

# English Essay

## The Epidemic of Loneliness in the Digital Age

### Outline:

#### 1. Introduction

##### Thesis Statement:

The problem of loneliness has reached epidemic levels due to its rapid and wide-spread all across the world. It has far reaching adverse impacts on physical as well mental health of individuals. It is an imperative to make serious efforts to tackle the epidemic of loneliness in the digital age.

#### 2. Loneliness - a pervasive issue of contemporary age

#### 3. What makes loneliness an epidemic in the digital age

- (a) The alienating influence of digital technologies
- (b) Nuclear family system
- (c) Void of social interaction due to over-reliance on technology mediated communication
- (d) Reduced social cohesion
- (e) Individualistic culture of contemporary capitalistic and materialistic world.

#### 4. Repercussions of Rampant Loneliness:

- (a) Profound effects on mental health of individuals
- (b) Serious risks for human physical health
- (c) Loss of richness of human interaction
- (d) Highly fragmented society
- (e) Increased threat of early mortality

#### 5. Strategies to tackle Loneliness:

- (a) Using technology in a balanced way
- (b) Strengthening Social Infrastructure
- (c) Incorporating interpersonal communication skills in curriculum
- (d) Developing a well-connected society
- (e) Cultivating a collectivistic culture

#### 6. Conclusion

# Essay:

One of the worst punishments in the criminal justice system is solitary confinement. The practice of limiting a person to a small cell with no human interaction is the worst form of psychological torture for a social animal like man. The need of socialization and interaction is ~~immersed~~ innate in humans. The desire to establish social contact is ~~also~~<sup>as</sup> necessary for the well-being and better survival of humans as the necessity of food, water and shelter. The absence of this social contact from an individual's life makes him a victim of loneliness, the emotional feeling of being socially isolated. In the contemporary digital era, the problem of loneliness has reached epidemic levels as it has embraced a considerable population across the globe. The alienating influence of digital technologies and over dependence of humans on technology mediated communication has exacerbated the issue. The individualistic culture and nuclear family structure also enhance the impact of loneliness. Owing to increased rate of online communication,

the richness of human interaction has been lost. Loneliness has imparted ~~hazard~~ hazardous effects on physical as well as mental well-being of individuals. It has increased the possibility of early death. This growing problem of loneliness can be curtailed by developing a well-connected society, cultivating a collectivistic culture, and strengthening the social infrastructure. The epidemic of loneliness in the digital age has rapidly spread and has far reaching implications, but taking right steps, at right time and in right direction can combat and contain the rampant loneliness.

Loneliness is a subjective feeling associated with an individual's experience of being aloof and socially isolated. It is the lack of social connectivity in one's life. It is an unpleasant, sad and distressing experience of having not enough friends and social connections that one needs. John T. Co Louie and John define loneliness in their work *Loneliness Matters* as "a distressing feeling that accompanies the perception that one's social needs are not being ~~for~~ met by the quantity or especially the quality of one's social relationships." The feeling of loneliness has been increased among the global population since the information technology revolution. In the contemporary digital world, the social face-to-

face interactions have been replaced by digital ways of communication. The information technology or digital revolution ~~is~~ can be considered as paradoxical in nature. This revolution aimed to connect people and it undoubtedly has, but paradoxically it has also created distances between people. It has established connections between people living at large distances and at the same time, alienated the people in their proximity. Loneliness, owing to the digital revolution and unrestrained use of technology by man, has become a pervasive issue of contemporary age to such a large extent that the US Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murphy, has declared loneliness as an epidemic. It emphasizes the widespread of loneliness.

There are various reasons that have contributed to make loneliness an epidemic. The alienating influence of digital technologies is one of them. The excessive use of various digital technologies like social media platforms and <sup>online</sup> entertainment sources ~~have~~ has enhanced the rise in loneliness. The heavy users of social media platforms are adolescents and young adults who are suffering from loneliness. According to a Meta Gallup Survey, 15% of adolescents and 27% of young adults experiences the feelings of loneliness. Thus, loneliness is primarily caused due to alienating effects of technology on people.

Another reason for exacerbated loneliness is the nuclear family system. The nuclear family structure comprises of immediate family members living with their parents. The nuclear family system experience more high levels members of

of loneliness as compared to the members of joint families. A recent research on the influence of family structure and proximity has proved that individuals living in nuclear families or living alone are more vulnerable to loneliness when compared to individuals living in a larger family or joint family.

The over-reliance of humans on technology mediated communication has created a void of social interaction which has in turn aggravated the problem of loneliness. In this digital age and post-Covid-19 world, online communication has become the major source of interaction between people. It leads to unfulfillment of human desire of face to face interaction. No matter how much technology advances, it can never replace the emotional energy provided by humans via face to face interaction. According to a recent 2022 global survey, one out of every four older people experience loneliness. It is because their families usually communicate with them via technology and do not bother to ensure face to face interactions.

The social cohesion has reduced dramatically since the widespread of technological advancement. ~~The next door~~ The social cohesion has deteriorated to such an extent that next door neighbours

are unaware of the physical and mental <sup>health of</sup> ~~of this high~~ one another. During pandemic, the sale of robot pets in Japan surged to a large number. The weakened social cohesion led people to cope with their loneliness by purchasing robotic pets. It shows the paradoxical nature of technology. It causes loneliness and then, tends to solve it by creating robots.

Loneliness has been intensified in the contemporary capitalistic world where individual <sup>this 21<sup>st</sup> century</sup> prefer material gains over social relationships. In ~~each~~ capitalistic world, humans worship financial and material gains. The individualistic culture has risen the ~~self~~ human selfishness. It makes an individual so self-centered that social relations are often neglected. In Japan, socially isolated and lonely people are provided with the "paid-relationship services". These services enable a lonely person to hire someone to play the role of their family member or friend in return of money. It is an evidence of highly individualistic, capitalistic and materialistic approach of modern man.

The aforementioned reasons of loneliness translate the rampant loneliness into far reaching adverse repercussions. Loneliness has globally affected the mental health of individuals in an adverse way. People who experience loneliness have high level of stress hormone, cortisol. The increased level of cortisol increases stress which weakens the immune system and cognitive abilities of an individual. It is also observed that lonely people are more vulnerable to the addiction

of alcohol, drugs or at least smoking. Loneliness deteriorates mental health of individuals by means of depression, despair and anxiety.

Loneliness not only impacts mental health, but it also poses serious threats to physical health of people. People who experience loneliness suffer from hypertension, increased risk of heart diseases and dementia. World Health Organization has declared loneliness as a global public health concern in November, 2023. The physical health issues linked with loneliness are mounting day by day.

Among the unwelcomed and negative influences of loneliness is the increased threat of early mortality. Loneliness has been proved a threat to longevity. Researches show that lonely people ~~are~~ usually have a shorter span of life when compared to well-connected people. ~~In a recent Gallup Survey~~ In a recent research, it has been proved that loneliness increases the risk of early death upto 26%. It represents the negative effects of loneliness on humans.

Highly fragmented society is also a product of the augmented loneliness in society. The social fabric has been torn by the influence of loneliness in the digital era.



The levels of social connectivity between people has immensely dropped. In order to develop social connection in this highly fragmented contemporary society, the WHO has formed a Commission on Social Connection (2024-2026) which will eventually produce propose a global agenda on social connection. 🍀

In order to combat this ever increasing epidemic of loneliness in the digital age, technology must be used in a balanced way. Individuals waste a huge amount of their time in passive scrolling and ingesting unnecessary content. It makes them ignore the valued activities like establishing social connections. A balanced use of technology digital technology can result in mitigating the effects of loneliness.

There is a need to strengthen social infrastructure so that people have more opportunities to interact. Governments must provide community centers, parks, and other socializing platforms where physical and face to face interaction is flourished. In Netherlands, special check out counters have been established where people do not hassle to check out. They ~~process slowly and communicate~~ with the staff on such counters deal with customers slowly and develop a social connection by interacting with them. These kind of steps can be taken to mitigate the effects of loneliness.

The ability to make social connections

and maintain them for a longer period of time is a social skill. A 2021 Gallup Research shows that 300 million people globally do not have even a single friend. It is because making friends is an interpersonal communication skill which should be incorporated in the curriculum at various academic levels so that individuals learn how to make friends.

Developing a well connected society is also imperative to combat loneliness. The collectivistic culture must be cultivated in society to decrease the level of loneliness. Human society should be more cooperative than competitive. The peril of loneliness can be combated by implementing these strategies.

It can be concluded that the widespread loneliness is a global threat. It is because loneliness transcends borders. It is spreading like an epidemic. Norman Cousins contends in his book *Modern Man is Obsolete* that "All man's history is an endeavour to shatter his loneliness." Human beings are social creatures. It is in the very essence of human nature that humans always tend

to socialize and interact. The threat of loneliness endangers the satisfaction of human desire of social interaction. Loneliness is not a mere emotional state rather it has tangible physical and mental health implications. This rising epidemic of loneliness can be diminished by making efforts in the right direction. The epidemic of loneliness in this digital age poses certain risks, but they are not unsurmountable. The human endeavour to shatter loneliness will definitely overcome the threats of epidemic loneliness in the digital age.

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