Lonely at Home: Exploring Factors Associated with Loneliness Among Female Students at Home During COVID-19 Lockdown in India

Shruti Narain¹ and Saurabh Maheshwari²

Abstract
The present study explores loneliness among female students who stayed at home during the COVID-19 lockdown. Recent research has shown a sharp rise in the self-reported incidences of loneliness, especially among females during the lockdown imposed in most regions around the globe. The studies have also shown that those with lower self-control and a negative self-image are more vulnerable to negative emotional and behavioral outcomes. Therefore, it would be interesting to see how are these aspects related to loneliness among young females that too in a patriarchal society such as India. Whether family dynamics have any impact on mitigating loneliness or not has also been investigated. For this purpose, an online survey was conducted on 1023 female students of various universities/colleges across India. The results show that loneliness is found less among the females who showed better self-control, positive self-image, and good family relationship. Though household work engagement can keep females busy, it has little to do with their feeling of loneliness. The study indicates that living with family members is not enough to deal with loneliness. Rather it requires a good relationship with family members, self-control, and a positive self-image. Hence, to deal with the loneliness issues that youth are facing at present, family connectedness and constructive self-view need to be (re)established to prevent loneliness from causing severe mental problems.

Keywords
loneliness, COVID-19, lockdown, self-control, positive self-image, family relationship, Indian youth

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought enormous and unparallel changes and challenges in the life of one and all worldwide affecting almost all nations. To prevent community spread, a nationwide lockdown was implemented in India on 24 March 2020. The COVID-19 outbreak suddenly transformed the fast-paced frantic society to a standstill, clipping its wings of unlimited socialization (Banerjee & Rai, 2020). This is precisely true in the case of students as college/school belongingness is the prominent indicator of mental health and well-being among students (Arslan, 2021), and the closures and the context of the pandemic led to an absence of social interactions with peers which confounded the feelings of loneliness and social isolation, and the risks of nonsuicidal self-injury (Hasking et al., 2021). Almost after two and a half months of lockdown, the first phase of unlocking was announced on 8 June 2020 in India. Nevertheless, educational institutions observed complete lockdown, and all the teaching-learning is still taking place in the online mode at most places. The impact of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown has mentally tolled both academicians (Gautam & Sharma, 2020) and students (Odriozola-González et al., 2020) majorly through a complete shift to the online mode of interaction. Even before the pandemic, the ways of socialization have seen tremendous change due to the advent of smartphones. In light of the COVID-19 outbreak, particular attention must be paid to how social changes might be affecting young people where the requirements of social distancing, loss of in-person relationships, school closures, and abandoned plans can pose greater challenges for them (Branquinho et al., 2020). Though proficient in the use of technology to connect with others, when younger people start replacing rather than extending their social relationships, it is of no help to alleviate loneliness (Barreto et al., 2020).

Loneliness and Youth
Loneliness refers to affective and cognitive discomfort or uneasiness from being or perceiving oneself to be alone or otherwise solitary (VandenBos, 2015). Griffin et al. (2020) defined loneliness as “feeling separate from others.” Loneliness negatively affects our physical, psychiatric, psychosocial functioning (Cacioppo et al., 2015), and well-being (Arslan, 2020). It

¹Department of Psychology, Patna Women’s College, Patna, India
²Department of Psychology, Sikkim University, Gangtok, India

Corresponding Author:
Saurabh Maheshwari, Department of Psychology, Sikkim University, Gangtok-737102, India.
Email: mahesaurabh@gmail.com
predicts/causes depression (Beutel et al., 2017; Yavuzer et al., 2019), alcoholism (Akerlind & Hornquist, 1992), suicidal behavior, and nonsuicidal self-injury (Hasking et al., 2021; Stickley & Koyanagi, 2016), social anxiety (Keams et al., 2014), sleep deprivation (Griffin et al., 2020) and even a recurrent stroke (Cacioppo et al., 2015). The evolutionary theory of loneliness (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018) posits that the negative cognitions of being alone are a precursor to feelings of loneliness which drives one to look for affiliations. Much earlier, the cognitive discrepancy approach (Peplau & Perlman, 1982) has explained loneliness as an outcome of the perceived discrepancy between the existing relationships and the kind of interconnectedness we wish we had. The negative impact of loneliness is so severe and wide that it may not be an exaggeration if we treat it as negative immunity, especially in a situation where there is no avenue or alternative to deal with it.

Youth have been a “hotspot” in loneliness research as younger respondents significantly report higher incidences of loneliness than older adults (Office for National Statistic, 2018). Earlier loneliness was assumed more prevalent in older adults. However, it is also common in other age groups, especially young adults (Fried et al., 2020). Some studies show a U-shaped curve relationship between loneliness and age, where young adults and older people are at the high end and middle-aged are at the bottom (Lasgaard et al., 2016; Nicolaisen & Thorsen, 2014). However, a recently published worldwide BBC Loneliness Experiment (Barreto et al., 2020) showed that loneliness decreases with age, that is, young people are more vulnerable to loneliness than the elderly. Several studies worldwide (e.g., Luiggi-Hernández & Rivera-Amador, 2020) and in India (e.g., Narain, 2018) have also shown that loneliness has emerged as an epidemic in itself especially among young emerging adults, more reported by females. Various factors contribute to the vulnerability of young adults to loneliness and exclusion such as their quest for identity, physiological changes, and erratic social networks, among others (Qualter et al., 2013). Studies have shown that although the number of social interconnections decreases with age, the eminence and quality of such interconnectedness were more fulfilling as individuals aged (Luong et al., 2011) and that older adults reported more positive emotions and satisfaction in their interactions than youth (Rook & Charles, 2017). Research also shows even physical changes, which may lead to social exclusion, can cause loneliness (Qualter et al., 2013). Therefore, given a situation like the COVID-19 outbreak as Reger et al. (2020) called it a “perfect storm” to set the stage for emotional distress leading to suicide and other mental health ailments, the present study focuses on youth since they are more vulnerable to loneliness owing to the restrictions and requirements of the lockdown (Arslan, 2021).

**Gender, Patriarchy, and Loneliness**

Though the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health has received the attention of various scholars (e.g., Ahuja et al., 2020; Huang & Zhao, 2020); however, limited work is available on the impact of lockdown on the related issues of the well-being of females, especially through the intersectional lens of family and society at large.

Gender is another important individual factor that plays an important role in loneliness. While some studies show no gender difference in loneliness (Maes et al., 2019), others have found that males are affected by loneliness more than females (Barreto et al., 2020). However, most studies support the notion that females report higher loneliness than males (Buecker et al., 2020; Nikollasise & Thorsen, 2014). The present study does not compare loneliness across genders. It focuses only on females because we agree with the scholars (Lasgaard et al., 2016) who believe that being a female in itself adds vulnerabilities to loneliness in adolescence and young adulthood, especially in a highly masculine society, such as India.

India has been and is still a patriarchal society. Women have been engulfed with low self-esteem as discriminatory treatment toward them in India, like in all other patriarchal societies cannot be masked (Kakar & Kakar, 2007). Though there have been changes from traditional to modern Indian society at large as middle-class parents do encourage and ensure higher education for their child to lead her to independence, still, a situation like the COVID-19 pandemic may threaten the freedom and opportunities for many young females in India much more than their Western counterparts for prospects. The ways of socialization for young females in India are restricted mostly to the confines of their homes. Their recreational activities are strictly monitored and limited to occasional going out with friends, to their homes, or to markets or movies ensuring the least probability of meeting with male members (Kakar & Kakar, 2007). Thus, the closure of educational institutions makes them all the more vulnerable to mental health problems and threatens their well-being more than their male counterparts. Not only this, a female in India is not considered the main bread earner of the house and has been subject to lower educational status so a situation like COVID-19-led lockdown and its economic challenges on the family may sabotage her chances of further education as well. All these fears may put the young Indian female to poorer well-being and heightened ambiguity, uncertainty, social isolation, and loneliness. So, this study was warranted.

**Self and Loneliness**

Researchers also tried to link loneliness with self; for example, while self-criticism is found positively related to loneliness (Besser et al., 2003), self-actualization shows a negative relationship (Sumerlin, 1995). Self-esteem is the most studied self-related variable in the context of loneliness. Research, in general, shows a negative association between self-esteem and loneliness (Mahon et al., 2006; McWhirter, 1997). This shows that people with positive self-worth do not feel lonely, or lonely people do not have high self-esteem. Since most of these studies are correlational, it is difficult to decide the
directionality of the relationship between self-esteem and loneliness. Research also explored the relationship between self-control and loneliness and found a negative association between them (Hamama et al., 2000; McWhirter, 1997; Özdemir et al., 2014). Self-control has been associated with good interpersonal relationships as restraining one’s yearnings, urges, and impulses will lead to better social relationships and lower the probability of ostracism and subsequently loneliness (Stavrova et al., 2022). This association reflects that people with high self-control generally do not feel lonely, or again, people high on loneliness cannot have good self-control. A situation like COVID-19-led lockdown requires much higher self-discipline, monitoring, and organization (Gonçalves et al., 2020), which may be a greater challenge for many amidst the disrupted routine and associated apprehensions. Thus, in the present study, two self-related variables, self-control, and positive self-image are taken. It is assumed that people who can keep their self-image positive in this negative and restricted time would be more advantageous in dealing with loneliness. Similarly, we also believe people who can keep their behavior and thoughts under control in an already controlled situation may feel less lonely. Therefore, it is hypothesized that

H1: Participants with a positive self-image would show less loneliness than participants with a negative self-image.

H2: Participants who have higher self-control would show less loneliness than participants with lower self-control.

Family Relationships, Household Work Engagement, and Loneliness

The importance of family relations and friendship in mitigating loneliness is also explored in various studies. Findings suggest that family support lowers loneliness, especially among youth (Chang et al., 2017; Segrin et al., 2012), and a healthy relationship with family members can work as a buffer when dealing with loneliness. Strong family ties and peer connectedness also enhance positive development (Sieving et al., 2017) and lower the feelings of “lostness” over time (Ja & Jose, 2017). Not only this, stress from peer relationships can be safeguarded by high-quality parental relationships (Hazel et al., 2014). Research also showed that higher physical activity is negatively correlated with social loneliness among students (Page & Hammermeister, 1995). It indicates that those who keep themselves busy in some work/activities feel less lonely, probably because they meet more people during these activities and feel connected, or probably, they get less time to think about their loneliness. The onset of the lockdown lowered the subjective vitality which refers to the positive feelings of physical and mental energy and has also been negatively impacted by loneliness among college students (Arslan, 2021; Satici, 2020). Whatever the reason, our active life keeps us less lonely. Even the World Health Organization (2020) in its advisory regarding the COVID-19 pandemic suggested that household work engagement can keep people mentally healthy in the present pandemic crisis. Against this backdrop, the present research also examines the family relation and household work involvement during the lockdown in the feeling of loneliness. We hypothesized that

H3: Good family relationships of participants would lead to less loneliness among them.

H4: Household work engagement would negatively influence loneliness, that is, participants who engaged more in household work would feel less loneliness than participants who engaged less in household work.

Method

Participants

The survey was a part of a project on “the impact of lockdown on youth.” A total of 1325 valid responses were received from the students of various universities and colleges across India; however, 302 participants were either male students or female students not staying at home, therefore those were not included in the present study. Hence the present study included data from 1023 female students who stayed at home during the lockdown period. The average age of the participants was 20.01 years (SD = 2.067) with the range of 17–30 years, and a total of 870 females were enrolled in undergraduate programs, while 153 were postgraduate students. The majority of the participants were from the North or the North-Eastern states of India.

Measures

In light of the suitability of the present context and the length limitation of the survey, we took only 10 items from the UCLA loneliness scale (Russell et al., 1980). The responses were taken on a four-point rating scale. The maximum score could be 40 and the minimum could be 10, where a higher score means higher loneliness. The Cronbach alpha of the scale for the present sample was .800.

Considering the context of COVID-19-led lockdown, it was realized that the standard scales for other study variables were not apt for capturing the context. Therefore, for the family relationship, household work involvement, self-control, and self-image, measures were constructed specifically for the present study. Each variable was operationally defined and the definition was used to develop a pool of items for each variable. These items were developed in English and checked by a subject expert. The final items of all the self-constructed scales were evaluated by three experts to establish the content validity of the scale.

A total of four items were developed for capturing the family relationships of participants during the lockdown, for example, I have developed a better bonding with my family (all items are given in Supplementary Appendix). The responses were measured on a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The score could vary from a minimum of 4 to
a maximum of 20. The higher score reflected an individual had a good family relationship and the lower score showed an individual did not have a good family relationship during the lockdown. The content validity ratio for the scale was calculated as 0.917 and Cronbach’s alpha was .842.

Household work involvement was measured by exploring how much individuals were engaged in various daily household activities, such as cooking, laundry, etc. A total of six items were constructed for the purpose; the list of the items is given in Supplementary Appendix. The responses were taken on a five-point scale. A high score reflected higher involvement in household work and a low score reflected lower involvement. The content validity ratio of the scale was .889 and Cronbach’s alpha was found .776.

Similarly, to measure individuals’ self-control during the lockdown, a scale of 10 items was constructed. The items were related to what extent individuals were able to control their activities/movements during the COVID-19-led lockdown, for example, during the lockdown, I had a difficult time controlling my desires. The items were measured on a five-point scale; the maximum score on the scale could be 50 and the minimum could be 10. A higher score showed high or better self-control and a lower score meant low or weak self-control. The content validity ratio for the scale was .933 and Cronbach’s alpha was .763.

For measuring the perceived self-image of participants during the lockdown, a bipolar adjective scale was constructed. A total of 12 bipolar items were constructed, such as complete— incomplete and worthless—worthy. Participants have to select one of the two options; for positive adjectives, they received two points and for negative adjectives, they were given one point. A participant can get a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 24 scores for the self-image. Low scores showed participants hold negative self-images about them and high scores on the scale showed that participants hold positive self-images about them. The content validity ratio of the scale was .861 and Cronbach’s alpha was found .869.

Procedures

To avoid physical contact during the COVID-19 situation and also due to the lockdown, we used the online survey method for data collection. The survey was circulated among the students of various universities, colleges, and institutions in India. The survey was prepared on Google forms and shared among the students via email and WhatsApp. The data was collected between June 21 and 28, 2020. The participants were provided with a brief introduction to the survey along with the study variables. Written informed consent from each participant was taken. Participation was voluntary, and there was no monetary or any other compensation.

Data Analysis

Out of 1325 valid responses, a total of 1060 responses were received from female participants. However, since the study focuses only on the females staying at home during the lockdown, 37 responses of females staying in hostels were not used in the analysis. The surveys were mostly filled, with <2% missing entries, which were replaced by the series mean. The analysis included bivariate correlation and hierarchical regression, while the correlations were calculated between the variables to see the relationship between various study variables. Regression analysis was conducted to see how the study variables along with the demographic variables predict loneliness.

Results

Tables 1 shows the relationship among various study variables. It is found that loneliness is negatively correlated with family relationships, self-control, and self-image. The result shows that participants’ loneliness and their family relationship are negatively related, which means, participants who had good family bonding during the lockdown felt less lonely. However, since it is a correlational result, therefore, the reverse relationship is also possible, that is, participants who felt less lonely were able to bond well with their family members. Similarly, loneliness and self-control show an inverse relationship, which means, that those who were able to control themselves better, reported less loneliness. Again, it is also possible that participants with high loneliness were able to exhibit less self-control. Self-image and loneliness were also found inversely related, which showed that a positive self-image leads to less loneliness or less loneliness leads to a positive self-image. Interestingly, household work involvement shows no relationship with participants’ loneliness. This shows

| Table 1. Descriptive and Bivariate Analysis. | Mean | SD  | Range | α  | Age | Family relations | Household work involvement | Self-control | Self-image | Loneliness |
|---------------------------------------------|------|-----|-------|----|-----|-----------------|---------------------------|--------------|------------|------------|
| Age                                         | 20.011 | 2.067 | 17-30 | —  | —   | —               | —                         | —            | —          | —          |
| Family relations                            | 15.929 | 3.457 | 4–20  | .842 | -.084** | —               | —                         | —            | —          | —          |
| Household work involvement                  | 23.954 | 5.421 | 6–30  | .776 | .054 | .054            | —                         | —            | —          | —          |
| Self-control                                | 32.063 | 6.460 | 10–50 | .763 | .000 | .259***         | .044                      | —            | —          | —          |
| Self-image                                  | 18.986 | 3.727 | 12–24 | .869 | .003 | .372***         | .073*                     | .510***      | —          | —          |
| Loneliness                                  | 23.024 | 6.091 | 10–40 | .800 | -.044 | -.344***        | .014                      | -.359***     | -.428***   | —          |

Note. N = 1023. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
that keeping oneself busy at work or being physically active has nothing to do with the feeling of loneliness. Moreover, age does not show a significant relationship with loneliness. Family relationships show a positive relationship with self-control as well as with self-image. In the present study, we have considered only those participants who were at home during the lockdown; therefore, a good family relationship emerges as an important correlate of low loneliness, better self-control, and positive self-image. Results also show a strong positive relationship between self-control and positive self-image. This indicates that those who have a higher sense of self-control also have a positive view of themselves.

Hierarchical regression was used to determine the impact of various study variables on loneliness (see Table 2). The analysis shows that the participants’ age, which shows no direct relationship with loneliness, has a small but significant impact on loneliness in the presence of other variables. The family relationship shows a significant impact on loneliness, even after controlling other study variables. This shows that when in a family, good relations with family members can reduce the feeling of loneliness. However, poor relations with family members can even increase loneliness. Results further show that in the lockdown, people with low self-control felt lonelier than people with high self-control. Similarly, a positive self-image reduces an individual’s loneliness, and the absence of a positive self-image or negative self-image increases one’s loneliness. That means those who could maintain a positive perception about themselves during the lockdown were better at dealing with their loneliness.

**Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Analysis: Predicting Loneliness from Various Study Variables.**

| loneliness | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Age       | −.081   | −.108*  | −.096*  |
| Education# | .041    | .033    | .038    |
| Family relations | −.359*** | −.211**** |          |
| Household work involvement | .030    | .048    |          |
| Self-control |        | −.176*** |          |
| Self-image  |        |         |          |
| \(R^2\) | .004    | .131    | .254    |
| \(R^2\) changed |      | .127    | .123    |
| \(F\) | 1.689   | 33.344*** | 50.151*** |

Note. Values quoted are \(\beta\) values; #postgraduate = 1, undergraduate = 0.

*\(p < .05\), **\(p < .01\), ***\(p < .001\).

Discussion

The study aimed to explore the dynamics of the experiences that buffer/trigger the feelings of loneliness among female students during the lockdown. Loneliness is generally felt by people when their social relationship is less satisfying than their expectations (Okwaraji et al., 2018). Even before the COVID-19 outbreak, complaints about loneliness were rampant among students (Qualter et al., 2013). Therefore, it is highly probable that the loneliness may have increased during the lockdown time since they were not allowed to pursue their normal activities such as going out, hanging out with friends, traveling to college/university, etc. Recent studies on college belongingness and subjective vitality have shown that college belongingness has been found to moderate the mediating effect of subjective vitality on adjustment among students enhancing their mental health and well-being while mitigating loneliness (Arslan, 2021). Another study by Buecker et al. (2020) shows that not only does the contact frequency with friends and relatives reduce loneliness, but also the relationship with neighbors, distance from parks, distance from sport/leisure facilities, etc. can influence loneliness. Thus, here in India too, the lockdown has limited meetings with friends, family, and neighbors, and also restricted visits to parks and sports/leisure activities places, which might have amplified loneliness among youths. Some scholars have already warned against the increasing loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic (Banerjee & Rai, 2020).

Though the present study does not compare the level of loneliness before and during the lockdown period; however, it explores the factors which can buffer the loneliness since many avenues or ways to deal with loneliness are not available during the lockdown, especially among females. Subsequent research has also reported that during this period females were found to have increased symptoms of stress and anxiety and decreased resilience to stress than their male counterparts exacerbated by increased loneliness and violence (Garcia-Fernandez et al., 2021; Hou et al., 2020; Szabo et al., 2020).

It was hypothesized that females with high self-control and positive self-image would feel less lonely when they were forced to stay indoors. The results support the hypotheses: both self-control and self-image negatively predict loneliness. The evolutionary theory of self-control puts forward that self-control has evolved as a means to resolve the conflict between narcissistic desires and social norms (e.g., altruism; Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). The self-control theory by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), also known as the general theory of crime, has long been investigated in criminology and has shown a lack of emotional self-control and feelings to be associated with many negative outcomes across the life span (Duckworth & Kern, 2011). But later investigations have also focused on the negative outcomes of poor self-control development among youth, for example, as a function of adverse childhood experiences and its implications on familial relationships (Jones et al., 2021; Tehrani & Yamin, 2020). Studies show that lower self-control is potentially damaging not only for existing relationships as showing less forgiveness and hit back intentions (Burnette et al., 2014) but it also acts as a wall against forming new relationships (Stavrova, et al., 2022). Jones et al. (2021) also found that youth had more self-control when they shared close familial ties and parental monitoring had a potent positive effect on their self-control. This seems applicable to the present study as well because we
have investigated the variables during lockdown when female students resided at home. While many previous studies show a negative association between self-control and loneliness (Hamama et al., 2000; McWhirter, 1997; Özdemir et al., 2014), very few explain the reason. McWhirter (1997) took self-control and learned resourcefulness and showed that people who were resourceful in controlling their thoughts showed lower loneliness. Certainly, research has illustrated self-control to be a facilitator of prosocial behaviors strengthening social relationships by showing cooperation (Kocher et al., 2017), and lowering the chances of aggressive behaviors (Denson et al., 2012). This explains why controlling one’s thoughts or actions, which may cause a feeling of loneliness, and engaging oneself in other positive thoughts or activities can reduce loneliness. Similarly, many previous studies have shown a negative relationship between self-esteem and loneliness (Mahon et al., 2006; McWhirter, 1997). Though the present study does not directly examine self-esteem instead of self-image, however, both the concepts, in a broader sense indicate self-worth. While self-esteem is generally treated as a more global aspect of self-worth, positive self-image in this study explores the temporary ability to keep one’s image positive in their eye. In the present context, a positive self-image acts as a buffer in dealing with loneliness, probably because it helps us feel good about ourselves and make us believe that because of our good qualities we are connected and will not be left out. Overall, the results indicate that keeping/developing positive perceptions about self and controlling oneself during the lockdown had helped in countering the feeling of loneliness.

Furthermore, the results show that loneliness is negatively associated with a good family relationship. Those having a good relationship with their family members are found to be less lonely. The results support the third hypothesis that a good family relationship would negatively influence loneliness. The result goes with the previous studies which show that family support can help in reducing loneliness (Chang et al., 2017; Segrin et al., 2012). The findings are very much in line with the studies of Banerjee and Rai (2020) that although we are connected 24/7 virtually, we have lost the sense of emotional connections which can act either favorably or unfavorably in fixing or straining relationships depending upon “the pre-existing intimacy and communication patterns.” Similarly, in a recent study, Hall and Zygmunt (2021) found that college students who had a negative interaction with parents or perceived less accepted at home during forced home quarantine reported a significant decrease in their mental health. That confirms that while a good bonding with parents or family members can help people to deal with their loneliness, a poor relationship increases such mental problems and a feeling of being trapped in one’s own house. Narain (2018) also found that as parents and adolescents gain a deeper understanding and relationships with each other, their experiences of negative life events such as loneliness will be lower.

Another important finding of the present research is related to household work involvement. Though, previous research has shown that physical activities keep loneliness down (Page & Hammermeister, 1995); however, we did not find such a relationship in the present study. Therefore, our fourth hypothesis that household work involvement will lead to less loneliness among females is refuted. One possible explanation comes from involvement in different kinds of activities. While Page and Hammermeister’s (1995) work was related to physical exercise, in the present study, we took household chores as an indicator of physical activity. The finding is also not going with the advisory of the World Health Organization (2020) that suggested that keeping oneself busy with regular household chores would help in supporting mental and psychosocial well-being in different target groups during the outbreak. One probable reason could be that although people are involved in physical activities in the form of household work, they could not meet new people or friends to have a sense of connectedness. Similarly, most of the household work requires minimal cognitive energy something as in habitual efforts, such as cleaning, washing, etc., which allows people to think about their lives even when they are physically involved in other activities. Most importantly, married females in Indian homes engage in these household activities regularly. If household work does not help married women deal with their loneliness, then the same applies to female students. This shows that even if we keep ourselves busy with household chores, we may be engulfed in the feeling of loneliness.

Limitations
Despite some interesting results and useful insights, the study has a few limitations. One limitation is related to the sample. Though the study focuses on female youths, the sample only includes students and not working young adults. This limits the generalization of findings to only female students. Also, the study does not incorporate a critical intersectional perspective related to how other identities (e.g., socioeconomic status, caste, and religion) may influence feelings of loneliness among female students. Additionally, most of the measures used in the study are developed according to the then lockdown in the Indian context. Hence despite showing good Cronbach alphas and content validity ratio, the measures used in the study were not standardized. Yet another limitation comes from the nature of the study; since the study was correlational, therefore, the results regarding the directionality of the relationship cannot be assured.

Conclusion
The lockdown has provided ample time to many for self-reflection and an opportunity to revisit their relationships with themselves and family (Narain & Maheshwari, 2022). However, this opportunity has put young people in a more vulnerable state than ever before because of social isolation, uncertain future, etc. The present study confirms that the stay-at-home orders made female college-going students more vulnerable to loneliness, especially in a country such as India, where some girls get the chance to meet and connect with
others only in their schools/colleges. Besides, the current study is also relevant for the post-pandemic situation as it highlights the factors that are associated with loneliness among female students even outside this pandemic situation. When these institutions are closed, we need to find other ways to deal with their loneliness. The results of the study show that positive self-image, self-control, and good family bonding help female students deal with their loneliness at home during the lockdown. To conclude, we can say that to handle the issue of loneliness among female youths in the present context, family connectedness, and constructive self-view need to be (re)established before loneliness draws them into severe mental problems. Interventions and prevention programs need to be designed to help students to develop positive emotions and relations with themselves and others.

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ORCID iD
Saurabh Maheshwari https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5948-6541

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