

FEELINGS OF COMPETENCE AMONGST INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF LONELINESS

Sheeba Ali*, Naima K Gulrez**

Abstract *Loneliness is often associated with emotional disorder, can be better understood if it is studied in relation to other relevant factor. The present research is concerned with studying loneliness in the context of feelings of competence experienced by individuals. The sample comprised of 153 subjects, 71 males and 82 females. Loneliness and competence was studied through scale constructed by author (Khan, 2003). On the basis of scores obtained on loneliness, three groups were formed, high loneliness, moderate loneliness, low loneliness. Inter group comparisons revealed that subjects having high loneliness showed a significantly low score on competence as compared to low loneliness subjects. Some differences in the two gender groups were also found.*

Keywords: *Loneliness, Incompetence, Seclusion, Worthlessness.*

INTRODUCTION

The present investigation is centered on the study of loneliness in the context of the experience of competence. Loneliness has been associated with a variety of individual differences and is also a concomitant of more severe disorder. Lonely people prefer seclusion, and they limit their opportunities for interaction. Such situations limit their tendency and ability to disclose their feelings and emotions. These pent up feelings keeps on building up into an explosive situation within such individuals and turning it to non competence.

Loneliness is a painful awareness of feeling isolated, i.e.; detached or unconnected with others. The Swiss psychiatrist Paul Townier (1998) said, "Loneliness is the most devastating malady of this age." It is a feeling of being unacceptable, worthless and unloved by those around, (even if others don't share these perceptions).

Ernst and Cacioppo (1999) concluded that chronic feelings of loneliness appear to have roots in childhood and early attachment processes. Chronically lonely individuals are more likely to be high in negative affectivity. Therefore, low competence may be a characteristic found in them.

There are two main types of loneliness:

Emotional Loneliness: This is defined as the lack of intimate relationships leading to over sensitivity and restlessness.

Social Loneliness: This deals with the lack of an available social network giving rise to feelings of meaningless, worthlessness and boredom.

Lonely persons are also having greater feeling of incompetence. Loneliness is one the dimension, which may yield information likely to enlarge understanding of competence.

Competence is the set of socio-affective conducts and cognitive, psychological, sensorial and mobile abilities that permit one to adequately carry out a role, a function, an activity or a task. White (1959, 1960, 1963) clarifies the concept of competence, and says it is an effectance motive to "explore the properties of the environment", it leads to an accumulating knowledge of what can and cannot be done with the environment. Smith (1968) belief that central to the concept of competence, is a constellation of attitudes towards one's self based on the belief that one has control of one's own life.

Perhaps people who are competent are so because they possess interactive skills, which help them to perform better and perhaps people, who are not highly competent or perceive themselves as being so, may withdraw and express behaviour that is termed lonely.

Therefore taking into consideration the dynamics and outcomes of loneliness and various aspects of the competence, the following hypotheses were framed by the researcher.

1. Subjects experiencing higher level of loneliness are low on competence.
2. Male subjects experiencing higher levels of loneliness are low on competence.
3. Female subjects experiencing higher levels of loneliness are low on competence.

* ** Researcher at Dept of Psychology, AMU Aligarh India

METHOD

Sample

The Participants comprised of 153 subjects. The age of subjects ranged between 25 to 60 years. Since random sampling in its true sense is almost impossible for practical reasons in such studies, subjects available and willing to participate were studied. All efforts were made to ensure objectivity and avoid personal bias in selection of subjects. The method of sampling was thus convenience sampling.

INSTRUMENTS

Loneliness Scale

Loneliness scale was constructed by the researcher (Khan, 2003). The scale had been constructed through “rational theoretical” approach which has been recommended by Kelly (1969) and Hassan (1997) as an appropriate strategy for developing an assessment tool. All steps involved in proper scale construction were meticulously followed.

Face validity of the questionnaire was determined. Initial questionnaire with 73 questions on various dimensions of loneliness was scrutinized by experts (senior teachers and researchers). Each item was examined closely and evaluated in terms of its suitability and relevance for trait being measured. After the suggested modifications were incorporated, the experts rescrutinized them and 41 items

were finally included. Cronbach alpha score was computed to determine reliability which was found to be 0.803

The loneliness scale consists of 41 items each having two responses categorize “True” and “False”. Those who were showing high loneliness were scored as 1, and those who were not loneliness were scored as 0.

Competence Scale

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Face validity of the developing questionnaire was determined. Initial questionnaire with 73 questions on various dimensions of competence was scrutinized by experts (senior teacher and researchers). Each item was examined closely and evaluated in terms of its suitability and relevance for trait being measured. After the suggested modifications were incorporated, the experts rescrutinized them and 30 items were finally included Cronbach alpha score was computed to determine reliability which was found to be 0.803

The competence scale consists of 30 items each having two responses categorize “True” and “False”. Those who were showing high competence were scored as 1 and those who were not competent were scored as 0.

Table 1: Comparison of Subjects of Various Loneliness Groups on Competence

| Group | Variable | N | Mean | S.D. | t - Value | Level of Significance |
|-----------------------|------------|----|------|------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Loneliness (High) | Competence | 58 | 19.6 | 2.9 | 5.3 | 0.01 |
| Loneliness (Low) | | 50 | 22.5 | 2.7 | | |
| Loneliness (High) | Competence | 58 | 19.6 | 2.9 | 3.2 | 0.01 |
| Loneliness (Moderate) | | 45 | 21.7 | 3.3 | | |
| Loneliness (Low) | Competence | 50 | 22.5 | 2.7 | 1.6 | NS |
| Loneliness (Moderate) | | 45 | 21.7 | 3.3 | | |

Table 2: Comparison of Subjects (Males) of Various Loneliness Groups On Competence

| Group | Variable | N | Mean | S.D. | t - Value | Level of Significance |
|-----------------------|------------|----|------|------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Loneliness (High) | Competence | 27 | 14.5 | 3.1 | 11.8 | 0.01 |
| Loneliness (Low) | | 23 | 22.8 | 2.4 | | |
| Loneliness (High) | Competence | 27 | 14.5 | 3.1 | 17.3 | 0.01 |
| Loneliness (Moderate) | | 21 | 28.4 | 3.1 | | |
| Loneliness (Low) | Competence | 23 | 22.8 | 2.4 | 8.0 | 0.01 |
| Loneliness (Moderate) | | 21 | 28.4 | 3.1 | | |

PROCEDURE

Administration of questionnaire is an extremely sensitive and important activity in which the crucial aspect is eliciting natural and unbiased responses from the subjects. Reassurance regarding confidentiality and proper rapport formation helps in this. Loneliness and competence scales were administered. Clear instructions were provided towards responding to both the instruments. In Loneliness as well as in competence instrument, the subjects were asked to respond in “True” and “False” on the basis of their experience. Both scales were individually administered to each subject. The time taken by each subject was approximately 60 minutes. Any clarification required by subject was given by the researcher. The scores obtained by each subject on the two scales were calculated. On the basis of scores obtained on loneliness, subjects were categorized into three groups. Higher group ranged from 33 till 61, medium group from 25 to 32, and lower group from 11 till 24. Inter group comparisons were made between the three loneliness groups on competence. t-test was applied to show significance of difference in mean score on loneliness of groups.

Results: The results obtained in the inter group comparisons are given below:

From table one, we note that subjects having high loneliness are lower feelings of competence, when compared to low loneliness subjects. Significant difference occurs between high and moderate loneliness subjects on competence. Therefore, hypothesis stating that groups having higher loneliness levels are lower on competence is supported. The two extreme groups differ significantly. However, the moderate loneliness group does not differ with the low loneliness group but differs significantly from the higher loneliness group.

Information shown in the above table, that there is significant difference between high and low loneliness groups amongst males on competence. Low loneliness subjects scored higher on competence than higher loneliness subjects. Significant difference existed between higher and moderate lonely groups on competence, the moderate lonely group being significantly higher on competence than higher lonely group. When moderate and low loneliness groups were

compared, again it was found that those who are low on loneliness have a significantly low score on competence than those who fall in moderate loneliness group. On the whole, we observe that high loneliness appears to be associated with low competence. Thus, hypothesis 2 which states that male subjects experiencing higher levels of loneliness are low on competence has been supported.

It can be seen from the above table, that females having high amount of loneliness have a significantly low score on competence than females having low loneliness. In addition, the mean score on competence obtained by those having moderate loneliness is significantly higher as compared to females having high loneliness. However, the moderate loneliness group does not differ with the low loneliness group but differs significantly from the higher loneliness group. Therefore, hypothesis 3 which states that females experiencing higher on loneliness have low score on competence than those experiencing lower loneliness is supported.

Discussion

Studying the experience of loneliness in the context of competence becomes an area of even greater importance and interest for the psychologist, because both loneliness and incompetence when present in an individual to a high degree are precursors of pathology. The strong relation between loneliness and competence, can be further argued by the fact, that a person is withdrawing may drastically limit his opportunities and capabilities for handling loneliness. Therefore the feeling of fear of loneliness and consequences thereof may be compounded. As a consequence of the inefficacy or efficacy of a particular reaction, the individual modifies or reinforces a certain behavior. Those who are withdrawn and avoid interactions are likely to be deprived of experiences, which would strengthen successful behavior and thus increase behaviours that are competent.

Loneliness has a great impact on competence, feeling of incompetence would also be enhanced when interpersonal skills are lacking. From the table we noticed that highly lonely persons were also found to be low on feelings of

Table 3: Comparison of (Female) Subjects of Various Loneliness Groups on Competence

| Group | Variable | N | Mean | S.D. | t - Value | Level of Significance |
|-----------------------|------------|----|------|------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Loneliness (High) | Competence | 31 | 19.4 | 2.6 | 4.2 | 0.01 |
| Loneliness (Low) | | 25 | 22.4 | 3.1 | | |
| Loneliness (High) | Competence | 31 | 19.4 | 2.6 | 3.2 | 0.01 |
| Loneliness (Moderate) | | 26 | 21.7 | 3.3 | | |
| Loneliness (Low) | Competence | 25 | 22.4 | 3.1 | 0.8 | NS |
| Loneliness (Moderate) | | 26 | 21.7 | 3.3 | | |

competence, it is clear that there is a definite connection between the loneliness and competence. Therefore, reduction in loneliness may also result more in competence. Zakahi (1986) investigated the casual relationships among loneliness, perceptions of communication satisfaction, and communication competence. Results showed that while loneliness was significantly related to both communication satisfaction and perception of partner's communication competence. Despite the fact that this research, or for that matter most of the researches in psychology can not establish whether incompetent is the out come of loneliness or loneliness is the out come of incompetent , it is clear that there is a definite connection. Therefore, reduction in loneliness may also result in increase in competence. Since, interventions which help to enhance ability of effective social interaction are available, if individuals who are incompetent develop skills which reduce their withdrawal and enable them to participate with ease in social situations, threshold of perceiving lonely and fear of loneliness can be positively affected. Competence is an ability which one acquires through understanding of situations and people. Green, Wildermuth, (1993) pointed loneliness in men was predicted by a lack of expressed inclusion and a desire for control from others, while loneliness in women was predicted by a lack of expressed affection. In the same manner, loneliness has also been implicated as a predisposing factor of psychopathology (Russell, Peolau and Cutrona, 1980). Thus, if individual is incompetent and also experiencing loneliness, the chances of psychopathology are increased.

Another important aspect of our work was related to gender differences in loneliness in the context of competence. It was found that males and females having low competence were high on loneliness. Since, interventions which help to enhance ability of effective social interaction are available, if individuals who are lonely develop skills which reduce their withdrawn and enable them to participate with ease in social situations. According to Davis and others 1992, such interpersonal behaviours drive potential friends away, and these experiences result in expectations of interpersonal failure, along with cynicism, pessimism, and the belief that one's life is uncontrollable. In such situations the tendency and ability to disclose to others also remains limited and when inappropriate disclosures are made there can be no improvement in interpersonal interactions (Solano, Barren, and Parish, 1982). If we take this total description of the lonely person, we are struck by the fact that there is an aura of helplessness about them.

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