CHAPTER V

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The present study investigates loneliness in middle class women of Assamese society. Level of loneliness as related to age, marital status and employment status was explored.

The data collected was analyzed through Analysis of Variance. All significant F- ratios were applied the Tukey's Test for Honestly Significant Difference (H.S.D.) to find which means differed significantly from each of the other. The results obtained have been given in Chapter – IV.

The total 1080 sample was classified as per age level (old age, middle age and young adult), marital status (married, unmarried) and employment status (employed, unemployed).

From the results of ANOVA, when the main effects are considered, it is found that only age affects loneliness level of women significantly. Through H.S.D. test it is found that young adult women experience highest level of loneliness. This group differs significantly from the old age group of women on loneliness at .01 level followed by significant difference with the middle age group at .05 level. These results show that there is highest difference in loneliness between young adults and old aged women. Based on this finding
the null hypothesis 3(b) of this research, stating young adult women will not differ from old aged women in the level of loneliness stands rejected.

Hypothesis 3(a) stands rejected too as young adult women (m=100.78) experience significantly more loneliness than the middle age women (m=95.68) of Assamese society. The difference in loneliness between the middle aged group and the old aged group of women was found to be non-significant. Based on this finding the null hypothesis 3(c) which stated that middle aged women will not differ from old age women in the level of loneliness experienced by them is accepted.

Thus, the results of this study illustrate that loneliness level probably is highest among young adults and then decrease progressively in middle age and old age. This seems to be in accordance with findings from other studies (Peplau et al 1982, Rubenstien & Shaver 1982, Brennan 1982, Parlee, 1979). It has been stated that 18-25 year olds suffer more from loneliness than any other age group.

Assam is also part of the recent rapid socio - economic change that is taking place in rest of our country, India, along with its effects of high competition, anxiety, depression and alienation, all of which are related to loneliness. Perhaps because of this the young adult women of Assamese society seem to be experiencing higher loneliness than women of old age (m=92.88) and middle age (m=95.68). The feeling of loneliness in early
adulthood is high whereas in old age the pre-disposing factors of loneliness become more stable. This is so as old aged women probably have learnt to adjust better with their lives as age brings greater social skills and more realistic expectations about social relations (Carolyn Cutrona, 1982).

Psychologists have empirically demonstrated links between loneliness and several personality characteristics: low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, shyness, self-consciousness, the lack of social skills needed for making new friends, introversion and lack of assertiveness and external locus of control. Because of industrialization, modernization, and resulting high aspirations for higher socio-economic status, but high competition and insufficient job opportunity, career oriented Assamese society may still be lagging behind in acquiring the required skills. This in turn could result in negative effects on personality characteristics such as low self esteem etc., which are related to loneliness. This is probably one reason for making young adult women more vulnerable to loneliness. Support for it comes from another study which found that individuals want something more or something different than what is currently available (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). Therefore, when they do not achieve what they aspire for, it can lead to frustration, depression and anxiety. In this way psychological discontent can eventually lead to loneliness.

That young adult women experience highest loneliness is also in accordance with Erickson's theory where it is stated that early adulthood is
the time of "isolation crisis", and therefore loneliness generally develops during early adulthood.

Loneliness tends to decline over the years, leveling off throughout the middle age years, decreasing still further in old age and increasing again in very old age.

Old age is another stage where studies have found high level of loneliness experienced by very old individuals (over 70 years or so) (Patil, Asgarali & Aruna 2000, Muthayya 1995, Anuradha & Prakash 1991, Perlman, 1991). However, in this study the old age group comprised of women aged 55 years and above. Therefore, any variation in loneliness experienced by these women, put into a very broad age range, is not apparent.

The other main effects of marital status and employment did not affect loneliness experienced by women significantly. The F- ratios obtained were non – significant (employment status, F = 3.453; marital status, F = .036). Therefore, hypothesis 1 stating married women will not differ from unmarried women in the level of loneliness experienced by them is rejected. So stands rejected hypothesis 2 which stated that employed women will not differ from unemployed women in the level of loneliness experienced by them.

That marital status does not affect loneliness in middle class women of Assamese society is contrary to the findings of earlier studies. Rubinstin & Shaver (1982) found that some married people (18% of one large study) do
feel lonely. To support the result another study may also be referred to
where it was found that loneliness is a common phenomenon and risk
factors include experience of domestic violence in current relationship, not
having recent paid employment, not being married/partnered and the
number of children under 18 years in households (Robert C. Atchely, Linda
Pignatiello 1979). Another study has found that widowed, divorced and
separated individuals are lonelier than those who are married or never have
been married (Perlman & Peplau 1981). Still another study indicates that
marital status was not directly related to loneliness but may be indirectly
related through social support (Barron CR, Foxall MJ, Von Dollen K, Jones
KA, 1994). Therefore, this variable i.e. marital status needs to be explored
further in more detail, although it is possible that the effect of marital status
on loneliness may have been mediated by social support. Thus, no
significant difference has been found in loneliness between the married and
the unmarried.

Main effect of employment status also did not affect loneliness in middle
class women of Assamese society. This too needs to be investigated further
as some studies (Frances M. Mc. Kee et al 2005, Bell et al 1990) have found
some effects of employment on loneliness.

When interaction effects were studied it was found that when age interacted
with marital status, F-ratio obtained was significant. From subsequent
Tukey's Test for H.S.D. we find that ten pairs of means differ significantly.
The highest difference is between young unmarried (m=102.82) and old unmarried (m = 91.64) followed by young unmarried and old married (m = 94.11). In both instances the group of young adults experienced higher loneliness. This again shows the effect of age on loneliness. But the problem of loneliness is probably reinforced by the unmarried status of these young adults. It is commonly believed that married people are less likely to be lonely than others and that is why the unmarried group probably show higher loneliness. In support of this finding is the report that loneliness is greater in unmarried than in married persons (Wood, 1978). Jong-Gierveld (1978) found marital status differences to be related to differences in average intensity of feelings of loneliness, with higher loneliness scores being for unmarried, widowed and divorced than married people.

Marriage probably lessens feelings of loneliness as married women have wider social networks through their families. They probably also have higher social support (Barron CR, Foxall MJ, Von Dollen K, Jones KA, 1994). In traditional Assamese families the extended family of aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. are actively involved in family matters and extend support to the family members. This could probably be one reason for lower loneliness among the old married women.

Difference between middle married (m = 96.23) and young unmarried (m=102.82) is also significant. The young unmarried group scored higher on loneliness. As mentioned above the probable reason for this difference could
be the unmarried status of the younger group which is further enhancing the loneliness experienced by this group due to their age status.

Significant difference has been obtained between young married (m=96.36) and old unmarried (m = 91.64). Young married group shows higher loneliness. Age seems to be an important variable affecting loneliness. It is found in this study that the young group differs significantly in loneliness level from all other age groups. Studies already quoted support this finding of the present study. How marriage affects loneliness is still not clear as research findings are contradictory to each other but age appears to be a determining factor of loneliness.

Another significant difference found through Tukey's H.S.D. is that between old unmarried (m = 91.64) and middle married (m = 96.23) with the middle age group of women experiencing higher loneliness. Studies have reported that loneliness levels off during middle age and increases again during very old age. Study by Jong-Gierveld (1978) also mentions that unmarried older persons score higher on loneliness. However, it is found here that the middle married women scored higher on loneliness. This could probably be due to the life changes which set in during this life stage such as negative physical changes, empty nest etc. This result could be investigated further. Social network and social support of these women could be explored to gain more insight into the level of loneliness experienced by them.
Another finding shows significant difference in loneliness level between young married ($m = 98.74$) and young unmarried ($m = 102.82$) women, with young unmarried group experiencing higher loneliness. Probably this difference is obtained due to the unmarried status of the young group (Jong – Gierveld, 1978). Young unmarried adults are lonely at times as they miss the companionship they enjoyed during their adolescent years (Hurlock, 1995).

Tukey's H.S.D. also showed low significant effect between old unmarried ($m = 91.64$) and middle unmarried women ($m = 95.14$) with higher loneliness level being experienced by middle unmarried age group. This finding shows the effect of being unmarried at the two age levels on loneliness. ANOVA showed that there is no significant difference of level of loneliness between middle age and old age groups, when age alone is considered. The old unmarried group probably experiences less loneliness due to their higher participation in social interaction with kith and kin. Significant $X^2$ for age also shows that old age women engaged highest in social interaction. Krause & Keith (1989) and Krause & Shaw (2002) found in their research that women are more likely to report experiences of benefiting from their personal relations.

Tukey's test for H.S.D. reveals difference in loneliness between young married ($m = 96.36$) and old married ($m = 94.11$) to be significant. As explained earlier the young married group is found to have higher loneliness.
due to their age and probably due to adjustive demands of married life. Tied
down with the care of young children, limited by a budget and often living
away from family and former friends, married adults may be as lonely as
those who are unmarried (Erikson, 1968).

Results also found that old married (m = 94.11) and old unmarried
(m=91.64) show second least significant difference in loneliness, with old
married group experiencing higher loneliness than old unmarried group. This
difference probably again shows effect of marital status. This result is
contrary to the finding of Jong – Gierveld (1978) where it was mentioned that
unmarried older persons scored higher on loneliness than married older
people. Ellen C. Shaw (2004) too reported that widows (included under
married in this study) had the highest levels of interaction with friends and
with primary relatives. This implies that loneliness is low in the unmarried
group probably due to higher interaction. It must be noted here that, as
stated in the distribution of the married sample, 11% of the total married
sample were single women who had got married at some time. The inclusion
of such women under the “married” category could possibly be one reason
for getting results which do not agree with findings from other research.

The least significant difference in loneliness was found between the old
married (m = 94.11) and the middle aged married group (m = 96.23), middle
married experiencing higher loneliness. This shows the effect of marriage on
loneliness as the main effect of age found difference between middle age women and old age women to be non-significant.

However, when age and marital status interact (as in this case) it is found that middle married women report significantly higher loneliness than old married women, though the difference is low and significant at .05 level. Marriage seems to be an enhancing factor for loneliness during middle-age. As mentioned earlier this could be due to the adjustable demands of this period but it needs to be investigated further.

Interaction effects not found significant through H.S.D. test are between young married- middle married, middle married- middle unmarried and old married-middle unmarried.

From the ANOVA results it was found that interaction effect for age and employment was also significant. Analysis through Tukey's test for H.S.D. shows that the highest difference is between the mean loneliness scores of old employed (m = 92.73) and young unemployed (m = 103.40) with the young group of women experiencing higher loneliness. The second highest difference among means is between old unemployed (m = 93.02) and young unemployed (m = 103.40) women. Again it is found that the young adult unemployed group experiences higher level of loneliness. Studies by Frances et al (2005) and Bell et al (1990) have found a link between employment and loneliness. Unemployment is seen to have adverse effects
and to raise feelings of loneliness (Sharkey and Mummery 2003). It is found that in these two interaction effects of this present study, the young unemployed group has the two variables of age and unemployment, both of which are seen to be related to high levels of loneliness. The older group because of their age show lower loneliness.

Tukey's test for H.S.D. reveals that the young unemployed group (m = 103.40) scores higher on loneliness than both the middle employed (m = 95.93) and middle unemployed (m = 95.44) groups. As was found earlier age is a significant factor in loneliness and in this case unemployment status interacting with age seems to have enhanced loneliness level of the young adult women. Studies quoted above support the adverse effect of unemployment on loneliness. Atchely & Pignatiello (1979) too reported that one risk factor for experience of loneliness is not having recent paid employment.

The young employed group (m = 98.17) is found to differ significantly from the old employed group (m = 92.73). This seems to be the effect of age in both the employed groups. The reasons could be the same as cited earlier, i.e. preoccupation with adjustive demands during early adulthood, differences in social interaction, etc.

Significant difference in loneliness score is also found between young employed (m = 98.17) and young unemployed adults (m = 103.40) with
young unemployed group showing higher loneliness level. Finding shows that here unemployment status of young adults affect the level of loneliness among young adult women. As already stated, study by Atchely and Pignatiello (1979) reports that a risk factor for experiencing loneliness is not having recent paid employment. Thus, being unemployed has made the young adult women of this study more vulnerable to loneliness as seen by the significant difference reported between young employed and young unemployed.

Old unemployed (m = 93.02) women experience significantly lower loneliness than the young employed (m = 98.17) women of this study. This difference too is probably due to the two different age levels of the two groups.

Two other significant differences is between old employed (m = 92.73) and middle unemployed (m = 95.44), and between old unemployed (m=93.02) and middle employed (m = 95.93). In both cases the older age group shows significantly lower loneliness. This again could be due to the age factor.

Further, significant difference is found between the young employed group (m=98.17) and the middle aged unemployed (m=95.44) and with the middle aged employed (m=95.93). In both cases the young employed group experience higher loneliness.
When age alone was considered, Tukey's test for H.S.D. revealed that young adult women experience higher loneliness than middle age women. When age interacts with employment it is again found that younger group (who are employed) experience higher loneliness than the middle age (both employed & unemployed) group. However, the difference in mean loneliness of the two groups (young and middle) is much lower now, though still significant.

At face value employment seems to be enhancing the high loneliness felt by the young adult women. Early adulthood makes many demands on the young adult person as she has to adjust to marriage, employment, parenthood etc. Taken up by life's preoccupations the young adult women have limited time for social interactions. This could be a probable reason for high loneliness in employed young adult women of this study. This is supported by findings of study by Schmitt & Kurdek (1985) where it is reported that compared to elderly women, younger women expressed more dissatisfaction both with their family and large group relations. Erikson (1968) has also stated that young adults have to devote most of their energies to their work, which leaves them little time for the socialization that leads to close relationships. As a result they become self centred, which contributes to loneliness.

However, if the fact is considered that mean difference in loneliness between the young adult group (m = 100.78) and the middle age group
is lower now, the implication may be that the young group's feeling of loneliness (which was found to be the highest when age is considered alone) is probably positively affected by their employment status; employment probably bringing down somewhat the level of loneliness experienced by them, even though it is still higher to loneliness experienced by the middle age group. This is probably because employment may also serve as an opportunity for social interaction.

Interaction effects not found significant through H.S.D. test are between middle employed-middle unemployed and old employed-old unemployed middle class urban women of Assamese society.

In interaction effect, when all three variables i.e. age, marital status and employment status interacted together, F-ratio obtained was not significant.

Non parametric $X^2$ test revealed that social interaction is significant only for age level. Responses regarding social interaction show that it is the old age group of women who report highest level of social interaction followed by the middle age group. Lowest social interaction is reported by the young adult women. This is in accordance with Erickson's theory stating that early adulthood is a period of "isolation crisis". This is also the life stage when the young adult is busy with career, marriage and children and has little or no time for social interaction outside the home and job.
This demand gradually decreases as one reaches middle age and eventually during old age the person is freer from career and household demands. Social interaction may thus increase during old age as seen from the $X^2$ result of this study.

This finding also gives some evidence in support of the ANOVA result for main effect of age on loneliness. It was found that loneliness was highest in the young adult women and gradually decreased from middle age to old age. Therefore, it can be probably assumed that as social interaction is high among the old age women thus their loneliness level is found to be low. Study by Spitzberg & Caney (1985), Sloan & Solano (1984) support this finding that social interaction mitigates the experience of loneliness.

A significant $X^2$ also reveals that entertainment activities are highest among young adult women and lowest among the old age women. This reveals that young adults probably engaged in entertainment activities such as watching TV, listening to radio, going for movies etc. during their leisure time instead of social interaction with others, as these activities can be carried out in isolation and does not always need other people.

Old age women ($m = 92.88$) on the other hand engaged less in such entertainment activities. As revealed from the previous $X^2$ test old age women show high social interaction and therefore, probably have less inclination toward, and less time for, entertainment activities. They engaged
more with other people and therefore their loneliness level is also seen to be low.

The results from $X^2$ support the finding obtained through ANOVA and Tukey's test. This test shows that age is a significant variable which affects feeling of loneliness along the life span. The results of this investigation reveal that loneliness is highest among young adult women of middle class Assamese society followed by middle age and then the old age women. From $X^2$ test on social interaction it is found that age ($X^2 = 19.37$) affects social interaction. The young adult reported least social interaction and the old age women the highest social interaction. As Tukey's test shows that young adult women experience highest loneliness, it is possible that one factor which could probably be responsible for this, is low social interaction. Similarly, old age women show low loneliness which could possibly be due to higher social interaction as revealed by $X^2$ test on social interaction. As given earlier, various studies report that social interaction can decrease feeling of loneliness.

Entertainment, however, appears to be a paradox because high engagement in entertainment activities could be either a probable cause of loneliness or a probable effect of loneliness. This is because the young adult group showing high loneliness also reports high engagement in entertainment activities and low engagement in social interaction. Both these behaviours could be possible reasons for their high experience of loneliness.
On the other hand, loneliness could also be responsible for the young adult group's reporting of such behaviour regarding social interaction and entertainment activities.

**CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion it may be stated that through this research it has been found that age is an important variable in the experience of loneliness. Loneliness is highest in young adult women of Assamese society, followed by the middle age women and then the old age women. Thus, loneliness level decreases along the life span and is lowest during old age. This finding is as per results reported in other studies.

The present research also indicated a possible relationship between social interaction and loneliness. Frequency of social interaction decreased from the old age group to the young adult group. Thus, the group experiencing high loneliness (young adults) also reported low social interaction and the group experiencing low loneliness (old age) reported high social interaction. Thus, an inverse relationship between loneliness and social interaction is suggested.

The two variables of marital status and employment status need to be investigated further as results of age and marital status interaction and age and employment status interaction give some indication of their possible
effect on loneliness. Other studies have also found some link between these two variables and loneliness.

The result of this study gives some insights into loneliness experienced by urban middle class women of Assamese society. It is the young adult women who seem to be more vulnerable to loneliness and thus may be affected by it in adverse ways possibly leading to depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, etc. Therefore, loneliness status of young women may be assessed by practicing Psychologists to identify related psychological problems and thus make suggestions to their clients and take measures to mitigate the experience of loneliness in women.