

Fast-paced Lifestyle, Loneliness and Social Connectedness Among Adolescents: An Exploratory Study

Ayushi Ghosh¹, Susmita Halder², Shinjini Samajdar³

¹Post-Graduate Student, Department of Psychology, St. Xavier's University, Kolkata

²Professor, Department of Psychology, St. Xavier's University, Kolkata

³Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Psychology, St. Xavier's University, Kolkata

Corresponding author: Susmita Halder

Email – susmitahalder@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Background: In present times, with adolescents facing increasingly busy schedules and rising demands, concerns have emerged about how such a fast-paced lifestyle may influence their feelings of social connectedness and experiences of loneliness. A fast-paced lifestyle also alters the levels of social connectedness and experiences of loneliness among adolescents. In an increasingly competitive and digitally driven world, adolescents are navigating multiple demands—from academic pressure and extracurricular commitments to social media engagement—that contribute to a lifestyle characterized by constant activity and limited downtime. The study aims to explore how these lifestyle patterns alter adolescents' sense of belonging and emotional well-being.

Methodology: Data were collected through three questionnaires- a semi-structured questionnaire on lifestyle, the social connectedness scale, and the UCLA Loneliness scale from adolescents aged 15 to 18.

Results: The findings reveal that adolescents with more fast-paced routines often report reduced levels of social connectedness and a higher sense of loneliness; conversely, those who reported a non-fast-paced lifestyle tended to exhibit higher levels of social connectedness and lower levels of loneliness.

Conclusion: The study highlights the need for promoting mental health awareness, encouraging meaningful social bonds, and fostering work-life balance in youth-centred environments such as schools and families. These findings carry important implications for educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals working to support adolescent well-being in the context of modern lifestyle pressures.

Key words: Adolescents, Fast-paced lifestyle, loneliness, social connectedness

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a formative stage of life marked by rapid physical, emotional, and social development. During this period, individuals begin shaping their identity, forming meaningful relationships, and seeking greater independence. However, in the context of today's fast-paced world, adolescents often find themselves overwhelmed by academic pressures, extracurricular demands, and the pervasive influence of digital technology. These factors may contribute to a lifestyle that is highly structured but lacking in quality interpersonal engagement. A fast-paced lifestyle, characterized by constant time pressure, multitasking, and reduced downtime can have unintended consequences on adolescents' psychosocial health. While such a lifestyle may be associated with productivity and ambition, it may simultaneously erode the time and energy necessary to nurture close social bonds. As a result, adolescents may become increasingly socially detached, which can heighten feelings of loneliness and emotional isolation.

Social connectedness, the perception of being close and meaningfully related to others, is essential for adolescents' mental well-being. High levels of connectedness are linked with lower rates of depression, anxiety, and loneliness, while poor connectedness has been associated with emotional withdrawal and increased psychological distress [1]. Research suggests that lifestyle factors can significantly influence social connectedness. For instance, Boer and others [2] found that increased screen time and reduced face-to-face

interactions among U.S. adolescents were associated with rising loneliness levels. Similarly, Chatterjee and Mondal [3] noted that disrupted daily routines among Indian adolescents negatively affected their circadian rhythms and social interactions and many urban Indian adolescents experience social fatigue and emotional exhaustion due to overscheduling and digital overload.

In Erikson's theory of psychosocial development patterns of adolescents' behaviour has been well-explained, which emphasises the conflict of identity versus role confusion in adolescence stage and it has also been explained that this conflict can be increased if social support systems are being compromised by modern life burdens. Along with this, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory pointed out in which way macro-level influences behaviours, likewise, school demands, excessive digital media and family dynamics has an interact to have an effect behaviour of adolescents and their well-being. While international studies offer valuable visions, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning how these phenomena explain within the Indian socio-cultural background, predominantly in urban adolescent populations, where alterations toward nuclear families, competitive academics, and digital involvement are rapidly altering the social fabric.

The increasing normalization of such lifestyles raises important questions about their psychological impact on youth. It becomes crucial to examine how a fast-paced lifestyle alters adolescents' sense of social connectedness and contributes to feelings of loneliness. This understanding can inform the development of early intervention strategies [4], help educators and parents support healthier routines, and foster environments where adolescents can thrive both socially and emotionally.

The present study aims to explore the relationship between fast-paced lifestyle, loneliness and social connectedness among Indian adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

This is a cross-sectional, exploratory study conducted to find out whether a fast-paced lifestyle alters the level of social connectedness and loneliness among adolescents.

Sample: Based on a convenience sampling technique, a sample consisting of 100 participants (50 males and 50 females) belonging to the age group of 15-18 years of age, residing in Kolkata, was included. A sample was drawn from the neighbourhood, housing, and tuition classes in and around Kolkata.

Tools

Consent Form: A consent form was created, where the participants were given a brief description of the study. Since the study is on adolescents, consent was taken both from participants as well as parents

Sociodemographic Questionnaire- This included basic questions like name, age, gender, education qualification.

Lifestyle questionnaire: A self-made questionnaire was prepared to get an overall idea about the types of lifestyles the participants have. The questionnaire consisted of questions covering key dimensions of sleep routine, work-life balance, non-academic activities, etc.

UCLA Loneliness Scale [5]: The UCLA loneliness scale is a 20-item rating scale that measures the subjective experience of loneliness on a four-point Likert scale. A revised version was developed, incorporating 10 positively worded items [5]. This revised UCLA loneliness scale is highly reliable, both in terms of internal consistency (coefficient alpha ranging from .89 to .94) and test-retest reliability ($r = .73$). The total score ranges from 20 to 80. Higher scores indicate higher loneliness. The most commonly used categorization is the following: 20–34 denotes a low degree of loneliness, 35–49 a moderate degree of loneliness, 50–64 a moderately high degree of loneliness, and 65–80 a high degree of loneliness.

Social Connectedness Scale Revised (SCS-R) [6]: The revised social connectedness scale, which is a revision of the social connectedness scale which was developed by R. M. Lee and S.B. Robbins is composed of 20 items: 10 positively worded and 10 negatively worded. The scale presented acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .94$). Point values are assigned as 1 for strongly disagree to 6 for strongly agree. Scores are reversed for the negatively worded items. The items are then summed for a total score. A high score indicates more connectedness to others [6].

Procedure

In the present study data was collected from 100 participants (50 male and 50 female). Prior consent was taken from both the parents as well as the participant before taking part in the study. They were also informed that they can opt out of the participation whenever they feel like. After rapport building, the questionnaires were administered to collect data. The participants were divided into two categories- individuals having a fast-paced lifestyle and individuals having a non-fast-paced lifestyle, based on the responses to items of the Lifestyle Questionnaire. Then appropriate statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 25.

RESULTS

Table 1: Showing socio demographic details of participants

Variable	(Mean ± SD)		
Age (Mean ± SD)	16.57 ± 0.67		
	Category	n	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	50	50%
	Female	50	50%
Educational Qualification	10th standard	10	10%
	11th standard	23	23%
	12th standard	67	67%

Table 2: Showing age and gender distribution of adolescents with fast paced and non-fast paced lifestyle

Variable	Fast-paced Lifestyle	Non Fast-paced Lifestyle
Age (Mean ± SD)	16.66 ± 0.59	16.48 ± 0.74
Gender	n (%)	n (%)
Male	33 (66%)	17 (34%)
Female	17 (34%)	33 (66%)

Table 3: Showing responses of all the participants in the lifestyle questionnaire

Q. No.	Item	Total n (%)	Male n (%)	Female n (%)
1	How many hours do you sleep in a day?			
	Less than 7 hours	61 (61%)	27 (54%)	34 (68%)
	7 hours	21 (21%)	8 (16%)	13 (26%)
	More than 7 hours	18 (18%)	6 (12%)	12 (24%)
2	Do you have time to relax or do things you enjoy?			
	Yes, always	9 (9%)	3 (6%)	6 (12%)
	Most of the time	21 (21%)	9 (18%)	12 (24%)
	Rarely	70 (70%)	43 (86%)	27 (54%)
3	How satisfied are you with your current work-life balance?			
	Satisfied	11 (11%)	4 (8%)	7 (14%)
	Somewhat satisfied	25 (25%)	14 (28%)	11 (22%)
	Not satisfied	64 (64%)	39 (78%)	25 (50%)
4	Do you engage in any non-academic activity?			
	None	3 (3%)	0 (0%)	3 (6%)
	1 or 2 activities	47 (47%)	26 (52%)	21 (42%)
	3 or more activities	50 (50%)	33 (66%)	17 (34%)

5	Does your work schedule affect your relationship with family/friends?			
	Yes	75 (75%)	47 (94%)	28 (56%)
	Maybe	22 (22%)	13 (26%)	9 (18%)
	No	3 (3%)	0 (0%)	3 (6%)

Table 4: Showing gender representation of both groups of participants

Group	Gender	SCS-R (Mean \pm SD)	UCLA Loneliness (Mean \pm SD)
Fast-paced	Male	81.9 \pm 3.04	40.1 \pm 3.68
	Female	79.5 \pm 5.15	41.5 \pm 2.90
Non-Fast-paced	Male	84.2 \pm 3.88	36.2 \pm 2.17
	Female	83.8 \pm 2.46	37.8 \pm 2.92

Table 5: Showing Differences in the level of social connectedness and loneliness between fast paced and non-fast paced lifestyle in adolescents

Variable	Fast-paced Lifestyle (Mean \pm SD)	Non-Fast-paced Lifestyle (Mean \pm SD)	t-value	p-value
Social Connectedness	81.1 \pm 4.00	83.9 \pm 2.99	3.96	< 0.001*
Loneliness	40.6 \pm 3.47	37.2 \pm 2.76	5.30	< 0.001*

*significant ($p < 0.05$)

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine how fast-paced and non-fast-paced lifestyles influence adolescents' experiences of loneliness and social connectedness. Using a self-developed lifestyle questionnaire, participants were categorized into two groups: those with fast-paced lifestyles ($n=50$) and those with non-fast-paced lifestyles ($n=50$). The UCLA Loneliness Scale and Social Connectedness Scale [5] were administered to assess emotional and social well-being. The study consisted of 100 participants (50 males, 50 females), with a mean age of 16.57 years ($SD = 0.67$). Most participants (67%) were from the 12th standard.

Among adolescents with fast-paced lifestyles, males ($n=33$) outnumbered females ($n=17$), observed to have greater academic pressure and stress among male adolescents [7], and sometimes females predominated in the non-fast-paced group [8] and females are less likely to perceive their routines as rushed.

Responses to the lifestyle questionnaire revealed that a majority (61%) slept less than seven hours per night, 70% rarely had time to relax, and 64% were dissatisfied with their work-life balance. Furthermore, 75% acknowledged that their schedules negatively affected relationships [9-10] caused by the strain of over-scheduling on adolescent well-being [11-12].

Results indicated lower social connectedness and higher loneliness among adolescents with fast-paced lifestyles. Males in this group scored $M = 81.9$ ($SD = 3.04$) on social connectedness and $M = 40.1$ ($SD = 3.68$) on loneliness, while females scored $M = 79.5$ ($SD = 5.15$) and $M = 41.5$ ($SD = 2.90$), respectively. In contrast, males with non-fast-paced lifestyles scored $M = 84.2$ ($SD = 3.88$) and $M = 36.2$ ($SD = 2.17$), while females scored $M = 83.8$ ($SD = 2.46$) and $M = 37.8$ ($SD = 2.92$), respectively. In Table 5, there is statistically significant differences between the two lifestyle groups. Adolescents with fast-paced lifestyles reported significantly lower levels of social connectedness ($M = 81.1$, $SD = 4.00$) than those with non-fast-paced lifestyles ($M = 83.9$, $SD = 2.99$), $t(98) = 3.96$, $p < .001$. This supports previous research indicating that high activity levels may reduce opportunities for meaningful social interaction [13-14].

Similarly, the t-test showed significantly higher levels of loneliness among adolescents with fast-paced lifestyles ($M = 40.6$, $SD = 3.47$) compared to those with non-fast-paced lifestyles ($M = 37.2$, $SD = 2.76$), $t(98) = 5.30$, $p < .001$ indicating academic pressure and over-scheduling to increased emotional distress [15-17].

The findings reveal a significant difference in the level of social connectedness and loneliness between adolescents with fast-paced and non-fast-paced lifestyles. Specifically, those leading fast-paced lifestyles reported lower mean scores on the social connectedness scale and higher levels of loneliness compared to their counterparts [18]. Adolescents who are constantly occupied with academic commitments, extracurricular activities, and digital engagements often have limited time for genuine, face-to-face social interactions [19]. In contrast, adolescents with a non-fast paced lifestyles showed higher levels of social connectedness, which are crucial buffers against loneliness. These results suggest that while a fast-paced lifestyle may increase activity and engagement in various pursuits, it may simultaneously reduce the depth or frequency of meaningful social interactions, potentially contributing to increased feelings of loneliness. These results emphasize the critical need to re-evaluate how adolescent lifestyles are structured and to promote practices that prioritize emotional well-being, downtime, and opportunities for authentic social engagement. Creating space for reflection, interpersonal connection, and mental rest is essential in mitigating loneliness and fostering healthier adolescent development.

Findings also highlight the need for greater awareness among parents, educators, and mental health professionals about the potential social and emotional costs of fast-paced lifestyles in adolescents. Encouraging balanced routines, setting realistic expectations, and allowing time for rest and meaningful social interaction can help reduce loneliness and strengthen connectedness [20-21]. Parents can support adolescents by fostering open communication and ensuring they aren't overwhelmed, while schools can integrate well-being initiatives alongside academic goals to promote healthier development.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory study investigated whether a fast-paced lifestyle alters the level of social connectedness and loneliness among adolescents. Adolescents with fast-paced lifestyles tend to feel lonelier and less socially connected, while those with slower routines report stronger social ties and less loneliness. The study emphasizes the importance of mental health awareness, meaningful relationships, and balanced routines for youth. These insights are crucial for educators, families, and policymakers aiming to support adolescent well-being amid modern pressures.

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