



THE RELEVANCE OF LONELINESS AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN MODERN SOCIETY

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Abstract. This article examines the relevance and psychological nature of loneliness among adolescent girls in the context of contemporary society. The paper analyzes theoretical approaches to understanding loneliness, the age- and gender-specific factors underlying its experience during adolescence, and the role of digital communication and social media in shaping girls' social and emotional well-being. Family relations, peer interaction, and identity formation are considered as key contextual factors. Based on the theoretical analysis, the article proposes directions for psychological and pedagogical support aimed at preventing and reducing loneliness among adolescent girls.

Keywords: loneliness, adolescence, adolescent girls, social isolation, identity formation, social media, peer relationships, emotional well-being, psychological support.

Introduction

Loneliness is one of the most complex and multidimensional phenomena studied within developmental and social psychology. It is generally defined not simply as physical isolation from others, but as a subjective, distressing experience arising from a perceived discrepancy between the social relationships a person desires and those they actually have.

This distinction between objective isolation and subjective loneliness was clearly articulated in the classic cognitive discrepancy model of loneliness¹, according to which a person may be surrounded by people yet still feel profoundly lonely if the quality or depth of these relationships does not meet their emotional needs.

Adolescence represents a particularly sensitive period for the emergence of loneliness, as it is precisely during these years that a young person's sense of identity, self-worth, and belonging is actively being formed through interaction with peers and significant adults. Among adolescents, girls often display distinct patterns of experiencing and expressing loneliness compared to boys, largely due to differences in socialization,

¹Perlman D., Peplau L.A. Toward a social psychology of loneliness // Personal Relationships in Disorder / ed. by S. Duck, R. Gilmour. — London: Academic Press, 1981. — P. 31–56.



communication styles, and the emphasis placed on close, emotionally intimate friendships.

Relevance of the Study

The relevance of studying loneliness among adolescent girls in modern society is determined by several interrelated factors. First, the rapid expansion of digital communication and social media has fundamentally transformed the ways adolescents interact, compare themselves with others, and build a sense of social belonging, creating new and previously unexplored sources of loneliness.

Contemporary research has drawn attention to a notable decline in subjective well-being among teenagers coinciding with the widespread adoption of smartphones and social networking platforms², raising concern among psychologists and educators regarding the emotional consequences of constant online comparison and reduced face-to-face interaction.

Second, girls at this age are especially oriented toward close, exclusive friendships and are therefore more vulnerable to distress when such relationships are disrupted, unstable, or perceived as superficial. Third, prolonged loneliness during adolescence is associated with a range of negative outcomes, including diminished self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and difficulties in later social and emotional functioning, which underscores the practical importance of early identification and psychological support.

Theoretical Approaches to Understanding Loneliness

One of the foundational theoretical distinctions in the psychology of loneliness separates *emotional loneliness*, stemming from the absence of a close attachment figure, from *social loneliness*, arising from the absence of a broader network of social relationships and a sense of community³. This distinction remains highly relevant for understanding the experiences of adolescent girls, who may simultaneously feel embedded in a wide circle of acquaintances while lacking a single relationship of genuine emotional depth.

Another influential perspective conceptualizes loneliness as a natural signal that motivates individuals to seek social connection, comparable to the way physical pain

²Twenge J.M. iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy — and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood. — New York: Atria Books, 2017.

³Weiss R.S. Loneliness: The Experience of Emotional and Social Isolation. — Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973.



signals bodily harm⁴. From this standpoint, occasional loneliness is a normal and even adaptive part of human experience; it becomes problematic primarily when it is chronic, intense, and unresolved, which is often the case in adolescents who lack adequate coping strategies or supportive relationships.

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development further situates loneliness within the broader task of identity formation characteristic of adolescence⁵: as young people work to establish a coherent sense of self, difficulties in this process may be accompanied by feelings of confusion, alienation, and disconnection from peers, particularly when adolescents feel that their emerging identity is not understood or accepted by those around them.

Age- and Gender-Specific Factors of Loneliness in Adolescent Girls

1. Identity formation and heightened emotional sensitivity

During adolescence, girls typically place a strong emphasis on emotional intimacy, mutual self-disclosure, and loyalty within friendships. When these expectations are not met — whether due to conflict, betrayal, exclusion, or simply a mismatch in emotional needs — the resulting sense of disappointment can be experienced far more acutely than a comparable situation might be for boys, whose friendships are often organized more around shared activities than emotional closeness.

2. Social media and digital communication

The pervasive use of social networking platforms introduces a distinctive dimension to adolescent loneliness. Constant exposure to curated, idealized representations of peers' social lives can intensify social comparison and foster a persistent feeling of being excluded or falling short, even among girls who are objectively well-connected⁶. At the same time, the substitution of in-depth, face-to-face conversation with brief, fragmented online exchanges may leave underlying emotional needs unmet, contributing to a paradoxical experience of being simultaneously hyper-connected and deeply lonely.

Empirical findings further indicate that heavy engagement with social media is

⁴Cacioppo J.T., Patrick W. Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection. — New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.

⁵Erikson E.H. Identity: Youth and Crisis. — New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968.

⁶boyd d. It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens. — New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.



associated with lower psychological well-being among adolescent girls in particular, compared with more moderate or purposeful use of digital platforms⁷.

3. Family relationships and parental support

The quality of family relationships continues to play a decisive role during adolescence, despite the growing importance of peer relationships. A lack of open communication with parents, insufficient emotional support at home, or excessive parental control can each contribute to feelings of isolation, as adolescent girls may feel unable to share their concerns either with family members or with peers.

4. Peer relationships and social status

Peer group dynamics, including exclusion, rejection, or shifting friendship alliances that are especially characteristic of early and middle adolescence, represent another significant source of loneliness⁸. Girls who experience marginalization within their peer group, or who struggle to find a stable place within existing social circles, are at particular risk of prolonged emotional isolation.

Psychological Consequences of Loneliness in Adolescent Girls

Persistent loneliness during adolescence has been linked in the psychological literature to a range of adverse outcomes, including reduced self-esteem, elevated levels of anxiety, difficulties concentrating on academic tasks, and a generally more negative outlook toward social interaction.

Longitudinal research on loneliness across different stages of life suggests that patterns of social withdrawal and difficulty forming close relationships established during adolescence may, without intervention, persist into adulthood⁹, highlighting the importance of timely psychological support during this developmental period rather than treating adolescent loneliness as a temporary or inconsequential phase.

It should be emphasized that loneliness itself is not a clinical diagnosis but a

⁷Twenge J.M., Campbell W.K. Media use is linked to lower psychological well-being: Evidence from three datasets // *Psychiatric Quarterly*. — 2019. — Vol. 90, No. 2. — P. 311–331.

⁸Rubin K.H., Bukowski W.M., Parker J.G. Peer interactions, relationships, and groups // *Handbook of Child Psychology* / ed. by W. Damon, R.M. Lerner. — Hoboken: Wiley, 2006.

⁹Qualter P. et al. Loneliness across the life span // *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. — 2015. — Vol. 10, No. 2. — P. 250–264.



subjective emotional experience; nevertheless, when prolonged and unaddressed, it can become a significant risk factor contributing to broader emotional difficulties, underscoring the need for attentive, non-judgmental support from parents, teachers, and school psychologists.

Directions for Psychological and Pedagogical Support

Based on the theoretical analysis presented above, several directions for supporting adolescent girls experiencing loneliness can be proposed:

- fostering open, trusting communication between adolescents and parents, in which feelings can be expressed without fear of judgment or dismissal;
- developing school-based programs that promote genuine peer connection, cooperative activities, and inclusive classroom environments where every student feels a sense of belonging;
- providing guidance on balanced and mindful use of social media, helping adolescent girls critically evaluate idealized online content and prioritize meaningful offline interaction;
- training school psychologists and teachers to recognize early signs of social withdrawal and emotional isolation, enabling timely and supportive intervention;
- creating safe spaces, such as peer support groups or counseling sessions, where adolescent girls can openly discuss their experiences and feel understood by both peers and adults.

The consistent, coordinated implementation of these measures by families, schools, and mental health professionals can substantially reduce the risk and intensity of loneliness experienced by adolescent girls, supporting their healthy emotional and social development.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that loneliness among adolescent girls in modern society is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by the interplay of identity development, family relationships, peer dynamics, and the pervasive influence of digital communication¹⁰. While a degree of loneliness may be considered a normal aspect of

¹⁰Выготский Л.С. Педология подростка // Собрание сочинений: в 6 т. — Т. 4. — М.:



adolescent development, its chronic and unaddressed forms carry meaningful risks for emotional well-being and future social functioning. Recognizing the relevance of this issue and implementing coordinated psychological and pedagogical support — within the family, the school, and the wider community — represents an essential task for ensuring the healthy development of adolescent girls in the contemporary social environment.

Note: This article addresses loneliness as a general psychological and social phenomenon for academic and educational purposes. Readers who are personally experiencing persistent loneliness, sadness, or emotional distress are encouraged to speak with a school counselor, psychologist, or another trusted adult for support.

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