

Centre stage

ALL BY MYSELF

Working on deadlines, a busy partner and a hectic social life, but still, all alone! Loneliness is gnawing at many women across the city, irrespective of lifestyle and socio-economic standing. Does this sound familiar?

>> SAVIA RAJAGOPAL

Ms. Lonely echoes the sentiment of a growing tribe of women across the city. How is that possible, you wonder? A day packed with work, people, and still lonely? The answer is a loud, affirmative YES! "Even though I attend parties and work on tight deadlines, sometimes I feel completely disconnected," says 25-year-old Neha Kapoor, a web designer. "Increasing numbers of women suffer from loneliness. The phenomenon has increased to about 50 to 60 per cent from 20 to 30 per cent in the last five years," points out clinical psychologist and psychotherapist, Seema Hingorrany. "Changing roles of women, the cultural shifts and varied family structures can also be attributed to this epidemic," adds Dr. Shamsah Sonawalla, consultant psychiatrist, Jaslok hospital. Whether it's women from BPOs or from corporate setups, loneliness is literally becoming a way of life.

Being alone versus being lonely

Severe longing, lack of interaction or even emptiness imply 'loneliness'. Very often, it is the fear of 'being alone' that causes distress. "Being alone is important for personal growth. The distinction between 'being alone' and 'loneliness' must be made," opines Dr. Sonawalla. When there is an excessive need for dependency and intimacy, it puts women at a higher risk of feeling lonely. Difficulties in making friends, being a couch-potato or getting hooked to the net are all manifestations of being lonely. "I moved to Mumbai a few months back and am totally alone here. I spend hours just surfing the net, just so that I don't feel alone," states software engineer, Shruti Sood.

Why me?

"I don't know why, but I feel alone. It's important that I have someone around me always. But my partner is too busy. I don't know what to do when I'm alone, so I stay at work late," confesses Shrijita Basu, 26, journalist. A thought shared by professionals struggling to balance work and personal relationships. Also, studies have found that marriage tends to isolate women from their friends, more than men. "Technology adds to this cauldron of isolation. SMS and email are slowly replacing verbal conversation," points out Dr. Sonawalla.

Does it really affect me?

Researchers have long established the linkages between loneliness and a multitude of psychosomatic illnesses. Loneliness is one of the key features of clinical depression. It can also trigger anxiety, panic attacks etc. Studies have indicated that blood pressure, heart disease, eating disorders and binge-eating are often connected to loneliness.

Active solitude

"It is important to take time out as a woman, especially, when she plays a multitude of roles. It's easy to forget yourself in the melee. Often, women feel guilty to make time for themselves and try to do too much. But this should be consciously avoided," says Dr. Sharita Shah, woman

and child psychiatrist, Hiranandani Hospital.

Do you suffer from...

Lack of energy

Lack of sleep or too much sleep

Low self-confidence

Inability to perform basic tasks

Loss of libido

Overcoming the lone factor...

Be aware and accept your loneliness

Participate in group-activities and discover new hobbies

Consciously try and be comfortable when you're with yourself

Join a support group



"I spent the whole day at work and headed home exhausted. I had a pile of errands that were waiting for my attention. I finished and sat still. All alone. I wanted someone to talk to, but there was no one. My partner was asleep and I felt so lonely even though my life is seemingly

full.”

- Ms. Lonely