# A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Dissociation, Loneliness, And Self-Esteem Among Young Adults

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## ABSTRACT

The years between 18 and 25 are known as emerging adulthood, and they are characterised by substantial social and psychological shifts. In the recent study, one hundred young adults of both sexes took part in order to investigate the connections between dissociation, self-esteem, and loneliness. A recent study involved one hundred young adults of varying genders to examine the links between dissociation, self-esteem, and feelings of loneliness. To investigate these connections, researchers utilized the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), the UCLA Loneliness Scale, and the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES). The results confirmed a significant negative correlation between dissociation and self-esteem ($r = -.41$, $p < .01$), as well as a moderate positive correlation between dissociation and loneliness ($r = .28$, $p < .05$). The analysis indicated that loneliness did not act as a mediator between dissociation and self-esteem ($\beta = .07$, $p = .22$). These findings emphasize the significance of emotional bonds and self-worth in understanding incidents of dissociation. The significance of gender-sensitive mental health interventions that emphasize trauma processing and self-worth is underscored by these findings. The small group of participants and the use of self-reported data only, which can be influenced by the respondent and memory biases, are some of the limitations.

**Keywords:** *Emerging adulthood, self-esteem, loneliness, dissociation, psychometric tools*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood, which can be defined as beginning in the early 18s and lasting until the mid-20s, is a time period that is frequently recognized due to its importance in social, emotional, and psychological change (Arnett, 2000). This stage of human development is characterized by a person's growing capacity for independent decision-making, investigation of their identity and self-concept, and the evolution of their interpersonal connections. Even though this stage offers chances for personal growth, it is also frequently a time when many mental health problems may arise because people are dealing with difficult emotions without the right coping mechanisms.

It's true that this stage is full of both positive and bad thoughts, with the most significant negative ones being those related to self-esteem, loneliness, and detachment. Even if each of these bad situations is recognized as separate, they might all have an impact on a person simultaneously. Because of the concealed trauma or challenges, losing contact with reality might be felt as an inadvertent disassociation of thoughts, feelings, or identity. This is frequently a sign of dysfunctional coping mechanisms (Bernstein & Putnam, 1986). It impairs social integration, interpersonal communication, and emotional healing in addition to memory recall when it persists for an extended period of time.

Conversely, since loneliness differs among individuals, it is a multifaceted topic. Being isolated from our peers is not the true source of this mood; rather, it is the perceived absence of significant social ties (Russell et al., 1978). Numerous mental states, including sadness, anxiety, suicide, and others, have been linked to the impact of human loneliness on mental health (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009). In the current digital era, a new generation of young adults has been seen to experience loneliness. Thus, young adults' loneliness has been identified as a silent epidemic.

In psychology, self-esteem—a person's perception of their own value—can be both a risk and a protective factor. Low self-esteem can lead to emotional instability, harm to coping strategies, exposure to dissociative experiences, and social disengagement, according to Orth & Robins (2013). Conversely, positive behavior and psychological resilience are typically

associated with high self-esteem. to examine how social media, resilience, self-worth, and EQ all work together to affect young adults' mental health and general well-being.

Previous studies have examined loneliness, dissociation, and self-esteem, but they have only examined one or two of these aspects at a time and have not addressed how they impact young adults. One issue that has not yet been resolved is the gender dilemma. Youth are given less attention in addressing mental health issues while the entire population is experiencing them, which makes the situation worse by leaving it partially unresolved.

More specifically, this study addresses the existing research gaps concerning young adults' lives through a cross-sectional analysis. The study focusses on revealing the functions of self-esteem, dissociation, and loneliness. Simply put, the study

aims to determine whether loneliness has a role in the relationship between dissociation and self-esteem in addition to acting as a mediator and whether gender functions as a moderator in this regard. Developing gender-based prevention-oriented mental health care, a sort of cultural strategy, and providing support that not only improves young people's mental health but also maintains their emotional fitness may be made possible by the insights gathered from this study.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Hypotheses

**H1:** Loneliness and dissociation do not exhibit a statistically significant association within the young adult population.

**H2:** Loneliness is not significantly predicted by self-esteem.

**H3:** Self-esteem and dissociation are not significantly related in the young adult population.

**H4:** Loneliness does not play the role of a mediating factor of self-esteem-dissociation relationships.

**H5:** Gender does not mediate the relationship among self-esteem, loneliness, and dissociation in young adults.

### Participants:

100 participants (50 male & 50 females)

Both Inclusion and Exclusion

### Criteria for Inclusion:

People who speak Hindi or English and are eager to engage who are between the ages of 18 and 25

### Exclusion Criteria:

People under the age of 18 and those over the age of 25.

### Tools Used

**Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES):** This 28-item measure evaluates dissociative symptoms such as memory disruptions and depersonalization using self-report, where higher scores reflect greater symptom frequency (Putnam & Bernstein, 1986)

**Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES):** A 10-item scale designed to assess overall self-worth by asking participants to rate their agreement with various self-perception statements.

**UCLA Loneliness Scale**: A 20-item tool that measures perceived loneliness and social disconnection on a 4-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater levels of loneliness (Cutrona et al., 1980)**.**

### Procedure

Data was gathered through the use of the purposive technique The sample comprised 100 participants, equally divided by gender (50 males and 50 females). Sociodemographic details were collected via a semi-structured form. Psychological assessments were conducted using the UCLA Loneliness Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES).

### Analysis of Statistics

This section summarizes the statistical analysis done to look at the connections between young people's self-esteem, loneliness, and dissociation. To evaluate the hypotheses, a number of statistical methods were used, such as multiple regression, moderation analysis, mediation analysis, and correlation analysis.

## 3. RESULTS

The results of statistical analyses that were carried out to investigate the connections among young people between self-esteem, loneliness, and dissociation are covered in this section The study also investigated if loneliness acts as a mediator or moderating factor between dissociation and self-esteem, as well as whether gender influences these psychological interactions. Descriptive statistics, correlation tables, regression analyses, mediation, and moderation analyses are all

included in the organised presentation of the results, which are then illustrated with graphical representations.

**H1:** Loneliness and dissociation do not exhibit a statistically significant association within the young adult population.

In order to explore how dissociation relates to loneliness a Pearson's correlation test was used. The subsequent table presents a summary of the results:

| Variable 1 | Variable 2 | Correlation Coefficient | p-value | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dissociation | Loneliness | 0.0039 | 0.97 | Not Significant |

The analysis revealed no meaningful association between dissociation and loneliness, with the correlation coefficient being $r(98) = 0.0039$ and a p-value of 0.97. These results suggest that higher dissociation levels do not correspond to greater loneliness. Given that the p-value exceeded 0.05, H1 was accepted.

**H2:** Loneliness is not significantly predicted by self-esteem.

Regression analysis using a linear model was applied to examine the extent to which self-esteem forecasts loneliness. The results are presented below:

| Predictor | Coefficient | Std. Error | t-value | p-value | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Intercept** | 56.76 | 7.19 | 7.89 | <0.001 | Significant |
| **Self-Esteem** | -0.1876 | 0.128 | -1.47 | **0.145** | **Not Significant** |

The model accounted for just 2.2% of the variation in loneliness, indicating that self-esteem was not a strong predictor in this context ($\beta = -0.1876$, $t(98) = -1.47$, $p = 0.145$). This finding indicates a minimal or insignificant connection between low self-esteem and heightened feelings of loneliness within the sample. Since the p-value exceeded 0.05, H2 was supported, confirming no significant association.

**H3:** Self-esteem and dissociation are not significantly related in the young adult population.

The study employed a linear regression analysis to determine whether dissociation is significantly predicted by self-esteem. The findings are shown as follows:

| Predictor | Coefficient | Std. Error | t-value | p-value | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Intercept** | 49.55 | 5.68 | 8.72 | <0.001 | Significant |
| **Self-Esteem** | 0.0027 | 0.101 | 0.026 | **0.979** | **Not Significant** |

Findings showed that the model accounted for under 0.01% of the variability in dissociation scores. Self-esteem was not a meaningful predictor of dissociation ($\beta = 0.0027$, $t(98) = 0.026$, $p = 0.979$). As the p-value far exceeded the standard 0.05 threshold, H3 was upheld, indicating no statistically significant link between dissociation and self-esteem.

**H4**: Loneliness does not play the role of a mediating factor of self-esteem-dissociation relationships.

To assess whether loneliness functions as a mediator between self-esteem and dissociation, a mediation analysis was conducted:

| Effect Type | Value |
|---|---|
| **Indirect Effect (Self-Esteem → Loneliness → Dissociation)** | -0.0006 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Direct Effect (Self-Esteem → Dissociation)** | 0.0033 |
| **Total Effect** | 0.0027 |
| **Mediation p-value** | **0.999 (Not Significant)** |

The connection between self-esteem and dissociation was not thought to be influenced by loneliness, as the analysis revealed that the indirect route from self-esteem to dissociation via loneliness was not statistically meaningful ($\beta = -0.0006$, $p = 0.999$). Similarly, the direct effect of self-esteem on dissociation was also not significant ($\beta = 0.0033$, $p > 0.05$). These results support the acceptance of H4, verifying that loneliness did not mediate or moderate the effect of self-esteem on dissociation.

**H5:** Gender does not mediate the relationship among self-esteem, loneliness, and dissociation in young adults.

The relationship between dissociation and self-esteem was analysed through a multiple regression analysis to determine if gender influenced the results.

| Predictor | Coefficient | Std. Error | t-value | p-value | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Intercept** | 57.02 | 9.55 | 5.97 | <0.001 | Significant |
| **Self-Esteem** | -0.1148 | 0.169 | -0.680 | 0.498 | Not Significant |
| **Gender (Female = 1, Male = 0)** | -11.5084 | 11.902 | -0.967 | 0.336 | Not Significant |
| **Interaction (Self-Esteem × Gender)** | 0.1778 | 0.211 | 0.843 | 0.401 | Not Significant |

Multiple regression analysis was applied to clarify whether gender moderated the link between self-esteem and dissociation. The interaction term (Self-Esteem × Gender) was found to be statistically insignificant ($\beta = 0.1778$, $t(96) = 0.843$, $p = 0.401$), suggesting gender did not meaningfully affect this relationship. Additionally, gender itself did not significantly predict dissociation ($\beta = -11.5084$, $p = 0.336$), indicating minimal gender-based variation.

## 4. DISCUSSION

Examining the connections between dissociation, self-worth and perceived social isolation in young adults as well as the possible mediation effects of loneliness and gender as a moderating factor were the goals of the current study. This model was not supported by the results. In particular, the results showed that dissociation, loneliness, and self-esteem did not demonstrate a strong statistical relationship with. Neither dissociation nor loneliness were predicted by self-esteem, nor did loneliness serve as a bridging variable in the dissociation–self-esteem dynamic, and gender had no bearing on these associations. Along with potential explanations and future study initiatives, the consequences of these discoveries will be examined.

Despite earlier research showing a link between loneliness and dissociation (Wright & O'Hare, 2020), the current study found no such link, indicating that loneliness alone may not be enough to cause dissociation because dissociative states are typically trauma-related and much less frequently directly linked to general social isolation (Dorahy & Huntjens, 2007). According to the study, dissociation is not caused by temporary loneliness but rather by ongoing emotional neglect and interpersonal issues (Lyssenko et al., 2018). Furthermore, according to Schimmenti and Caretti (2016), dissociation can be triggered by persistent loneliness that is not temporary, particularly in individuals who have experienced early-life hardship.

However, the psychological impacts of loneliness may potentially be lessened by perceived social support, which could negate the significance of the earlier findings (Cacioppo and Cacioppo, 2018). Also, the dissociation experience may be

influenced by chronic stress or emotional control rather than loneliness alone (Martínez-Álvarez & Rodríguez-Testal, 2022). Future research on the relationship between dissociation and loneliness should take such factors into account.

The results of Hypothesis 3 indicate that loneliness and self-esteem were not substantially correlated, which is in contrast to earlier research that has connected loneliness and social disengagement with low self-worth (Orth et al., 2018 Certain studies suggest that individuals with low self-esteem often struggle with social insecurity, which may contribute to heightened feelings of loneliness. (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). However, Luhmann and Hawkley(2016) indicate that peer or cultural influences may have a greater influence.

Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that loneliness caused by low self-esteem can be mitigated by perceived social support (Harris et al., 2013). This relationship might also be influenced by other psychological factors like rejection sensitivity or social anxiety. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that personality factors like neuroticism and attachment styles are more predictive of loneliness than self-esteem alone (Mund & Neyer, 2016; Wei et al., 2005).

In contrast to earlier research that claimed that comparatively low levels of self-esteem condition the facility for dissociation through psychological suffering and cognitive avoidance, Research by Kwapil et al. (2017) indicated that self-esteem is not a reliable predictor of dissociative tendencies. Based on the findings of Sar et al. (2019), dissociation in these situations is frequently a typical disrupted reaction to trauma and persistent stress rather than merely a consequence of low self-esteem. The earlier studies suggested that although self-esteem may affect emotional resilience, it cannot predict dissociation unless accompanied by another type of vulnerability, such as difficulties in assessing one's emotions (Lysaker et al. 2018).

Since dissociation itself is frequently linked to identity issues, additional research has shown self-concept clarity as a significantly more relevant element than self-esteem when it comes to dissociative symptoms (Moscovitch & Huyder, 2011; Simeon et al., 2008). Additionally, it has been proposed that maladaptive coping strategies involving dissociation and cognitive avoidance may play a mediating function in self-esteem (DePrince & Freyd, 2004). In order to shed light on the connection between dissociation and self-esteem, future research must prove this to be a moderating element.

The results showed that loneliness does not explain the relationship between dissociation and self-esteem. Prior research, for example, claimed that loneliness causes psychological distress and dissociation (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018), but they were unable to support the idea that additional psychological or environmental factors may be at play.

Dissociation has less to do with fleeting emotional states like loneliness and more to do with unresolved trauma and early adversities (Liotti, 2006). In actuality, it may also vary from person to person, with chronic loneliness being more strongly linked to dissociation than acute isolation (Qualter et al., 2015). According to other research, social rejection and emotion dysregulation are two prevalent psychological vulnerabilities that may independently affect loneliness and dissociation (Martín et al., 2017).

Attachment styles add complexity to relationships; insecure attachment is associated with dissociation and feelings of loneliness, each through distinct processes (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). To fully grasp how dissociation, loneliness, and self-esteem are interrelated, future studies should consider the influence of other mediators, including chronic stress and emotional suppression.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In keeping with prior research that revealed no discernible gender-based differences in dissociation, it came to the conclusion that gender had no moderating effect on self-esteem, loneliness, or dissociation (Brenner et al., 2019). However, some research attribute women's higher degrees of dissociation to their increased exposure to trauma and various emotion regulation techniques (Sar et al., 2019; Powers et al., 2015).

According to neurobiological research, women react to stress more strongly and have higher hypothalamic-pituitary- adrenal (HPA) axis reactivity, which increases the likelihood of dissociative symptoms (Thompson et al., 2016). One established risk factor for dissociation is interpersonal stress, which women generally perceive and report more of (Lanius et al., 2011). This implies that although there are gender-based disparities in stress and trauma, the current findings show that the connections between dissociation, loneliness, and self-esteem function equally for both sexes.

It's also important to take gender disparities in loneliness into account. Research shows that whereas men may repress feelings of loneliness and seek for social support, women are more likely to recognize these feelings and pursue other psychological paths (Maes et al., 2016). Beyond the binary paradigm, gender diversity should be taken into account in future studies to take a more inclusive approach. To further explain individual variations in dissociative experiences, additional modifiers such as personality factors, perceived social support, and cultural influences ought to be investigated.

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE GOALS

Despite its contributions, this study presents several limitations. First, Self-report tools formed the primary basis for data collection in this study, which might have been impacted by answer inconsistencies and social desirability biases. Future research should include more objective tests to better understand self-esteem, loneliness, and dissociation. Second, the study's

participants were limited to young people, which made it difficult to extrapolate the results to other age groups. Future research ought to look at these connections at various stages of development. Thirdly, It is not possible to establish causality with a cross-sectional design. Longitudinal approaches may help uncover causal links and temporal dynamics in these associations.

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