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RESEARCH PAPER

Loneliness in Working and Non-Working Young Adult Women

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ABSTRACT

This study compares loneliness levels between employed and non-employed young adult women in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Employment is believed to play a protective role against loneliness by offering social interaction, identity, and structure. This study examines whether vocational engagement reduces perceived loneliness among women. A purposive sample of 60 women aged 25–30 years (30 employed, 30 non-employed) was assessed using the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3). Data were analyzed using an independent samples t-test in SPSS. Findings revealed that non-employed women reported significantly higher loneliness scores than employed women, suggesting that employment contributes to emotional and social well-being. To reduce loneliness among non-working women, it is recommended to implement community-based programs, support groups, and skill-building workshops that foster social engagement and self-worth. Policymakers and mental health professionals should promote inclusive initiatives that enhance psychological well-being through structured roles and social support systems.

| **Keywords:** | Loneliness, Working Women, Non-Working Women, UCLA Loneliness Scale, Employment, Mental Health |

Introduction

Feeling lonely is a really complicated experience that can affect anyone at any age, but it's especially common during young adulthood. That's when a lot of big changes happen like starting a career, building close relationships, and trying to find your independence. For women, manipulating personal goals with what society expects can make feelings of loneliness even harder to shake. Working women might find themselves with little time or energy for socializing because of work stress, while women who aren't working might feel isolated or lack a sense of purpose. Knowing how whether someone is working or not impacts loneliness is super important so we can create better support systems to help young women feel more connected and mentally healthier.

An ever more important public health issue affecting people at all phases of life is loneliness. It has been linked to a variety of psychological and physical health consequences, including weakened immune function, heart disease, anxiety, and melancholy. (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). Despite its prevalence and significance, loneliness is still an underexplored phenomenon in some populations, including young adult women in South Asian countries. Focusing specifically on young adult women, both working and non-working, in Pakistan, this study aims to analyze the link between employment status and loneliness.

Loneliness can be described as a subjective and desolate emotion that arises from a discrepancy between preferred and actual social contacts. Whereas loneliness can be something one prefers and appreciates, solitude is frequently something one does not want and results in emotional pain.

However, personal development and career advancement often pressure societal expectations adhere to traditional gender roles, hinder their chances for women at age range of 20s and 30s loneliness feelings women faced while like unemployment, which adhere feeling of separation more intensely. women experienced broader the feeling of left out or behind frequently which compounded success is measured by professional achievements by a social context.

loneliness perspective useful to how work relates towards ppsychological concepts. The theory of role, where women play different important roles in which they had high levels of psychological well-being. Loneliness in the Pakistani society, cultural values and social norms arises the difficulty in work. The societal pressure from family or cultural limitations bounded the women to not to work which causes her socially isolated and emotionally unsatisfied. Non- working women may experience self-doubt which cause internalized stigma upon on her personality.

Literature Review

Many researches where on working and non-working women which link to women's mental health and wellbeing, explaining the issues of unemployment, what factors contributing towards employment. Working women experienced more commonly the greater feeling of emotional stability as compared to working women's loneliness less commonly found in non-working women. In western and eastern societies researches were conducted and highlight the issues which lack among women working and non-working women which contribute the source of factor in their personal growth and social interaction. In meanwhile explaining the demographic characteristics of loneliness studies such as education, age, marital status, economic structure low, middle, high (income level).

The working women affects the financial structure of family and society and influence positively towards her inner self. The several Studies conducted upon nonworking women who are unemployed belongs to poorer families they experienced the emotion of loneliness most commonly which weakened their self-worth, and emotional desolation. (Ahmed and Qureshi,2019). These personal financial records highlight the reputation of effort for affecting happiness and the social relevance of recognizing women's work, whether paid or unpaid. To deepen our understanding of this connection, it is beneficial to delve into psychological theories. In theory of Maslow's hierarchy emphasizes that a sense of belonging and maintaining a high level of self-esteem are fundamental to mental health. In this context, work plays a crucial role by development links and uncertainty a sense of success. (Maslow, 1943). Erikson's theory of psychosocial development emphasizes that, during young adulthood, establishing intimate relationships and feeling connected to others are crucial developmental tasks. Work can be a crucial step in achieving these goals. (Erikson, 1963).

In summary, studies consistently show that employment is a protective factor against loneliness in women. The mental, social, and financial benefits of employment contribute significantly to enhancing emotional stability. This review highlights the importance of inclusive hiring process, mental health activities, and negatives attitudes that value numerous women characters. Future research should report the complex relationship between gender, work, and mental health, mainly in varied cultural and socioeconomic contexts. In Pakistan, it is common for women not to travel alone in public places. This often limits their contact with others or the situations in which they occur. For women who work outside the home, their work often provides opportunities to meet different people and sometimes make friends outside their families, which can influence their decisions and help them feel closer. These interactions help create a sense of belonging and combat loneliness. Conversely, women who stay at home are less socially visible; they are often seen primarily

within their homes. Although they are not as publicly recognized, they may also be more vulnerable to social and emotional isolation.

Women feel more confident and less dependent on others. This can be a big help in fighting loneliness. For example, a study by Rani and Singh (2016) where in India found that women who had jobs scored lower on the UCLA Loneliness Scale compared to women who stayed at home, showing how working can have mental health benefits. Plus, the social role theory suggests that the roles society assigns us, like being a worker, play a big part in who we think we are and how we feel mentally. For women, these roles are often just about caring for family or doing housework. While these jobs are important, they aren't always recognized or appreciated, which can lead to social isolation. Having a job gives women a chance to take on different roles, which can boost their self-esteem and make them feel more visible in society. Being part of a workplace, maintaining professional relationships, working in teams, and being involved in organizations creates a support system that can do a lot for their emotional health.

Material and Methods

Sample

The study included a sample of 60 women aged 25 to 30 years, equally divided into two groups: 30 working and 30 non-working women. All participants were residents of the Islamabad and Rawalpindi regions.

Research Design

A comparative cross-sectional design was adopted to explore differences in loneliness between the two groups.

Instrument

The UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) was utilized, comprising 20 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (often). The instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .89$.

Procedure

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants. Informed consent was obtained before administering the questionnaire. Participants completed the scale independently, and their responses were analyzed using SPSS. An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine differences in loneliness scores.

Hypothesis

Non-working women will report significantly higher levels of loneliness than working women.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of working and non-working women (N = 60)

Variables	Category	Working Women (n = 30)	Non-Working Women (n = 30)
Age	24–26 years	10	12
	27–28 years	12	10
Education	B.A./B.Sc.	12	14
	Master's/M.Phil.	14	8
Income Level	Low	5	18

Middle	18	10
High	7	2

The demographic breakdown highlights differences in educational attainment and income levels. Working women tended to have higher education and income, which may contribute to increased social mobility and reduced loneliness.

Table 2
Comparison of Loneliness Scores between Working and Non-Working Women

Occupation	M	SD	t	P
Working Women	38.56	7.42		
Non-Working Women	45.21	6.89	3.83	.000

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; t = t-value; p = p-value

The analysis revealed a significant difference in loneliness scores. Non-working women reported significantly higher levels of loneliness (M = 45.21, SD = 6.89) compared to working women (M = 38.56, SD = 7.42), t (58) = 3.83, p < .001. This supports the hypothesis that employment serves as a protective factor against loneliness.

This study simplifies how employment can really boost emotional well-being, especially by helping young women feel less lonely. The data clearly shows that women who aren't working tend to feel lonelier than those who are employed, which supports what we've seen in previous research about the protective role of having a job. Women with jobs usually follow daily routines that involve chatting with colleagues, working together, and making social connections. These everyday interactions help them feel connected and reduce social isolation. Plus, having a job gives women a sense of independence, confidence, and recognition, which all contribute to emotional strength and help fend off loneliness. Work also plays a big part in shaping a woman's identity. Not only does it bring financial independence, but it also offers a sense of achievement and purpose that fights feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness. In general, women who work feel more empowered because they see the positive impact of their efforts. Contrariwise, those who stay at home every so often tend to invest in housekeeping without receiving much social position or acceptance. In countries such as Pakistan, traditional roles regularly restrict women to the domestic setting, which can mean that their social circle is largely made up of family members. Many women may occasionally feel overlooked or unimportant when their social interactions are limited and domestic chores go unrecognized, especially if they lack outside connections. These feelings can grow stronger, leading to loneliness and a sense of not belonging, particularly when societal pressures and cultural expectations add to the burden. Theories like role theory and activity theory simplify why staying busy with work or other meaningful pursuits can be so essential for mental well-being. Role theory suggests that manipulating multiple roles such as being a mother, a wife, and an employee can provide emotional stability .(Biddle, 1986).

On the other hand, activity theory emphasizes that engaging in purposeful, goal-driven activities, like a job, helps preserve psychological health and a sense of satisfaction. (Havighurst, 1961).Women who aren't actively involved in their professional lives often experience less variety in their daily routines, especially in terms of social interactions with family members. While family support remains critical, a lack of external social contacts can lead to feelings of boredom, emotional drain, and loneliness. Without stimulating pursuits or chances to learn new skills and express themselves, they become more vulnerable to stress and emotional fatigue. Conversely, women who work and interact with diverse groups are exposed to different ideas and experiences, which encourages personal growth and resilience. These opportunities for learning and development help them better manage emotional highs and lows, eventually reducing feelings of isolation.

The findings have serious implications for policy. It's important to support women's mental health by creating more job opportunities or offering alternatives like skills

workshops, volunteering, and social clubs that encourage meaningful connections. For women who stay home, especially homemakers, community programs and support groups can provide critical social spaces and emotional support.

From a therapeutic perspective, mental health professionals should view loneliness as something shaped by the wider social, cultural, and economic environment. Instead of just focusing on individual therapy, it's helpful to also include group sessions or community programs that help build social bonds and encourage women to participate in activities that give their lives purpose. We also need to be honest about the limits of this study. The number of people we looked at was pretty small, and they only came from two cities, so we can't say these findings will hold true everywhere.

Future studies should look at more diverse groups and different locations, and it'd be really useful to track changes over time to see how a woman's employment status might affect her loneliness in the long run. There's a complex link between having a job and feeling lonely. While work often helps reduce loneliness by giving women chances to socialize, boost their sense of identity, and feel independent, it's just as important to support women who aren't working through community activities and broader social recognition. To really make a difference, we need a combined approach that includes job opportunities, social inclusion efforts, and cultural change, all aimed at lowering loneliness and improving mental health for women in Pakistan.

Conclusion

This study shows that having an employment essentially helps young women in urban Pakistan feel less lonely. Working women tend to have more social interactions, better self-awareness, and greater emotional satisfaction. In contrast, unemployed women often face loneliness, less contact with others, and less emotional support. Understanding the role of employment in mental well-being is essential. This information can help policymakers, mental health experts, and organizations create better programs to support unemployed women. Encouraging women to engage in meaningful activities, whether through formal employment or community projects, can have a significant impact on their mental health and overall well-being.

Recommendations

The findings of this research were adequate, while upon on practical suggestions for opposing loneliness among young non-working women. A represents a wise initial step non-working women represents producing mental health programs that bring emotional care. A wise initial step was represented towards non-working women to pproducing mental health programs which deliver initial emotional support. Women's support group's role was friendly to socialize their feelings while at work place environment. In meanwhile such programs were develop to help women socialization to connect with people which may reduce the feelings of such as loneliness and isolation. Organizations such as private and government setup should focused upon the skill development and training programs for women's, in these programs women educate may enhances skills and gives opportunities to work as employees, freelancers or entrepreneurs from home.Women may faces issues towards organizational norms while at workplace environment , women may come from different family backgrounds , emphases upon flexible work place arrangement for women like day care facilities may reduce the rate of nonworking women's , and it also reduce the rate of resignation from organization of working women, it may reduce the rate of employment among women's who are educated and determined . The women needs awareness programs for their well-being to boost the level of confidence while at work place or either they are non-working women's, give them awareness towards their emotions how to deal in certain situation how to beat stress, work load, be your self-determined it may reduce the level of loneliness among them. women need open discussions which impact on

their mental health to respond the dishonour feeling which may surrounds them loneliness. To acquire mental health support among women's working and nonworking women through digital and apps and tools. Emotional and mental health assistance among women's actively more by using the tools of digital app and applications. Online resources available greatly benefit conventional support systems of financial constraints were without access and mobility challenges among women. Pakistani women need platforms where the learn customized cultural awareness programs for their wellbeing. loneliness impact upon several factors of cultural, economic, and geographic it needs to explore additional researches. training programs reveals the mental health effective among working women's while at employment status.

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