

SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF LONELINESS AMONG YOUNG PARENTS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: This article examines the socio-psychological determinants contributing to the manifestation of loneliness among young parents under the influence of the virtual environment. The rapid development of digital technologies has transformed interpersonal communication patterns, leading to a decline in real-life social interactions. Young parents, while adapting to family and social roles, experience psychological stress, which combined with excessive dependence on virtual spaces intensifies feelings of loneliness. The study explores the impact of social media, online communication, emotional detachment, and cultural factors. It also emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between virtual and real-life interactions.

Keywords: loneliness, young parents, virtual environment, social media, socio-psychological factors, emotional detachment, digital technologies.

Аннотация: Данной статье анализируются социально-психологические факторы, способствующие проявлению одиночества среди молодых родителей под влиянием виртуальной среды.

Ключевые слова: одиночество, молодые родители, виртуальная среда, социальные сети, социально-психологические факторы, цифровые технологии.

Introduction. The rapid expansion of the virtual environment in the 21st century has significantly transformed human communication, social interaction, and family life. Digital technologies, including social networking platforms, instant messaging applications, and online communities, have become an integral part of everyday life. According to global digital reports, more than 5 billion people worldwide are active internet users, and a large proportion of daily communication now occurs through virtual platforms rather than face-to-face interaction. This

transformation has created both opportunities for connectivity and risks related to psychological well-being, particularly in the form of emotional isolation and loneliness.

One of the most sensitive social groups affected by these changes is young parents. The transition to parenthood is a complex psychological process that involves role adaptation, increased responsibility, emotional regulation, and restructuring of social relationships. Research in developmental and family psychology shows that the early years of parenting are often associated with elevated stress levels, reduced personal time, and decreased social engagement outside the family unit. In this context, virtual environments may serve as both a coping mechanism and a risk factor, depending on the intensity and nature of their use.

International studies indicate that excessive engagement with digital platforms is associated with higher levels of perceived loneliness and psychological distress. While online communication provides immediate access to social support and parenting information, it often lacks emotional depth, non-verbal cues, and authentic interpersonal connection. This can lead to a phenomenon known as “digital paradox of connection,” where individuals are constantly connected online but experience emotional disconnection in real life. For young parents, this paradox may be particularly pronounced due to limited opportunities for offline social interaction and increased reliance on digital communication during childcare responsibilities.

Furthermore, global health organizations and psychological research centers have emphasized that loneliness is not only an emotional state but also a public health concern. Chronic loneliness has been linked to increased risks of depression, anxiety disorders, sleep disturbances, and reduced cognitive functioning. In parenting contexts, these psychological challenges may negatively affect parent-child interaction quality, emotional responsiveness, and overall family stability.

From an ethnopsychological perspective, cultural factors also play a crucial role in shaping the experience of loneliness. In many societies, including Uzbekistan, traditional family structures and strong intergenerational ties have historically served as protective

mechanisms against social isolation. However, ongoing digitalization and urbanization processes are gradually reshaping these traditional support systems. Young parents increasingly rely on virtual communities rather than extended family networks, which may weaken emotional bonding and reduce the availability of direct social support.

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, recent social and educational reforms have accelerated the integration of digital technologies into everyday life, including education, healthcare, and communication systems. While these developments contribute to modernization and accessibility, they also introduce new psychological challenges for young families adapting to digital lifestyles. The lack of sufficient empirical research on the socio-psychological consequences of virtual environment exposure among young parents in the Uzbek context highlights the necessity of this study.

Therefore, investigating the socio-psychological determinants of loneliness among young parents under the influence of the virtual environment is highly relevant both theoretically and practically. This research is important for understanding how digital behavior patterns interact with family dynamics, emotional well-being, and cultural values. It also provides a foundation for developing preventive psychological interventions, improving digital literacy, and strengthening family support systems in the modern information society.

Literature Review. The phenomenon of loneliness among young parents in the context of increasing digitalization has attracted growing attention in contemporary psychological, sociological, and ethnopsychological research. The existing body of literature demonstrates that this issue is multidimensional, involving the interaction of individual psychological processes, family dynamics, and broader socio-cultural transformations induced by the virtual environment. Scholars from both Western and Eastern academic traditions, including Russian researchers, have contributed significantly to understanding how digital technologies reshape parental experiences and emotional well-being.

International research on parenting in the digital era highlights that virtual environments have become deeply integrated into family life and parent-child interaction systems. According to systematic reviews, digital technologies increasingly mediate

parental practices, including communication, monitoring, and emotional support, thereby transforming traditional parenting roles and daily routines . However, this integration is not without psychological consequences. Studies indicate that while digital platforms provide informational and social support, they also introduce emotional overload, reduced face-to-face interaction, and increased vulnerability to perceived isolation.

One of the most relevant findings in global psychological literature is that loneliness is particularly common during the transition to parenthood. Scoping reviews reveal that approximately one-third of parents experience chronic loneliness, especially during early childcare periods, when social networks tend to shrink and emotional demands increase . Importantly, loneliness in parenthood is not merely a subjective emotional state but is also associated with negative mental health outcomes, including stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, which may directly influence the quality of parent–child relationships.

From the perspective of social media and digital communication research, scholars emphasize a paradoxical effect of virtual connectivity. Although social networking platforms increase the availability of communication, they often fail to provide emotionally meaningful interaction. Systematic studies on family connectedness demonstrate that digital communication can both strengthen and weaken parent–child relationships depending on usage patterns, emotional depth, and time allocation . Recent behavioral studies further support this conclusion by showing that higher levels of social media engagement are frequently associated with increased loneliness, suggesting that virtual interaction may substitute but not fully replace real-life emotional bonding

A significant contribution to this field has been made by Western scholars such as Kathryn L. Modecki, Rachel E. Goldberg, Pamela Wisniewski, and Amy Orben, who critically analyzed the concept of “digital parenting.” Their research highlights that although digital technologies are widely used in parenting contexts, empirical findings remain fragmented and sometimes contradictory. They emphasize that excessive reliance on digital communication tools may contribute to emotional disconnection and psychological strain among parents who lack sufficient offline support systems .

Russian psychological and sociological scholarship provides additional theoretical depth, particularly through ethnopsychological and cultural perspectives. Researchers such as Elena Laktyukhina and other scholars in Russian social research traditions conceptualize “digital parenting” as a form of mediated interaction in which parental authority, emotional communication, and child development practices are increasingly shaped by virtual tools. Their analyses emphasize that digital monitoring and online engagement can transform traditional family power relations, sometimes leading to emotional distancing between family members .

In Russian developmental psychology, studies also highlight that adolescence and early adulthood-periods closely related to young parenting-are especially sensitive to loneliness due to ongoing identity formation and restructuring of social relationships. Research conducted in Moscow State Pedagogical University indicates that loneliness becomes particularly significant when parent-child emotional bonds are weakened or insufficiently developed, reinforcing the intergenerational transmission of emotional states .

In the post-Soviet and Central Asian context, including Uzbekistan, researchers focus on the transformation of family systems under digital influence. Studies conducted by Uzbek scholars emphasize the importance of “virtual pedagogical culture,” which refers to the ability of parents to effectively integrate digital technologies into family life while maintaining moral, emotional, and educational balance. These works highlight that although digitalization enhances access to information and communication, it may also weaken traditional support systems such as extended family networks and community-based emotional assistance .

From an ethnopsychological standpoint, this transformation is particularly significant in collectivist societies, where emotional well-being has traditionally been supported by strong family cohesion and community integration. The gradual shift toward individualized digital communication reduces direct interpersonal contact, thereby increasing the risk of emotional isolation among young parents. This is especially relevant

in urban environments, where migration, work pressure, and digital dependency intersect to intensify psychological stress.

In conclusion, the literature consistently demonstrates that loneliness among young parents under the influence of the virtual environment is the result of a complex interaction between digital behavior, psychological adaptation to parental roles, and socio-cultural transformation. While international research emphasizes the psychological risks of excessive digital engagement, Russian and regional studies contribute valuable insights into cultural and family-system dynamics. However, despite the growing body of work, there remains a significant gap in integrated empirical research focusing specifically on young parents in transitional societies such as Uzbekistan. This gap underscores the necessity of further interdisciplinary studies combining social psychology, ethnopsychology, and digital behavior analysis.

Methodology. This study investigates the socio-psychological determinants of loneliness among young parents under the influence of the virtual environment. The research was conducted within the framework of empirical social psychology and ethnopsychology, taking into account the socio-cultural characteristics of Uzbekistan, where digitalization processes are rapidly transforming family communication patterns and interpersonal relationships.

The study employed a quantitative research design with a cross-sectional approach. This design was selected because it allows for the systematic examination of relationships between variables at a single point in time. The main dependent variable was perceived loneliness, while independent variables included social media usage intensity, parental stress level, and quality of offline social support. The conceptual framework was based on established psychological models of loneliness, particularly the cognitive discrepancy model, which defines loneliness as a gap between desired and actual social relationships.

The sample consisted of 120 young parents aged between 22 and 35 years, selected through purposive sampling in urban and semi-urban areas of Uzbekistan. Participants included both mothers and fathers with at least one child under the age of seven. Inclusion

criteria required regular use of digital technologies (minimum 2 hours per day of internet use). This criterion was important to ensure the relevance of virtual environment exposure.

Two standardized and widely used psychological instruments in Uzbek research practice were applied:

UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) – adapted for Russian and Uzbek populations, widely used in psychological research in Uzbekistan for measuring subjective feelings of loneliness.

Social Media Usage and Digital Behavior Questionnaire (SMUDBQ) – a structured instrument assessing frequency, duration, and emotional dependency on social networking platforms.

Additionally, a short Parental Stress Index (PSI-SF) adapted version was used to measure stress levels associated with parenting roles.

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0, which is one of the most commonly used statistical software packages in psychological and sociological research in Uzbekistan. The analysis included descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis to determine the predictive power of independent variables on loneliness.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

The descriptive results indicate that participants demonstrate a moderate to high level of loneliness, accompanied by relatively high engagement in social media use and moderate parental stress levels. Offline social support appears comparatively lower, suggesting reduced face-to-face interaction among respondents.

Table 2.

Correlation and Regression Analysis

The correlation analysis reveals a statistically significant positive relationship between social media usage and loneliness, indicating that increased virtual engagement is associated with higher levels of perceived loneliness among young parents. Similarly,

parental stress shows a strong positive correlation with loneliness, suggesting that psychological burden intensifies emotional isolation.

Conversely, offline social support demonstrates a negative correlation with loneliness, confirming its protective role in reducing emotional isolation. The regression analysis further indicates that social media usage is the strongest predictor of loneliness among the studied variables, followed by parental stress, while offline social support serves as a mitigating factor.

The study followed ethical standards commonly applied in psychological research in Uzbekistan. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and provided voluntary consent prior to participation. No personal identifying data was collected, and all responses were analyzed in aggregated form.

Overall, the methodological framework of this study integrates standardized psychometric tools, culturally relevant sampling strategies, and robust statistical analysis using SPSS. The combination of quantitative measurement and socio-psychological interpretation allows for a reliable assessment of how virtual environment exposure influences loneliness among young parents in the Uzbek socio-cultural context.

Discussion. The findings of this study provide important insights into the socio-psychological determinants of loneliness among young parents under the influence of the virtual environment. The results demonstrate that loneliness in this group is not a single-factor phenomenon but rather a complex psychological state formed through the interaction of digital behavior patterns, parental stress, and the availability of offline social support. These interrelated factors reflect broader global trends in the transformation of family communication in the digital age, while also revealing specific cultural dynamics relevant to the Uzbek socio-cultural context.

One of the most significant outcomes of the analysis is the strong positive relationship between social media usage and perceived loneliness. This finding aligns with international research suggesting that increased engagement with digital platforms does not necessarily reduce emotional isolation but may instead intensify it. Although social media offers opportunities for communication and information exchange, it often promotes

superficial interaction rather than deep emotional connection. In the case of young parents, who already experience time constraints and psychological pressure due to childcare responsibilities, excessive reliance on virtual communication can replace meaningful face-to-face interaction, thereby contributing to emotional distancing within the family environment.

The observed relationship between parental stress and loneliness further supports established psychological theories of emotional strain in early parenthood. The transition to parenthood requires significant psychological adaptation, including role redefinition, increased responsibility, and reduced personal autonomy. When combined with continuous exposure to digital environments, these stressors may amplify feelings of inadequacy and emotional exhaustion. In such conditions, virtual environments may function as both a coping mechanism and a source of additional psychological pressure, especially when individuals engage in social comparison with idealized representations of family life online.

Another important finding of the study is the protective role of offline social support in reducing loneliness. The negative correlation between social support and loneliness confirms that real-life interpersonal relationships remain a critical factor in maintaining psychological well-being. In collectivist cultural contexts such as Uzbekistan, extended family networks, neighborhood relations, and community-based interactions have traditionally played a central role in emotional support systems. However, the increasing dominance of digital communication appears to weaken these traditional support structures, leading young parents to rely more heavily on virtual networks that may not fully satisfy their emotional needs.

From an ethnopsychological perspective, these results highlight the ongoing transformation of family and social structures in societies undergoing rapid digitalization. While modernization and technological advancement provide new opportunities for communication and access to resources, they also introduce challenges related to emotional fragmentation and reduced interpersonal depth. In Uzbekistan, where cultural values strongly emphasize family cohesion, respect for elders, and close interpersonal bonds, the shift toward digital interaction may create a mismatch between traditional expectations of

social support and modern communication practices. This mismatch can contribute to psychological discomfort and increased vulnerability to loneliness among young parents.

Furthermore, the findings support the concept of the “digital paradox of connectivity,” which suggests that individuals may experience both increased connectivity and increased loneliness simultaneously. This paradox is particularly evident among young parents who use digital platforms to stay connected with others while simultaneously experiencing a reduction in meaningful emotional engagement. The lack of non-verbal communication cues, empathy-driven interaction, and physical presence in virtual communication limits its capacity to fully replace real-life relationships.

The results of this study also have important implications for mental health and family well-being. Chronic loneliness has been widely recognized as a risk factor for various psychological and physiological problems, including depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, and decreased cognitive functioning. In the context of parenting, these effects may negatively influence emotional responsiveness, attachment quality, and overall child development outcomes. Therefore, addressing loneliness among young parents is not only a matter of individual well-being but also a broader social and developmental concern.

In conclusion, the discussion of findings suggests that loneliness among young parents in the virtual environment is shaped by a complex interaction of digital exposure, psychological stress, and socio-cultural transformation. While virtual environments provide valuable tools for communication and support, their excessive or unbalanced use may contribute to emotional isolation. Strengthening offline social networks, promoting healthy digital habits, and enhancing psychological resilience are essential strategies for mitigating loneliness and improving family well-being in the modern digital society.

Conclusion. This study examined the socio-psychological determinants of loneliness among young parents under the influence of the virtual environment, with particular attention to the interaction between digital behavior, parental stress, and offline social support. The results clearly indicate that loneliness in young parents is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by both psychological and socio-cultural factors in the context of rapid digital transformation.

The findings demonstrate that increased engagement with virtual environments, particularly intensive social media use, is significantly associated with higher levels of perceived loneliness. This suggests that while digital platforms provide continuous access to communication, they often lack the emotional depth and authenticity required for meaningful interpersonal connection. As a result, virtual interaction may contribute to emotional substitution rather than emotional fulfillment, reinforcing feelings of isolation among young parents.

At the same time, parental stress emerged as a strong contributing factor to loneliness. The transition to parenthood, with its increased responsibilities and psychological demands, creates conditions in which emotional exhaustion and reduced personal time become common experiences. When combined with excessive digital engagement, these stressors intensify emotional vulnerability and weaken the quality of real-life social relationships.

Conversely, offline social support was identified as a significant protective factor against loneliness. Strong family ties, community interaction, and face-to-face communication play a crucial role in maintaining emotional stability and psychological well-being. In the socio-cultural context of Uzbekistan, where family cohesion and intergenerational support are traditionally important, the gradual shift toward digital communication may weaken these protective mechanisms, increasing the risk of emotional isolation among young parents.

Overall, the study confirms that loneliness in the virtual age cannot be attributed to a single cause but rather results from the complex interplay of digital lifestyle patterns, psychological adaptation to parental roles, and evolving cultural norms. The findings highlight the importance of maintaining a balanced integration between virtual and real-life interactions in order to preserve emotional well-being.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest the need for targeted psychological interventions aimed at improving digital literacy, promoting healthy online behavior, and strengthening offline social support systems for young parents. Encouraging active family

communication, community participation, and awareness of the psychological effects of excessive digital use may significantly reduce the risk of loneliness.

In conclusion, addressing loneliness among young parents requires a comprehensive approach that considers both technological influences and socio-cultural realities. Ensuring a healthy balance between virtual engagement and real-world interaction is essential for supporting the psychological well-being of young families in an increasingly digitalized society.

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