



EDITORIAL

THE LONELINESS EPIDEMIC- EACH PERSON AN ISLAND



A resident of rural India refers to a person from his village as a 'brother', a relation as sacred as one's own brother. On the contrary, an urban Indian will refer to his parents as his 'extended family', since 'family' is defined as husband-wife and children! Thankfully two thirds of India are still rural. This vast chasm in attitudes is evidently disturbing to many of us old-fashioned adults. We are seeing the tidal waves of change for more than two decades, with the turn of the millennium.

In 2007 a blockbuster Bollywood film made headlines with a dialogue that became a favorite of teenage girls 'I am my most favorite person. I love myself!' This national sentiment among teens of 'self-love' was a dangerous trend for a seasoned psychologist like me. The 'selfie' culture had already made dents into the social fabric. The alien concepts of 'privacy', 'locking my mobile', 'my life' 'who are you to advise me', 'locking bedroom doors', 'extra sensitive to critical advice', 'learn how to set boundaries' and a host of such attitudes had already invaded the Indian psyche. This growing self-centered behavior was bound to lead to loneliness. Breaking of the joint family, shrinking of the nuclear family, working mothers, loss of the original community in urban areas, was leading to social dis-connection and alienation. The utter disregard of social norms, relationships, elders, religion, rituals, morality was shocking. Everything socially sacred was challenged. Each person was becoming an island.

COVID 19, after a two-year lock-down of schools, changed the habits of children as well as adults as they became more home-bound and comfortable in their cocoon. 'I don't feel like meeting and going out'. This cocooning of people furthered the social disconnect.

Not surprisingly, Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, Surgeon General of the United States, issued an advisory on 'Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation' in 2023, which called attention to urgent action for improving the lives of people by increasing social connection. By declaring it a public health challenge, he formulated a national strategy with recommendations.

Psychologist Jonathan Haidt in his best seller book 'The Anxious Generation' 2024, says 'The arrival of the smartphone changed life for everyone after its introduction in 2007. Like radio and television before it, the smartphone swept the nation and the world. It's the Great Rewiring of Childhood that is causing the Epidemic of Mental Illness, including social disconnection'. Jean Twenge and Jonathan Haidt in a study analyzed responses of thousands of 15-year-old across 37 participating countries and stated that 'through 2012, reports of feeling lonely and friendless at school increased in all regions except for Asia'!

The ancient Vedic principle of 'Vasudhav Kutumbhkam' meaning 'Universal Brotherhood' and Rotary's ideal of 'The World is One Family' seems like a beautiful ideal to understand and imbibe. To make the dream come true, we need to re-connect to society, expand the 'self' to embrace all humanity, build compassion, empathy, kindness and care for the entire cosmos, humans, animals and the environment. Therein lies salvation.

Rita

-Rita Aggarwal.

59-SECOND REEL COMPETITION ON MENTAL HEALTH

On 1st July 2025, a 59-Second Reel Competition was announced, jointly conducted by District Action Group for Mental Health Initiative (DAGMHI) – 3030, Antarman, Rotary Club of Amravati Ambika (Host Club) and Rotary Club of Amravati (Co-host Club). The competition was announced during the installation ceremony of RC Amravati Ambika & was graced by PDG Rtn. Sunil Pathak (RID 3261). Dr. Jugal Chirania, DAGMHI 3030 Chair Dr. Smita Hantodkar, Hon Secretary Rtn. Gunjan Hantodkar, RC Amravati Ambika President Rtn. Amol Chawane, RC Amravati President Rtn. Sugandha Deshmukh & others were present.

The reels were invited on the following mental health topics: Screen Addiction, Workplace Stress, Unhappy Relationships and Parenting Challenges.

The results were announced on 19th July 2025, by DAGMHI Hon Secretary Rtn. Gunjan Hantodkar, in the presence of RID 3030 Secretary Rtn. Nilesh Partani and PDG Rtn. Manju Phadke.

The proud winners are -

First Prize (₹5000): Mrs. Varad Heda, 2nd Prize - (₹3000): Mr. Rameez Shaikh, 3rd Prize (₹2000): Ms. Menka Fattepuria (RC Nagpur Ishanya), These prizes were generously sponsored by Cottonking.

Consolation Prizes (₹1000 each) were bagged by Mr. Lalit Rathod, Ms. Devika Gokhale, Ms. Charu Mukesh Nainav (RC Pachora-Bhadgaon).

These prizes were sponsored by Rotary Club of Amravati.

We extend heartfelt gratitude to our esteemed judges for their critical evaluation and dedicated support- Dr. Mohana Kulkarni, Dr. Vikram Wankhade, Rtn. Nilesh Partani.

**-Rtn. Dr. Smita Hantodkar
DAGMHI-3030 President**

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SOLITUDE: AN ANTIDOTE TO LONELINESS

Here are some interesting reactions to situations: ‘Single child? He is sure to become lonely!’ someone declared.

‘Be careful when you’re alone. You’re moving to a hostel’

‘Aww, her kids are all grown now. She must be free all the time.’

‘Poor thing, he’s been all alone since his spouse has passed away.’

From childhood to old age, society often paints being alone as something to pity — a void, a vulnerability, a vacuum. But must it always be?

Though man is a social animal, seasons of separation are inevitable. Whether due to work, migration, caregiving, or personal choices, being alone is no longer a rare occurrence but a rhythm of modern life. Yet we often fear aloneness, as though it were a sign of failure or abandonment. **Staying alone or being physically separated does not always lead to loneliness, but it can.**

We teach children to read, write, share, compete, and succeed. But rarely do we teach them to be alone without panic. Solitude—the gentle art of being with oneself—when introduced early, becomes a lifelong companion.

In childhood, it begins in whispers: moments of imaginative play, a secret world under the dining table, or watching rain slide down glass. **A child who enjoys her own company grows into an adolescent who doesn’t crave constant validation.**

Adolescence, with its rush of comparison and belonging, often paints aloneness in darker hues. Yet solitude can be cultivated—not through isolation, but reflection: journaling, doodling, walking, dancing alone, skipping rope. Solitude becomes the pause that protects.

Adulthood brings its own ironies—a mother among children, yet lonely; a man in meetings, yet unseen. Here, solitude is intentional: temple corridors echoing footsteps, the scent of old ink on letters, reading in silence. Choosing stillness, even briefly, nourishes more than any conversation.

Then comes the stage of ancient seers called **Vanaprastha—not isolation, but inward migration.** A retired postmaster once told me, **“Solitude is not being away from people. It’s being at home with yourself.”** He was a widower in a quiet village, not abandoned but anchored. His children lived far away, yet he found companionship in books, memories, and the breeze through the neem tree. He taught me solitude isn’t what remains when people leave, but what you build while with yourself.

Today, as we rush from notification to notification, solitude must be re-learned—not as punishment, but as practice. **Psychologist Daniel Goleman defines emotional intelligence as self-awareness and self-regulation—a quiet tuning in before tuning out.**

Solitude, when practiced across life, prepares us not just to face loneliness, but to befriend it.

Solitude must be schooled early, embraced in youth, protected in adulthood, and celebrated in old age.

It is not an escape from people. It is a reunion with the self.

-Dr Sripriya Shaji

Counselling Psychologist & Nutritionist, Kozhikode

LONELINESS IN OLDER ADULTS

It was just another day for Mr. Gupta who sat on his antique rocking chair, sipping his morning tea, while seeing the new leaves that stood out in his garden. His eyes seemed tired though the birds tried to disturb the morning with their loud chirping. He looked up slowly as his neighbour and good friend Hari walked in.

Hari asked him why he was not his usual self. Then came the surprising reply. **“I DON’T FEEL WANTED ANYMORE”.** ...today is my birthday and I am alone at home. My son and daughter-in-law left early in the morning as they both have work. Of course they wished me and have bought a lot of sweets and my daughter in law has cooked my favourite dishes. But I feel lonely. I am not important to anyone.”

The above **emotions** are familiar to many of us who have aged people at home. Loneliness in older adults arises due to various factors. Health issues including physical limitations storm in. Death of a spouse leads to reduced social connections and networks. Intergenerational gaps, financial issues, digital fear are other enemies for the elderly to confine themselves. The greatest culprit is no one has patience or time to talk to them nor listen, making them insecure.

If we are not watchful, loneliness can **trigger serious mental health issues including depression, dementia, anxiety** to mention a few apart from other physical ailments. Previously, we were happy that in India loneliness in senior citizens is better than their counterparts, worldwide but not anymore. Disintegration of traditional family structures, migration, urbanization has given on par loneliness quotient to our older people here too. The statistics are not very encouraging. Fifty five percent of older adults in India experience loneliness.

There are solutions. The routine methods of social inclusivity through Rotary and other such groups can help. Digital help by younger generations, library and travel groups, online global connections, older citizen communities, senior citizen friendly norms are some ways to better their living apart from access to mental health counseling and therapy sessions. It would be nice if we develop social places for the elderly to meet and encourage their skills and hobbies.

Continuing Gupta sir’s birthday, Hari gave him a big hug and said “I have a big surprise for you. Please get ready, we will go”. A taxi stopped in front of Mr. Gupta’s house and soon the two gentlemen sped away to an orphanage. What Mr. Gupta saw next, swelled his eyes with tears. He saw his old friends with the children ready with a cake to wish him. They all gathered and shouted with innocence. “Dada we love you.”. They danced, sang and enjoyed every moment as though it was the only day left in their life. In the end, it was his friends who made his day!

-Rupashree Venkat

Child Mental Health Counselor

P.C.: The New Indian Express, 1st July 25

1 in 6 people worldwide affected by loneliness

Linked to 100 deaths every hour

More than 8,71,000 deaths annually

1 IN 6 PEOPLE AFFECTED

Between 17–21% aged 13–29 years feel lonely, with the highest rates among teenagers

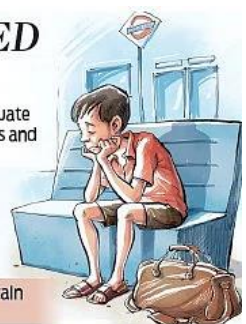
24% IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES FEEL LONELY, TWICE THE RATE IN HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES (ABOUT 11%)

REASON FOR LONELINESS

Poor health, low income and education, living alone, inadequate community infra, public policies and digital technologies

RISKS

Loneliness and social isolation increase risk of stroke, heart disease, diabetes, cognitive decline, and premature death



Teenagers who felt lonely 22% more likely to get lower grades

Adults may find it harder to find or maintain employment and may earn less

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HUNGRY FOR MORE: HOW LONELINESS FUELS FOOD ADDICTION

When I first met Samira, she was 34 years old, divorced, and working from home as a graphic designer. Her doctor had referred her for “unexplained weight gain.” But within the first few minutes of our session, it was clear that this wasn’t just about food. “I know I’m not hungry,” she told me, “but the food fills something else.”

Samira had been living alone in Nagpur, far from her family in Chandrapur. Her friends were busy dating, getting married, and starting families. She felt like life was moving on without her. Most of her days were quiet, her phone barely buzzed, and by late afternoon, the emptiness would settle in. That’s when the eating began.

She didn’t crave healthy, home-cooked meals. It was always the comfort foods: pizza, burgers, samosas, brownies, and thick shakes. chips, cookies, ice cream. She’d sit on the couch, the TV playing in the background, eating until she felt nothing. “I’m not eating because I’m hungry,” she said. “I’m eating because I’m alone.”

The Biology of Emotional Eating: As a clinical dietitian, I hear stories like Samira’s more often than you’d think. Emotional eating isn’t just a lack of willpower; it’s a coping mechanism. When we eat foods high in sugar, fat, or salt, the brain releases dopamine, the chemical that gives our mood a little boost. For someone who’s feeling disconnected or lonely, that quick hit of comfort can feel like a lifeline. But it doesn’t last. Over time, the brain gets used to it. You need more food, more often, just to numb the loneliness.

In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General called loneliness a public health crisis. It’s been linked to higher risks of anxiety, depression, heart disease, and yes, food addiction. People who feel isolated are more likely to overeat, skip meals, and lose the motivation to cook or care for themselves.

Where Healing Begins: We didn’t start with a meal plan. Instead, we focused on small, gentle steps to help her understand what she was feeling. She began journaling during cravings, asking herself what was going on in her mind, not just in her stomach. We introduced a five-minute “pause” before eating: stretch, sip water, step outside—just enough time to check in with herself. She started reconnecting, joining a book club online, chatting more with old friends, even volunteering locally. The more she connected with people, the less she needed food to fill the silence.

If you see yourself in Samira’s story, please know this: you’re not weak, and you’re not alone. You’re human. Food might be filling the gaps, but healing starts when we ask ourselves, *what am I truly hungry for?*

-Malvika Fulwani

Dietitian, Founder & Director Healthitude, Nagpur.



P.C.: Rainford Hall

THE ILLUSION OF CONNECTION IN A DIGITALLY CROWDED WORLD!

Digital isolation doesn’t mean being cut off from devices—it means being cut off from *meaningful human connection, despite being constantly online*. It’s ironic how a space created to bring people closer is often the very thing making us feel more alone.

In today’s world, the digital space often becomes our escape—a break from the harsh reality filled with expectations, comparisons, and pressure. It feels easier to scroll through reels than to process our emotions or face difficult conversations. But over time, that escape turns into isolation.

This is the illusion we often fall for; the illusion of connection. We feel surrounded, even seen, online. But in reality, we’re often emotionally distant, starved of genuine presence. The more we rely on digital interactions to fill emotional gaps, the lonelier we may become, even when we’re never truly “alone.”

Psychologically, this creates a *dopamine feedback loop*. Each like, comment, or follow gives a temporary high—a small shot of pleasure. Our brains begin associating these digital rewards with self-worth. We keep posting, refreshing, checking—waiting for the next hit of validation. And when the numbers are “low,” it feels like *we are not enough*.

Social comparison theory also plays a major role here. We compare our real, messy, emotional lives with someone else’s polished online content. This constant comparison can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, and even depressive thoughts. We start believing that others are doing better, living happier, achieving more—forgetting that social media is a highlight reel, not a full story.

Even our *perception of appreciation changes*. If 20 people like our reel, we feel disheartened. But if 20 people came up to us in real life to praise us, we’d feel seen, celebrated, valued. That’s the distortion—in real life, quality matters. On digital platforms, we get lost chasing quantity.

This digital detachment also affects our emotional attunement. Texts replace tone. Emojis replace empathy. We lose out on non-verbal cues: the comforting hug, the reassuring nod, the spark in someone’s eyes. Over time, this weakens our ability to connect deeply, and strengthens a sense of emotional loneliness.

And yet, we keep going back. Why? Because of *FOMO Fear of Missing Out*. We’re scared to log off, afraid of falling behind or feeling left out. So, we stay engaged... but not necessarily connected.

So what can we do?

We can’t—and don’t need to quit the digital world. But we can redefine our relationship with it. Here are a few suggestions:

- Use tech to connect, not escape.
- Seek validation from your values, not virtual numbers.
- Pause before scrolling—ask yourself: *Am I feeding connection or comparison?*
- Protect your mental space as much as your screen space.

To conclude, we must realise that the real connection—raw, imperfect, human—is still the most powerful antidote to loneliness.

-Aditi Sethi

Counselling Psychologist, Certified psychotherapist and Founder of Align Your Mind



P.C.: Make Text Easier

ALONE TOGETHER: UNDERSTANDING LONELINESS IN MARRIAGE

Loneliness in marriage doesn't always mean being alone – it often means feeling alone. A person might be with their spouse and still feel emotionally detached, isolated, or unacknowledged. **Emotional loneliness occurs when there is a significant gap between one's expectations of emotional connection and the reality of the relationship.**

For example, a couple might sit at the same dining table, each scrolling on their phones, immersed in their own thoughts or worries. This lack of meaningful conversation gradually builds a wall between them. Another common situation is when one partner goes through a tough time—like stress at work or the loss of a loved one—and the other doesn't notice or know how to offer support. That kind of emotional invisibility, the feeling of being unseen, can create deep loneliness. Or take a scenario where one partner shares something they're excited about—a new idea, a personal achievement—and the other responds with indifference or distraction. Repeated moments like these slowly chip away at the emotional bond, leading to emotional disconnection.

As per a 2024 Indian study with sample size of 1084, 46.4% married individuals experienced moderately high level of loneliness and the age group of '31 to 40' felt maximum loneliness.

People with anxious or sensitive personalities, introverts, or those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles—especially when partnered with emotionally unavailable, depressed, or narcissistic individuals—may be more prone to loneliness. Beyond emotional distance, signs may include sadness, anxiety, irritability, or seeking connection outside the relationship.

Mental Health Consequences: Marital loneliness is often silent and misunderstood, yet it can significantly impact mental health—leading to depression, anxiety, stress, sleep disturbances, low self-worth, and substance use. A 2022 Mental Health America report linked relationship loneliness to a 52% higher risk of depression. Couples therapy frequently reveals loneliness as a root cause of broader marital distress.

Another side of the coin:

A strong, emotionally connected marriage can heal loneliness and protect mental health. When both partners are willing to grow, communicate, and connect, marriage becomes a safe and fulfilling bond.

Research from the University of Chicago shows that those in high-quality marriages experience significantly less loneliness and fewer mental health issues than singles. Similarly, the 2020 Harvard Study of Adult Development found that the quality of close relationships—especially marriage—predicts long-term happiness and health more than income, fame, or career success.

Though the mental health impacts of marital loneliness are severe, they are not irreversible. A healthy marriage, nurtured with care and vulnerability, can become a powerful buffer, offering not just companionship but true emotional refuge.

Remember: *Feeling lonely doesn't mean you're broken—it means it's time to reconnect.*



P.C.: Becoming You With Julie

**-Dr. Aabha Pimprikar
Co-Editor**

FROM LONELINESS TO MEANING

You come home after a long day, walk into an empty apartment, and crash on the couch, exhausted. Notifications buzz on your phone, and you find yourself scrolling endlessly. You haven't had a real, meaningful conversation in days and though the world around you is bustling and fast paced, internally, it feels unbearably quiet and melancholic. This is loneliness. Often defined by psychologists as a distressing experience that arises when there is a perceived gap between desired social connection and what is experienced in reality. It is deeply subjective and shaped more by the quality of relationships, accompanied by feelings of isolation, emptiness, and a yearning for deeper connection. Solitude, on the other hand, is an individual choice that can be peaceful and restorative.

In today's digitally hyperconnected world, the prevalence of loneliness is steadily rising, especially post-COVID. It cuts across age, gender, and socioeconomic background. Research shows that chronic loneliness not only has psychological impacts like depression, anxiety, and sleep issues, but can also increase the risk of lifestyle illnesses like heart disease.

In an attempt to avoid discomfort, many people turn to unhealthy coping strategies, like excessive screen time, binge-watching, emotional eating, alcohol or substance use, compulsive shopping, or constant social media scrolling. While these may offer temporary escape or distraction, they often numb emotions, disrupt routines, and prevent deeper engagement with real needs. Over time, such patterns may intensify feelings of disconnection, affecting mental and physical well-being.

Dealing with loneliness isn't about simply increasing social interaction but about cultivating authentic connections and a deeper sense of belonging. Rebuilding connection may involve reaching out to one or two trusted people, engaging in shared activities, or joining community groups. Small, meaningful steps help restore trust and connection over time.

Equally important is connecting with oneself, understanding one's emotional needs, reflecting on experiences, and being compassionate with oneself. When we feel more grounded within, the intensity of loneliness begins to soften, and being alone becomes more bearable, even nurturing.

Connecting with one's purpose also transforms the experience of loneliness. When we feel part of something larger than ourselves, working for a cause, pursuing a passion, or contributing in a meaningful way, it provides motivation, direction, and a reason to show up for life. Purpose, when rooted in values, can turn loneliness into a doorway to growth and meaning.

Loneliness is not a flaw rather a signal that something within us is asking to be recognised and nourished. By moving toward connection, be it with others, with ourselves, or with a purpose, we begin to meet that need with compassion.

-Dr. Devika Patil

Psychiatrist, Nashik

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