THE MEANING OF LONELINESS IN THE SRI LANKAN CONTEXT

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Loneliness is an unpleasant feeling where a person experiences a strong sense of emptiness and solitude resulting from inadequate levels of social relationships. This is a subjective experience. While it is subjective, many agree that it is a universal feeling experienced by all human beings. Though it is universal, studies across various cultures have proven that the meaning of loneliness differs from culture to culture. The present study attempted to explore the meaning of loneliness in the Sri Lankan context. Five female university students who were selected using the convenient sampling method were interviewed using semi structured interviews. Then the interviews were transcribed in order to do the data analysis. Data analysis was done using qualitative method - thematic analysis. Important facts were identified by carefully going through the transcribed interviews. Then the above identified facts were categorized into possible themes. Findings of the research suggest that, what meant by "loneliness" is a combination of emotional distress, social alienation, growth and discovery, interpersonal isolation and self alienation. Furthermore, emotional distress can be broken into three aspects: intense psychological pain, inner turmoil and emptiness. Two forms of interpersonal isolation: feelings of abandonment and rejection, lack or absence of intimate relationships and three forms of self alienation: immobilization, confusion, denial were also discovered. So, what meant by "loneliness" in the Sri Lankan context is a composition of the above mentioned factors. Different socio cultural and individual factors appear to be mediating the experience of these factors.