1982); feeling of emptiness awkwardness and boredom (Russel...1978); rejection by other peers (Cassidy...); apathy and aimlessness (Brenman ..) and low affiliative tendency. (Cutrona 1982).

The internet, with its unprecedented popularity, is now used, for communication apart from its function as TV, telephone, newspaper. The internet is also made use for playing games, watching videos, reading stories and for a chat with a friend. Kraut et.al (1998) divided internet use into **communication, information seeking, entertainment and commerce**. Turkle (1995) proposed that 'internet skewed our experience of the real world as the artificial space seemed so real due to technology advancement. Sometimes the virtual reality was even more compelling than the real world and internet users would expect they could achieve more from the internet. Little by little we may sequester ourselves from real life and be engrossed with cyber space.' Rheingold (2000) reported that 'internet addiction has been a serious concern for psychologists and sociologists and even psychiatrists on the harmful impact of the internet. Caplan (2002, 2003,2005) and other researchers pointed that 'not only excess time spent online but also perceived online benefits, perceived social control on the internet, withdrawal from social life and some other factors constitute criteria to diagnose the internet addiction'.

Internet today is much more advanced than the previous periods, and has become more or less an integral part in everyday life. It is a very fast spreading media technology. For many, today's life is punctuated by internet culture and in contrast with general public occasionally communicating through computers, the internet is now a virtual and real world for them. In America almost all are connected to internet and its use is at least 3 hrs. Per day. The use of internet enables bulk data storing; online bank transactions; supplementary relationships; information and leisure. One other distinct use now found is a boom in employment by way of jobs in **computer-mediated information technology (IT for short)** based industry. Since, in IT jobs the employees are rather compelled to stay on a computer for many hours it can create serious consequences for one psychological and social well-being. In the **IT industry the medium of communication, information seeking and commerce are all through computer, i.e, mediated through computer**.

Since the development of UCLAS [University of California Los Angeles scale] to measure the feeling of loneliness by Russell,

peplau and Cutrona (1980), researches in this new area got momentum in America and other developed Western Countries. Most of the studies in this field were carried out by Western investigators in their industrially and technologically advanced societies. Since, in India too, the practice of competition started in all aspects of development; it was felt that there was a need to develop a scale to measure the extent of loneliness in Indian society. Moreover, loneliness and its correlates varied from culture to culture. Having conceptualized loneliness as a one-dimensional state of an individual, it was planned to develop a comprehensive inventory to measure the extent of loneliness. The final form of loneliness scale ( L scale) came out with 36 items out of which 28 are positive in pro-loneliness direction and 8 are negative in un loneliness direction, after its pre-try out, try-out of scale and item analysis, and was developed by Dr. Praveen Kumar Jha, Bihar, India and all items in the scale had high discriminative power value.

**Significance of the Study.** Review of literature reveals that only a small section research, report that internet use leads to negative psychological well being. In contrast more research studies showed no such causality. No one can ignore the IT boom today and jobs created in this field, and this is especially so in the southern region of India. Many graduates after their engineering graduation are not entering their respective disciplines, but to the IT field. One distinct feature of It industry is that the computer and internet is used for synchronous communication often with strangers than the existing relationships. This can definitely be demanding on the employees. Moreover, here the internet is used not for supplementary purpose, but for a distinct purpose of communication and development of software. They are expected to meet certain deadlines and there is compulsion in job to work to hang on computers for long hours and there is no escape, except a weekly off for two days.

**Objective**

To compare perceived loneliness felt among early adult employees in computer-mediated IT jobs.

**Hypotheses**

**H1** Early adult employees in computer-mediated IT jobs will be high in loneliness.

**H0 1** Loneliness has no association with gender among early adult employees in computer-mediated IT jobs

**H0 2.** Loneliness has no association with marital status among early adult employees in computer- mediated IT jobs.\_

**Method**

The sample comprised of 100 employees from IT jobs, out of which 60 were men and 40 women. The participants from IT industries were selected as a part of exploratory research and randomly selected from different IT units.

**Research Tools**

Perceived Loneliness scale by Praveen Kumar Jha.

Mean; Standard Deviation.

Spss.

**Chi Square test.**

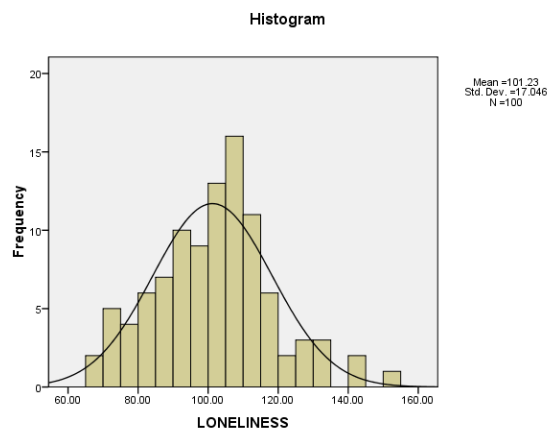
**Procedure** Employees from IT companies in the age group of **22-40** were selected at random and as per availability. The sample population consisted of 100 employees out of whom 60 were men and 40 women. The perceived loneliness scale developed by Dr. Praveen Kumar Jha to gauge loneliness in Indian situation were distributed to the participants which comprised 36 questions. There was no time limit to complete the questionnaire; however it did not take more than 10 minutes to complete. The questions were in the form of 5 point likert scale wherein the categories of answer took the form of 'Totally Agree, Agree, Can't Say, Disagree, Totally Disagree, with scoring from 5 to 1 in that order. Among the total ques-

tions 28 questions were in positive direction to loneliness and 8 negative worded statements in negative direction to loneliness. In order to avoid monotony on the part of the respondents due to repetition of response categories in words against each item and to shorten the length of the questionnaire five response categories in words have been given only on top of right hand side and against each five numbers from 5 to 1 for positively worded statements and 1 to 5 for negatively worded statements are provided. The encircled number indicated the subject's score on the particular item. The minimum and maximum score range between 36 to 180. High score is to be interpreted as high loneliness and low score as low loneliness of the respondent. The L scale used possessed high reliability as determined by Kuder Richardson formula and high content, predictive and concurrent validity.

**Table 1: mean and standard deviation of the whole group.**

CATEGORY	N	LONELINESS	
		MEAN	SD
MEN	60	101.23	17.05
WOMEN	40		
TOTAL	100	101.23	17.05

O	E	( O – E) <sup>2</sup>	(O – E) <sup>2</sup> /E
46	44.4	2.56	0.058
28	29.6	2.56	0.086
14	15.6	2.56	0.164
12	10.4	2.56	0.246
			0.554



**Table 2: Table showing estimated value in each cell in chi square test. (gender)**

CATEGORY	HIGH LONELINESS	LOW LONELINESS	TOTAL
MEN	46	14	60
WOMEN	28	12	40
TOTAL	74	26	100

**Table 3 : Table showing expected frequencies in chi square test.**

Category	High loneliness	Low loneliness	Total
Men	44.4	15.6	60
Women	29.6	10.4	40
Total	74.0	26.0	100

$$V = (r-1)(c-1) = (2-1)(2-1) = 1.$$

$$\text{For } \nu = 1 \quad \chi^2 = 3.841$$

0.05

**Table 4 Table showing estimated value in each cell in chi square test. (Marital)**

	HL	LL	TOTAL
MARRIED	39	11	50
UNMARRIED	36	14	50
TOTAL	75	25	100

**Table 5 Table of expected frequencies**

37.5	12.5	50
37.5	12.5	50
75	25	100

O	E	(O- E) <sup>2</sup>	(O-E) <sup>2</sup>
39	37.5	2.25	0.06
36	37.5	2.25	0.06
11	12.5	2.25	0.048
14	12.5	2.25	0.048

**0.48**

$$V = (r-1)(c-1) = (2-1)(2-1) = 1.$$

$$\text{For } \nu = 1 \quad \chi^2 = 3.841$$

0.05

**Results and Discussion**

The frequency distribution in the **histogram** shows that the majority of scores lie around the centre of the distribution and more so between the range of 90-120 and the frequency curve takes a mesokurtic shape and hence the distribution is close to normal. **Table 1** shows the mean and standard deviation of the sample for the whole group which is 101.23 and 17.05 respectively. Scores 91-180 shall be classified as subjects who are high in loneliness and below 90 as having low loneliness as per the research tool L scale applied. On analysis it is seen that 61 percentage of the IT employees fall in the category of above 90 score which attribute to high loneliness and therefore confirms the given hypothesis **H1**. The Z scores are 71% within 1 SD and 96% are within 2 SD. The SE is 1.7045 and the population mean will lie between 97.89 and 104.57 at 95% confidence interval.

Chi square as a **test of independence** was conducted to test the association of attributes. Table 2 & 3 shows the values of Chi square, and the results of test conducted to test association of loneliness with regard to gender. The calculated value of chi square was found 0.554 which is lesser than the table value of 3.841. Therefore the hypothesis is accepted, ie, Loneliness has no association with regard to gender among early adult employees in computer mediated IT jobs.

Table 4 & 5 shows the values of Chi square, and the results of test conducted to test association of loneliness with regard to marital status. The calculated value of chi square was found 0.48 which is less than the table value of 3.841 at 0.05 significant level. Therefore the hypothesis is accepted, ie, Loneliness has no association with marital status of early adults in computer mediated-mediated IT jobs.

**Limitations.** Other variables like experience, age or spouses working in same stations which may have influence upon the L factor has not been considered for now. As per convention of 10 stages in life span, early adulthood is between eighteen to forty years. The age group of twenty two to forty is conveniently taken as the subjects are employees.

**References**

1. Becker, E. (1962) Towards a comprehensive theory of depression. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 135,26-35.
2. Bargh, J.A & Mckenna, K.Y.A (2004) The Internet and social life. *Annual Review of psychology*. 55,573-590.
3. Caplan, S.E (2000). Problematic Internet use and psycho social well-being: development of a theory-based cognitive- behavioural measurement instrument. *Computers in Human Behaviour*; 18(5) 553-575.
4. Caplan, S.E. (2003). Preference for online social interaction. *Communication research*, 30(6), 625-648.
5. Caplan, S.E.(2005). A social skill account of problematic Internet use. *Journal of communication*, 55 (4), 721-736.
6. Cassidy, J., & Asher, S.R (1992) Loneliness and peer relations in young-children. *Child development* , 63(2), 350-365.
7. Cutrona, C.E. (1982). Transition to college: Loneliness and the process of social adjustment.
8. Jones, W.H., Samsone,C., & Helm. B. (1983). Loneliness and interpersonal judgements. *Personality and social psychology Bulletin*,9, 437-441.
9. Jones,W.H., Hobbs, S.A., & Hockenbury, D. (1982). Loneliness and social skill deficits. *Journal of personality and Social Psychology*, 42, 682-699.
10. Kraut, P., Patterson M., Lundmark. V., Keisler S., Mukopadhyay T., & Scherlis w., (1998) Internet Paradox : a social technology that reduces social involvement and Psychological well-being. *American Psychologist*, 53,65-77.
11. Peplau, L.A and Perlman, D (1982). Loneliness : A source book of current theory and research and therapy. New York:Wiley.
12. Peplau, L.A and Perlman, D.(1979). Toward a social psychological theory of loneliness. In M Cook & G. Wilson (Eds.), *Love and attraction : Processing of an international Conference*. Oxford, England; Pergman.
13. Morahan – Martin J.M.(1999). The relationship between loneliness and internet use and abuse. *Cyber Psychology and behaaviour*. 6(6), 653-656.
14. Rheingold, H. (2000). *The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic Frontier* (Rev. ed.) Addison Wesley; Reading, MA.
15. Hanson, R.O., Jones, W.H., Carpenter, B.N., & Remondet,I. (1986). Loneliness and adjustment to old age. *International Journal of aging and Human envelopment*, 24,41-53.
16. Rubenstein, C. & Shaver, P.(1982) The experience of loneliness. In L.A. Peplau & D.Perlman (Eds.) *Loneliness: A service of current theory, research and therapy* (pp 36-62) , New York: wiley- Interscience.
17. Russel D., Peplau, L.A., & Ferguson, M.L. (1978). Developing a measure of loneliness. *Journal of personality assessment*. 42, 290-294.
18. Turkle, C. (1996). *Virtuality and its discontent. Searching for community in Cyberspace*. *The American prospect*, 24,50-57.
19. Weiss, R.S. (1982). Issues in study of loneliness. In L.A Peplau & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Loneliness: A source book of current theory, research and therapy* (pp 71-80). New York : Wiley.
20. Weiss, R.S. (1974). The provisions of social relationships. In z. Rubin ( Ed.), *Doing unto others* (pp 17-28). Englewood Cliffs, NJ : Prentice-Hall.
21. Young, J.E. (1982). Loneliness, depression and cognitive therapy. In L.A peplau, & D Perlman (Eds.) *Loneliness: A source book of current theory; Research and therapy* (pp379-406) New York: nd therapy (pp379-406) New York: wiley.