



# The Relationship Between Self Esteem and Loneliness amongst Smoker And Non Smoker Male College Students

## KEYWORDS

smokers, smoking, self esteem, loneliness, college students.

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## ABSTRACT

Loneliness has been linked to number of pathways that lead to disease. It has also been linked to depression and substance abuse. The present cross sectional study has been designed with the aim to find the relationship between self esteem, smoking and loneliness as well as the correlation between them. 30 subjects who were smokers and 30 non smokers were divided into 2 group comparative groups and were administered rating scales for self esteem and loneliness. The data obtained was statistically analyzed. Smokers had significantly greater scores on loneliness than non smokers ( $p=0.0008$ ) while smokers showed a negative correlation with self esteem and loneliness ( $p=0.04$ ). The study shows that smokers have low self esteem and greater loneliness scores but needs to be replicated in larger populations and different settings to further confirm the results.

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is the period of stress and strain and those lacking strong social supports have tendency towards smoking and drug abuse.<sup>[1]</sup> Repeated helplessness situations like feeling insecure, conflicts with parents or friends are major threats leading them to seek comfort in drugs.<sup>[2-3]</sup> Rosenberg defines self esteem as "a stable sense of personal worth or unworthy towards oneself, feeling worthy influences all aspects of one's life including the person's view towards his or her abilities".<sup>[4]</sup> Various studies have shown presence of smoking in those with low self esteem.<sup>[5-6]</sup> Loneliness has been defined as the subjective perception of either quantitative or qualitative deficiencies in an individual's network of social relations.<sup>[7]</sup> It has been linked, for example, to hazardous health behaviours such as smoking, alcohol consumption and problems.<sup>[8-9]</sup> The present study is a pilot study in small college based sample to find out the relationship between self esteem and loneliness in smokers and non smokers.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was a cross sectional survey amongst men of age group 18 -21 years pursuing traditional graduate courses in a reputed college in Mumbai. There were two groups in the study one that smoked and that were non smokers. The Personal Self-Esteem Evaluation Scale<sup>[10]</sup> and The UCLA Loneliness scale<sup>[11]</sup> were administered to both groups. Both these scales are regularly used measures in self esteem and loneliness and have demonstrated a fair validity and reliability across populations. The Personal self-esteem Evaluation scale consisted of 30 questions while UCLA Loneliness scale had 20 questions. The scores are on likert type pattern. The scores were compared using the independent t test and statistics were done using a computerised software. Written informed consent was taken from the subjects prior to the study. The study was discussed in a departmental review board meeting prior to commencement.

## RESULTS

Both groups had 30 subjects were well matched demographically. All subjects in the study were male. The mean self esteem score in smokers and non smokers was  $110.53 \pm 28.9$  and  $110.9 \pm 34.2$  respectively while that for loneliness score was  $21.5 \pm 7.6$  and  $15.46 \pm 5.9$  respectively (Table 1). Loneliness was significantly greater in smokers ( $p = 0.0008$ ). A negative correlation was noted between those scores amongst smokers which was statistically significant ( $p = 0.04$ ) but not so amongst non smokers (Table 2).

**Table 1 :** Self-esteem and Loneliness scores in both the groups

|                      | Self Esteem Scores<br>(n = 30) | Loneliness Scores<br>(n = 30) |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Smokers              | $110.53 \pm 28.9$              | $21.5 \pm 7.6$                |
| Non Smokers          | $110.93 \pm 34.2$              | $15.46 \pm 5.9$               |
| Statistical analysis | t = 0.0493<br>p = 0.9609 NS    | t = 3.5423<br>p = 0.0008*     |

Statistics done using the independent t test  
NS – not significant, \* significant

**Table 2 :** Correlation between self-esteem and loneliness

|             | n  | df | Correlation (r) | p value |
|-------------|----|----|-----------------|---------|
| Smokers     | 30 | 28 | -0.43           | 0.04*   |
| Non Smokers | 30 | 28 | -0.18           | NS      |

Statistics done using Pearsons correlation  
\*significant

## DISCUSSION

In our study it was seen that low self esteem plays an important role in substance users. Loneliness scores were significantly greater amongst smokers. Studies done have shown correlation between low self esteem and smoking.<sup>[12]</sup> Our findings are in keeping with these studies. Several mechanisms have been proposed to explain why loneliness may lead to more hazardous health behaviour. It has been suggested for example, that social exclusion may be linked to poorer self-regulation and thus worse health behaviours.<sup>[13]</sup> It is also possible that behaviours such as smoking might be undertaken in an attempt to connect with others and gain social acceptance.<sup>[14]</sup> Loneliness has also been associated with reporting higher levels of stress, and in such circumstances, behaviours such as consuming alcohol (and smoking) might be used to mitigate stress.<sup>[15,16]</sup> The study is marred with a small sample size and just restricted to one college setting and hence the study findings cannot be generalized. It is imperative that we have similar studies in larger settings to elucidate our findings.

## REFERENCE

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