

# Loneliness of Z Generation Adolescents in the Covid-19 Pandemic: Descriptive Study

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## ABSTRACT

Loneliness is a condition of a discrepancy between what you want to achieve and what is actually achieved in social relationships, both in quantity and quality. Continued loneliness has a clinical impact that needs to be considered. Loneliness can be experienced by all ages, including adolescents who are currently included in Z generation. During the Covid-19 pandemic, direct social interaction is very limited. Meanwhile, Z generation adolescents are already good at using digital technology and interacting more virtually through social media. This study describes loneliness in Z generation adolescents during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study participants were 233 adolescents aged 15 to 19 years and have one or more gadget. The measuring instrument used is the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) which has been proven valid and reliable. Data analysis was conducted with descriptive statistics. The findings show a high level of loneliness in Z generation adolescents. Other findings show there is a significant difference between the number of active social media on loneliness, but there is no significant difference between the number of family members living with and the number of interactions with parents on loneliness in Z generation adolescents. Suggestions for this research are addressed to parents and practitioners.

**Keywords:** *loneliness, Z generation adolescence, UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3).*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transition period in the human lifespan between childhood and adulthood. Usually begins between the ages of 10 to 13 years and ends before entering the age of 20 years (18-19 years old) or late adolescence [1]. Based on the stage of development, the main task of adolescents is to face the crisis of identity versus identity confusion [2].

In adolescence, they are building self-identity, one of which is by building intimacy that can be obtained through friendship with peers as a basic social need [1]. Through friendship, they can support and trust each other more than their parents. With this trust, they can express personal thoughts and feelings that help them to better know themselves or their identity [2].

Generally, adolescents have friends in a small groups that engage in the same activities by spending time together, sharing the same interests, and enjoying the togetherness. For example is doing sports activities together [1]. Therefore, direct social interaction is important for adolescents.

Meanwhile, during the Covid-19 pandemic, direct social interaction has become very limited. In order to suppress the spread of Covid-19, President Joko Widodo has set a policy to stay at home, including teaching and learning activities [3]. This certainly has an impact on adolescents, because they are very limited to direct social interaction with their friends and spend more time at home, which can cause loneliness. A Doctor of Psychology, Melly Latifah also revealed that the limitation of direct social interaction has resulted in the widespread loneliness of today's adolescents (Zakaria & Azizah, 2020) [4].

Loneliness is a condition of a discrepancy between what you want to achieve and what is actually achieved in social relationships, both in quantity and quality. Loneliness is subjective because it can only be felt by certain individuals [5]. Moreover, loneliness can also be interpreted as a social situation experienced by individuals due to unpleasant feeling in certain relationships. Social situation lead to a condition when the number of relationships that are owned is less than desired, and

the situation where the desired intimacy has not been realized [6].

Cacioppo et al. [7] found that loneliness can predict the emergence of depression. Loneliness is also known to determine social welfare and cause physical disorders such as diabetes, obesity, and aging [8]. The results of a rapid systematic review in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic also found that loneliness in adolescents can be associated with mental health problems later in life, even up to nine years later, with the strongest association with depression [9].

However, today's adolescents who are currently included Z generation are already good at using digital technology. Z generation are people who was born between 1993 and 2005 [10]. They are the first generation to have access to large-scale digital communication technology in the form of mobile phone, Wi-Fi, and interactive games on computer [11]. They can give comments, opinions, and show attitudes through blog, internet forum, photo sharing, and film [12].

Z generation adolescents can easily search and check any information they need. They can quickly share information with others because the communication process can take place continuously using a variety of different communication devices or social media [13]. Z generation adolescents have considered smartphone as an important part of their life [14].

Thus, although direct social interaction is very limited, Z generation adolescents can have virtual social interactions with their friends very easily. Therefore, this study wants to see a description of loneliness in Z generation adolescents during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**2. METHODS**

This research is a quantitative non-experimental study. Data analysis was conducted by using descriptive statistics and processed with SPSS version 21 for Windows. Data collection used a questionnaire distributed online via Google Form. It contained an informed consent and instrument to measure loneliness using the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3), which has been adapted to the Indonesian version by Ariani, Supradewi, and Syafitri [15].

The UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) consists of 20 items with 11 negative items and 9 positive items. This measuring instrument uses a Likert scale from 1 (never) to 4 (often). Scores for all positive items must be reversed (1 = 4, 2 = 3, 3 = 2, 4 = 1). All scores of each item must be added up to obtain a total score.

The participants in this study were 233 Z generation adolescents, aged between 15 to 19 years, and have gadget (smartphone/laptop/tablet). Demographic data consist of gender, age, number of active social media, number of family members living with, and frequency of interaction with parents.

Based on data, it is known that the majority of participants are female (65%), 16 years old (27.5%), have more than three active social media (70.3%), and live with their nuclear family (91%). Meanwhile, the participants admitted that they very often interact with their parents, both father (37.8%) and mother (66.5%). See in table 1. and table 2.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of participants

		N	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	81	35
	Female	152	65
Age	15	29	12.4
	16	64	27.5
	17	61	26.2
	18	50	21.5
	19	29	12.4
Active social media	1	6	1.6
	2	20	8.6
	3	37	15.9
	> 3	170	70.3
Living with	Nuclear family	212	91
	Big family	15	6.4
	Living alone	6	2.6

**Table 2.** Frequency of interaction with parents

		N	Percent (%)
Father	Very rarely	17	17.3
	Seldom	22	9.4
	Often enough	49	21
	Often	57	24.5
	Very often	88	37.8

		N	Percent (%)
Mother	Very rarely	2	0.9
	Seldom	2	0.9
	Often enough	12	5.2
	Often	62	26.6
	Very often	155	66.5

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results showed that the majority of participants were in a high level of loneliness during the Covid-19 pandemic, with a percentage of 30.5%. See in table 3. Sears, Fredman, and Peplau [16] said that adolescents are the most often lonely from all range of ages. Thus, it is not surprising that during the Covid-19 pandemic, they became increasingly feel lonely due to limited social interaction. Even virtual interaction can have any problem, such as signal trouble or internet quota limitation. Holmes et al. [17] said that the main possible risks of the Covid-19 pandemic are increased social isolation and loneliness.

**Table 3.** Level of loneliness

	N	Percent (%)
Very low	25	10.7
Low	65	27.9
Average	64	27.5
High	71	30.5
Very high	8	3.4

Based on the compare mean test, the result showed that there was a significant difference between the number of active social media owned by participants on loneliness ( $p < 0.05$ ). See in table 4.

Vanden Abeele et al. [18] said the use of smartphone can cause the quality of interactions to establish closeness with others to be low because they are too focused on online interactions. Moreover, the previous research from Csobanka [13] found that although Z generation adolescents can fulfill their social needs with active use of social media, they still need direct social interaction with peers.

Other findings showed that there was no significant difference between participants who lived with their nuclear family, big family, or living alone ( $p > 0.05$ ). From the result of this study, it is also known that there is no significant difference between participants who very rarely and very often interacts

with their parents on loneliness ( $p > 0.05$ ). The results of these two studies indicate that the large number of people living with the participants and the frequency of interaction between the participants and their parents, do not determine that Z generation adolescents during the Covid-19 pandemic do not feel lonely. See in table 5 and table 6.

**Table 4.** Compare mean test on the number of active social media

	N	Mean	F	Sig.
1	6	50.1667	3.570	0.015
2	20	50.8000		
3	37	44.0811		
> 3	170	49.6647		

**Table 5.** Compare mean test on who living with participants

	N	Mean	F	Sig.
Nuclear family	212	48.7075		
Big family	15	50.8667	0.387	0.679
Living alone	6	50.3333		

**Table 6.** Different test on the frequency of interaction with parents

		N	Mean	F	Sig.
Father	Very rarely	17	44.4118	2.172	0.073
	Seldom	22	51.9091		
	Often	49	50.5306		
	Often enough	57	49.6491		
Mother	Very often	88	47.5909		
	Very rarely	2	37.5000	0.924	0.450
	Seldom	2	14.5000		
	Often	12	31.5833		
	Often enough	62	27.0484		
	Very often	155	27.2839		

Based on the results of the study, it can be seen that although Z generation adolescents have been fulfilled quantitatively in their social relationships, they can still feel lonely because they are not necessarily fulfilled in quality. This is in accordance with the definition of loneliness given by Peplau and Perlman [5] who see loneliness as a condition of a discrepancy between what you want to achieve and what is actually achieved in social relationships, both in quantity and quality.

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The large number of active social media, the large number of family members living with, and the large number of interactions with parents both mother and father, do not determine that Z generation adolescents in pandemic Covid-19 will not feel lonely. Therefore, for parents, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is necessary to increase their interaction with their adolescents both in quantity and quality, so that they do not feel lonely. For example, by taking a role like a friend by listening more to their complaints, so that they feel understood.

In addition, adolescents also need to be given a time limit in the use of gadget and social media that can reduce the quality of interactions that play a role in the emergence of loneliness. For practitioners, to be able to provide counseling or therapy, not only for the adolescent who are experiencing loneliness but also to their parents with giving them psycho education.

This study has limitations because it was carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, this study cannot be generalized when the Covid-19 pandemic ends. Therefore, further research can look at the loneliness of Z generation adolescents after the Covid-19 pandemic is over. Moreover, for the future research can look for other characteristics of adolescents that are appropriate to adolescents developmental stages, such as curiosity and identity crisis that are being experienced in adolescence, and can be related to other variables.

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