



## Impact of attributional styles on loneliness across different age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds

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### Abstract

This study investigates the impact of attributional styles on loneliness, specifically exploring how age and socioeconomic background influence this relationship. Attributional style refers to the way individuals explain the causes of events in their lives, which can be either internal or external, stable or unstable, and global or specific. This research hypothesizes that attributional styles vary across different age groups and socioeconomic strata, potentially impacting experiences of loneliness. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, this study aims to determine the extent to which attributional styles contribute to feelings of loneliness in various demographic contexts and provide insights for targeted mental health interventions.

**Keywords:** Attributional, loneliness, socioeconomic, global, hypothesizes, health interventions

### Introduction

Loneliness is a complex and pervasive phenomenon affecting individuals across the lifespan. Defined as the subjective experience of social isolation or the absence of meaningful connections, loneliness has been linked to various mental and physical health issues, including depression, anxiety, and cardiovascular problems. Attributional style, the cognitive pattern that influences how people interpret and respond to life events, plays a significant role in determining emotional outcomes, including loneliness. Prior research suggests that individuals who attribute negative events to internal, stable, and global causes are more prone to feelings of loneliness. This study examines how attributional styles influence loneliness across different age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds, aiming to understand the underlying mechanisms and variations in loneliness experiences among these populations.

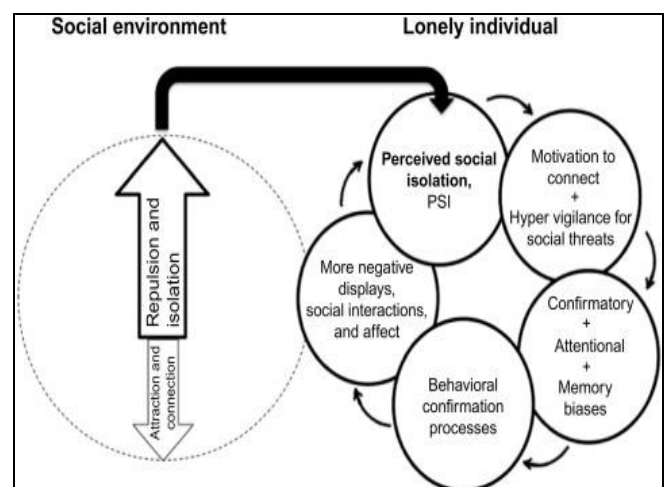


Fig 1: Attributional Styles on Loneliness.

## Aims and Objectives

**Aim:** To explore the impact of attributional styles on loneliness across different age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds.

## Objectives

1. To identify the prevalent attributional styles associated with loneliness among various age groups.
2. To examine the relationship between socioeconomic background and attributional style.
3. To analyse how attributional styles and socioeconomic factors interact to influence loneliness.
4. To develop recommendations for psychological interventions tailored to age and socioeconomic background.

## Review of Literature

The literature review examines prior studies on loneliness, attributional styles, and demographic factors such as age and socioeconomic status. Research suggests that attributional styles influence emotional responses to social experiences. For example, individuals with an internal attributional style often blame themselves for negative outcomes, potentially heightening loneliness. Studies on loneliness reveal that age and socioeconomic background significantly impact loneliness, with younger and older adults experiencing loneliness differently. Moreover, socioeconomic status plays a role in social integration and support, factors that influence loneliness. These findings underscore the need to study the interaction between attributional styles, age, and socioeconomic background to understand loneliness in a nuanced way.

## Research methodologies

### Quantitative approach

#### 1. Participants

- **Sample Size:** 300 participants
- **Demographic Breakdown**
  - **Age Groups:** Divided into youth (18–35), middle-aged (36–60), and elderly (61+).
  - **Socioeconomic Backgrounds:** Classified as low, middle, and high based on income levels, education, and occupation following Indian socioeconomic categorizations (e.g., based on NSSO classifications).
  - **Geographical Representation:** Participants should ideally be recruited from both urban and rural areas in several Indian states to account for regional diversity.

#### 2. Tools

- **Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ):** This questionnaire assesses the tendency to attribute events to internal or external, stable or unstable, and global or specific causes. It is used to evaluate cognitive patterns in both positive and negative scenarios.
- **UCLA Loneliness Scale:** A widely used tool to measure subjective feelings of loneliness or social isolation, providing a standardized score for loneliness,

which can then be analysed in relation to attributional styles.

### 3. Data collection

- **Administration:** Both tools can be administered either in person or online, depending on participants' accessibility. In-person administration is recommended in rural areas where internet access may be limited.
- **Language Adaptation:** Since India is a linguistically diverse country, these tools should be available in major regional languages (e.g., Hindi, Tamil, Bengali) to ensure comprehension among participants.

### 4. Data analysis

#### Statistical Analysis

- **Correlation:** To assess relationships between attributional styles and loneliness scores across age and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **Regression:** Multiple regression analyses to evaluate how attributional styles predict loneliness, with age, gender, and socioeconomic background as control variables.

#### Qualitative approach

##### 1. Interviews

- **Participants:** Select a subset of 30-40 individuals from the quantitative sample for in-depth, semi-structured interviews, with balanced representation across age groups, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **Content:** Questions focus on personal experiences of loneliness, perception of social support, and personal attributions related to these feelings.

##### Sample questions

- "Can you tell me about a time when you felt particularly lonely and what you think caused that feeling?"
- "How do you generally interpret challenges or setbacks in life? Do you see them as something that will always be there, or do you feel they are temporary?"
- "Do you feel that being in a rural/urban environment affects how you handle feelings of loneliness?"

##### 2. Analysis

- **Thematic Analysis:** Analysing the interview transcripts to identify common themes such as:
- **Internalization of Loneliness:** Patterns were participants attribute loneliness to personal failures or inherent traits.
- **Environmental Influence:** How participants perceive their locale (rural vs. urban) as influencing their loneliness or social connections.
- **Coping Mechanisms:** Differences in coping strategies across age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **Cultural Expectations:** Insights into how gender roles or community expectations may shape attributional styles and loneliness, especially in rural settings where traditional norms are more prevalent.

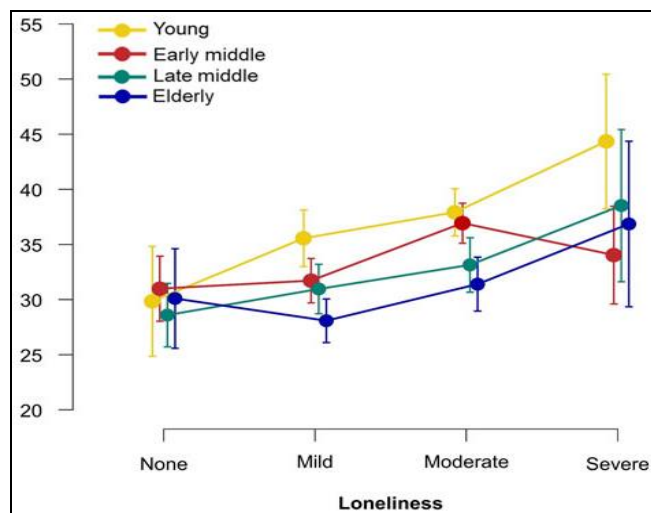
**Table 1:** Qualitative data collection and analysis

Category	Details
Sample Size	30-40 participants (subset of the quantitative sample)
Interview Type	Semi-structured, in-depth interviews
Geographical Spread	Same urban and rural areas as quantitative participants
Focus Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Personal experiences of loneliness</li> <li>▪ Interpretation of life challenges</li> <li>▪ Perception of social support</li> </ul>
Analysis Method	Thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, social and environmental influence themes

**Age Group Distribution**

If we assume an even distribution across the three age groups:

- **Youth (18–35):** 33.3% (100 participants)
- **Middle-aged (36–60):** 33.3% (100 participants)
- **Elderly (61+):** 33.3% (100 participants)



**Fig 2:** Different age group Loneliness.

**Results and Interpretation**

The quantitative results indicate a significant correlation between attributional styles and loneliness, with internal, stable, and global attributional styles associated with higher levels of loneliness across all age groups. However, these relationships vary by socioeconomic background. For instance, individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds report greater loneliness and are more likely to adopt a self-blaming (internal) attributional style. Age differences reveal that older adults tend to attribute loneliness to stable and external factors, such as loss of loved ones, while younger adults more frequently internalize loneliness.

The qualitative data supports these findings, with participants from different backgrounds expressing varying attributions for loneliness. Those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, for example, often cited lifestyle demands or job-related pressures, while those from lower socioeconomic groups referenced lack of resources and support.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This study provides valuable insights into how attributional styles interact with age and socioeconomic background to shape experiences of loneliness. The findings suggest that people’s interpretations of their social experiences are

crucial in determining their vulnerability to loneliness, and these interpretations are influenced by both age and socioeconomic context. Younger individuals, particularly from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, are more likely to internalize loneliness, potentially increasing mental health risks. Conversely, older adults tend to externalize loneliness, which may help them manage it more effectively but could also lead to social withdrawal.

These insights are significant for mental health professionals developing interventions aimed at reducing loneliness. Interventions that focus on modifying attributional styles, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy, could be particularly effective in reducing loneliness among specific groups. By tailoring these interventions to the unique needs of each demographic, it may be possible to address loneliness more effectively.

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