

Social Competence, Parental Promotion of Peer Relations, and Loneliness among Adolescents

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The aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship between social competence, parental promotion of peer relations, and loneliness among adolescents. The study comprised three parts; Part I dealt with the translation of Parental Promotion of Peer's Relations Inventory (Adel, 2004), and Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale (Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw, 1984). Part II pertained with the cross language validation of these scales. In Part III, the translated scales were administered along with Social Competence Scale (Shahzad, 2002) to a sample of 98 adolescents (48 boys, 50 girls). Results showed significant positive relationship between social competence and parental promotion of peer relations; whereas both the variables were negatively related with loneliness. *t*-test revealed that children of employed mothers reported significantly higher parental promotion of peer relations, and that children of less educated mothers experienced significantly more feelings of loneliness as compared to the children of highly educated mothers. However, there were non significant gender differences in relation to the variables of the study.

Keywords: social competence, peer relations, loneliness, adolescents

A natural demand of human survival is to live in a group, a group in which people form relationships, share their feelings, have positive contacts and gain knowledge about better survival. As people live on, they may encounter feelings about not being a part of the group. They may feel detached and left out and resign from the colorful life and become loners. Loneliness is an emotional and cognitive state that a person experiences as a result from desiring close relationships but being unable to attain them (Baron & Byrne, 2003). Loneliness as a term describe the inner feeling when we are starved of affection (Davey, 1994). Sometimes a person is in the condition of desired aloneness. A desire to be alone is distinct from loneliness (Bauminger

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& Kasari, 2000). A person is in solitude when he/she deliberately chooses to be alone or to play by him/herself; solitude is associated with a pleasant positive and sometimes even desired situation (Margalit, as cited in Bauminger & Kasari, 2000). Loneliness does not always mean that the person does not have social relationships. Hall (2007) stated that loneliness can be experienced by someone even in a class of three hundred other students. Loneliness is a painful awareness that one is not feeling connected to others and important needs are not being met. According to Weiten and Lloyd (2003), there are different types of loneliness; emotional loneliness, social loneliness, transient loneliness, and chronic loneliness. Emotional loneliness is absence of an intimate attachment figure. Social loneliness can result from lack of a friendship network. Transitional loneliness occurs when people who have had satisfying social relationships in the past become lonely because of a specific disruption of their social network, whereas, people who have been unable to develop a satisfactory interpersonal relationship over a period of years have chronic loneliness.

From the viewpoint of cognitive approach, loneliness is experienced when people perceive a discrepancy between their desired and acquired patterns of social relations (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). The social support perspective (Weiss, 1973) suggests that people feel lonely because of lack of access to social networks that connect a person with others. According to Gallozzi (2007), loneliness triggering events for children include criticism, corporal punishment, and sexual abuse. Loneliness can predispose children to long-term and negative consequences (Bullock, 1998).

Social competence refers to those skills necessary for effective interpersonal functioning. They include both verbal and nonverbal behaviors that are socially valued and are likely to elicit a positive response from others (Osman, 2001). Social competence includes a child's social skills, social awareness and self confidence. It also includes the abilities to understand others' emotions, perceive social cues, understand complex social situations and understand other people's motivation and goals. Children having a wide repertoire of social skills, awareness of society, and good social perception are likely to be socially competent (Welsh & Bierman, 1998). Junttila (2009) found that social competence can be seen as a protective factor and loneliness as a risk factor for children's and adolescents' socio-emotional well-being and learning. Chen (1994) examined the relations among parental education, occupational status, parental acceptance, and social competence along with other variables. He found that parental acceptance was associated positively with

prosocial-competent behavior in children; parental education and occupational status was directly associated with children's competent behavior; and the family's psychological resources were positively related to competent behavior. According to Robert (2004), socially competent people have social awareness and social skills. These people understand others' needs, show sensitivity, acknowledge and reward other people's strengths, manage conflicts, collaborate, and cooperate.

Parents play a significant role in the life of their children. When children come into this world they are totally dependent on their parents for the fulfillment of their needs. Peers are also important in the child's life. The term peer can be differentially interpreted; that is, peers may consist of a group of same age mates that may or may not be friends. In other instance, it may refer to people with whom we work who may or may not be the same age fellows. A peer group, therefore, regarded as people with whom we have social contact. If parents help their children in forming relations with peers then they learn different competencies, and this, in turn, reduces their loneliness (Adel, 2004). A study was conducted on a sample of 8th grade children, revealing significant association between feelings of loneliness, perceived social competence, low self esteem, and low peer acceptance. It also led to the conclusion that the children rejected by peers; are lonelier than other children (Stella, Valds, Skaalvit, & Sebstad, 2011). McGrath and Noble (2010) further suggest that positive peer relations are of great importance in psychological wellbeing of the adolescent. Adolescents who have positive relationships with peers, shows better academic results, whereas, negative peer relations are associated with poor academic results, absence from school, victim of bullying, behavioral problems, drug addiction, depression, anxiety, and also social life problems in adulthood. These outcomes elaborate the importance of positive peer relations in the healthy development of adolescents.

Children entering kindergarten have limited access to peers unless parents make special efforts to arrange peer contacts (Kerns & Kathryn, 1998). Some children are rejected by their peers; others are ignored or neglected. These children miss out on opportunities to learn social skills that will be important throughout their lives (Burton & Christine, 1986). It is also seen that some children have many friends but they are still alone and unhappy. If relations are not satisfying then children can have great problems with social functioning. Furthermore children with family problems may be reluctant to bring friends home, therefore, avoiding close friendships (Burton & Christine, 1986). Bullock (1989) studied the relationship between parental

opportunities for and management of children's peer interactions and the social competence of their child. Participants were children (ages 47 to 66 months), and their parents. Findings revealed positive relationships between mothers' opportunities for and management of inter-actions and all of the measures of children's social competence, whereas, father's opportunities for interactions were correlated with the children's measures. This suggests an important link between opportunities provided by parents for play and the peer social system. Adel (2004) investigated the interaction between parental treatment styles and peer relations in the classroom on the feelings of loneliness among Egyptian school children. Four hundred and fifteen children from fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh grades (age range 8.5 to 13.2 years) in six elementary schools of deaf children were participants. Results showed that loneliness is negatively related with parents' promotion of peer relations. Furthermore, it was concluded that children whose parents promote peer relations develop better social skills and sense of competence that, in turn, reduce loneliness. This research clearly explains the relationship between parental promotion of peer relations, loneliness and social competence.

Later empirical evidence found that adolescents who's parents do not pay much attention in understanding the problems and worries of their children, reported more feelings of loneliness as compared to the parents caring and understanding attitude towards their children's problems (Oliver, Owusu, & Ander, 2010). Findings also revealed that children who have no close friends are more likely to score high on loneliness scale as compared to the children who have one or more close friendships; thereby, clearly depicting the importance of parents' and peers' role in inducing loneliness. Pope and Ward (1995) found that preadolescents with greater social competence reported more relations with peers; whereas preadolescents with lower social competence reported loneliness and social anxiety. In addition, parents with more socially competent children tended to be more active in providing encouragement and making arrangements for opportunities for their children to interact with peers; whereas, parents of children with low social competence were less likely to actively direct their children's social behaviors.

The present study intends to explore the relationship between loneliness, social competence, and parental promotion of peer relations. Loneliness is an internal, subjective feeling or experience that affects the psychological well being of a person. Every one, in this world, feels lonely at times; however, if these feelings prevail for a longer time then they might affect the mental, emotional, and even physical health of the individual. Consequently, person may likely

detach from others (physically, mentally, or psychologically), feels left-out but bears strong wish to be with other people. Loneliness is not only related to adults' life; children and adolescents are also equally likely to be affected by loneliness. The age range of the present sample is 12 to 14 considering as early adolescents. Although, loneliness is also relevant to age as young as 8 years old, but this age group is selected as it is assumed that boys and girls of this age group are better able to report their feelings as compared to younger children. Moreover, measures related to loneliness, social competence, and parental promotion of peer relations are translated into Urdu, to overcome the barriers of language. Researchers state that good peer relations reduce or diminish loneliness (Adel, 2004; Asher & Paquette, 2003); however, ability to make friends is dependent on social skills. Adel (2004) stated that lonely children lack appropriate social skills or competencies and this lacking affect their participation in different social activities; thereby, enhancing their vulnerability to be unpopular in society and unable to make new friends or establish good social relationships. The present study, therefore, also explores the relationship between loneliness and social competence.

In order to acquire different basic skills and to interact in society, the child has a great dependency on his/her parents in learning ways and means to develop new acquaintances with children (Mounts, Valentiner, Anderson, & Boswell, 2006). For adolescents, proper parental guidance would play facilitative role in learning social competencies necessary for interaction with other children (Adel, 2004). Hence, the present study intends to determine the relationship between the parental guidance of their children and their ability of social competence. According to Adel (2004), acquisition of different competencies to interact with other children enables the child to form sustainable friendships; which in turn helps in reducing the feelings of loneliness. Therefore, relationship regarding loneliness and parental promotion of peer relations is also studied in the present research.

Research Design

The present research was conducted in three parts. Part I dealt with the translation of the Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale (Asher et al., 1984), and Parental Promotion of Peer Relations Inventory (Adel, 2004); while Part II involved cross language validation of these scales. Part III was the main study and aimed at investigating the relationship among social competence, parental promotion of peer relations, and loneliness among children. The

research also explored the effects of demographic variables that are, gender, mother's education, and mother's employment in relation to these variables.

Hypotheses

The present study aimed at exploring the relationship between loneliness, social competence, and parental promotion of peer relations. Following hypotheses were formulated.

1. Social competence will be positively related with parental promotion of peer relations and negatively associated with loneliness.
2. Boys are more likely to reflect social competence and parental promotion of peer relations and less experience of loneliness than girls.
3. Children of working mothers would display more social competence and parental promotion of peer relations and lesser feelings of loneliness as compared to children of non-working mothers.
4. Children of highly educated mothers will be exhibiting more social competence and parental promotion of peer relations and lesser feelings of loneliness as compared to their counterparts.

Method

To overcome language barriers the Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale (LSDS; Asher et al., 1984) and Parental Promotion of Peer Relations Inventory (PPPRI; Adel, 2004) were translated into Urdu. The translation and cross language validation of the scales was done in four steps: 1) forward translation, 2) committee approach, 3) back translation, and 4) cross language validation.

Part I: Translation of Scales

For the translation of two scales, i.e., LSDS and PPPRI, seven bilingual experts were contacted. They were introduced to the variables and the nature and purpose of the research. As these experts translated the scales, a committee constituting four members was called to select the best translations for each item. Later all the translated items were back translated to the original English language.

To ensure whether the translated items conveyed the same meaning, the scales were given to five other bilingual experts to translate them back into English. All the experts had Masters degree in English language. Again a committee approach, comprising three members, was held. They declared that the translated items either conveyed the same meaning or meaning close to the original item, therefore, adaptation of any item was not identified.

Part II: Cross Language Validation of Scales

To determine the cross language validation of the Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale and Parental Promotion of Peer Relations Inventory, a group of 60 students was selected (age = 12 to 14 years), 30 boys and 30 girls, using convenient sampling technique; selected from a private school. This group was divided in two equal halves, group 1 and group 2. After the researcher gave instructions, (the first half) group 1 completed the original version of the scales; whereas, (the second half) group 2 completed the translated version of these scales. After 15 days the scales were readministered to the same sample but in a different way. This time group 1 was divided into two groups by placing first fifteen members in group 1a and the other fifteen in group 1b. Similarly, group 2 was further divided into group 2a and group 2b, having 15 members in each group. Group 1a was given the English version (original version) and group 1b was given the Urdu version. Group 2a was given the English version and group 2b was given the Urdu version; respectively. Later test retest reliability of the scales was determined.

English to English reliability of LSDS was .54 ($p < .05$), and PPPRI was .83 ($p < .01$); English to Urdu reliability of LSDS was .79 ($p < .01$) and PPPRI was .69 ($p < .01$); Urdu to Urdu reliability of LSDS was .82 ($p < .01$) and PPPRI was .42 ($p < ns$); whereas, Urdu to English reliability of LSDS was .55 ($p < .05$), and PPPRI was .86 ($p < .01$). This shows that the translated version of the Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale retains its conceptual basis. It also shows that there was significant test retest reliability of Parental Promotion of Peer Relations Inventory, except Urdu to Urdu reliability.

Part III: Main Study

Sample. The sample consisted of 98 early adolescents (50 girls and 48 boys). Their age range was 12 to 14 years ($M = 13.04$, $S.D = .73$) and recruited from government ($n = 50$) and private ($n = 48$)

schools of Rawalpindi. Mothers of 60 adolescents were less educated (below matric), while 38 adolescents had highly educated mothers (qualification above matric). Mothers of 21 adolescents were working and 77 adolescents had non-working mothers.

Instruments. The following measures were used to determine the relationship among variables of the study.

Social Competence Scale. To measure social competence of the adolescents, Social Competence Scale (SCS; Shehzad, 2002) consisting of 23 items, was used. Six items (2, 3, 7, 8, 20, and 21) were negatively phrased which were later reverse scored. It was a 5-point rating scale with response categories ranging from *Always* (5) to *Never* (1) with high score indicating high level of social competence. Reported alpha coefficient of SCS was .70 (Shehzad, 2002) while same value of alpha coefficient (.70) was yielded for the present sample.

Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale. To assess feelings of loneliness of the adolescents, Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale (LSDS; Asher et al., 1984) was used. LSDS consisted of 24 items which was translated in Part I of the present research. The 16 primary items focused on children's feelings of loneliness with eight filler items focusing on children's hobbies or preferred activities. LSDS was a 5-point rating scale ranging from *Always true* (5) to *Not at all true* (1) and negative items were reversed in scoring. High score on LSDS was indicative of more feelings of loneliness while low score reflect lesser experience of loneliness. The resulting 16 item scale was found to be internally consistent (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$) and internally reliable (split-half correlation between forms = .83; Spearman-Brown reliability coefficient = .91; Guttman split-half reliability coefficient = .91), as reported by the original authors (Asher et al., 1984). In the present study, the reliability of the scale was found to be .70 indicating LSDS as dependable measure of loneliness.

Parental Promotion of Peer Relations Inventory. Parental promotion of peer relations was measured with translated version of Parental Promotion of Peer Relations Inventory (PPPRI; Adel, 2004). It consisted of 10 items with two subscales: Parental prohibition of peer relations (5 items) and Parental support of peer relations (5 items). The scale was translated in Part I of the present research. PPPRI had dichotomous response options of *Yes* (2) and *No* (1) and scoring was reversed for negatively phrased items. Therefore, high

score suggested high parental promotion. Reliability of the PPPRI was determined as .64 in the present sample.

Procedure. For the purpose of data collection, permission letters on behalf of National Institute of Psychology was given to the principals of the schools chosen. The participants were approached in the classrooms and were provided with the consent form. They were briefed about the consent form and information regarding the research. The participants who agreed to participate in the study were then given a briefing about the three scales. Written as well as verbal instructions were narrated about responding the questionnaires. The participants were divided into three groups, using convenient sampling technique. Each group was given the scales in a different sequence to avoid response bias. After completing the scales, they were thanked for their participation.

Results

Correlation was used to explore relationship between social competence, parental promotion of peer relations, and loneliness among adolescent. To study the difference between gender, mother's employment, and mother's education, *t*-test was used.

Table 1
Relationship between Social Competence, Parental Promotion of Peer Relations, and Loneliness among Adolescents (N= 98)

Scales	LSDS	PPPRI	SCS
Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale	-	-.08	-.52**
Parental Promotion of Peer Relations		-	.24*
Social Competence Scale			-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Note. LSDS = Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale; PPPRI= Parental Promotion of Peer Relations; SCS = Social Competence Scale

Table 1 showed that loneliness has a non-significant negative relationship with parental promotion of peer relations whereas significant inverse relationship exists with social competence. On the other hand, the parental promotion of peer relations exhibited significant positive relationship with the social competence ($p < .05$). Therefore, it can be inferred that social competence and parental promotion of peer relations are negatively correlated with loneliness.

Table 2

Difference between Boys and Girls on LSDS, PPPRI, and SCS (N=98)

Variables	Boys (n = 48)		Girls (n = 50)		t(96)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
LSDS	54.63	9.44	56.54	54.63	1.10	.27	-.04
PPPRI	15.48	1.76	15.50	1.58	.062	.95	-.01
SCS	87.98	11.06	84.56	10.22	1.59	.11	.32

Note. LSDS = Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale; PPPRI = Parental Promotion of Peer Relations Inventory; SCS = Social Competence Scale

Results of Table 2 indicated non-significant gender differences in relation to variables of the study. No differences were observed among boys and girls with respect to social competence, parental promotion of peer relations, and feelings of loneliness.

Table 3

Difference between Children of Working and Non-working Mothers on LSDS, PPPRI, and SCS (N = 98)

Variables	Working Mothers (n = 21)		Non-working Mothers (n = 77)		t(96)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
LSDS	87.98	11.06	84.56	10.22	.67	.50	.32
PPPRI	14.67	2.03	15.71	1.48	2.63	.01	.64
SCS	85.29	11.43	86.49	10.58	.45	.65	.11

Note. LSDS = Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale; PPPRI = Parental Promotion of Peer Relations Inventory; SCS = Social Competence Scale

Findings of Table 3 revealed significant difference between the scores of children of employed and non-working mothers regarding, parental promotion of peer relations. Findings revealed that children of non-working mothers exhibited better skills in regard to peer relations. On the contrary, non-significant differences were found regarding social competence and feelings of loneliness. Hence, mothers' working status did not show any difference in social competencies and feelings of loneliness among children.

Table 4

Difference between the Children in Relation to Mothers' Education on LSDS, PPPRI, and SCS (N=98)

Variables	Less Educated Mothers (n = 60)		High Educated Mothers (n = 38)		t(96)	p	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
LSDS	57.45	8.84	52.68	7.50	2.75	.00	.57
PPPRI	15.70	1.73	15.16	1.51	1.58	.11	.32
SCS	85.50	11.22	87.39	9.92	.85	.39	.17

Note. LSDS = Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale; PPPRI = Parental Promotion of Peer's Relations Inventory; SCS = Social Competence Scale

Table 4 show that children of less educated mothers experience significantly more feelings of loneliness as compared to the children of highly educated mothers. However, there were non-significant differences between children of less and more educated mothers on parental promotion of peer relations and social competence.

Discussion

This research was an attempt to investigate the relationship among social competence, parental promotion of peer relations and loneliness among adolescents. Another aim of this research was to explore the differences of different demographic variables, that is, gender, mother's employment, mother's education and school type, with reference to the variables of the research.

Findings of the first hypothesis exhibited positive relationship between social competence and parental promotion of peer relations; whereas both constructs displayed negative association with loneliness. Empirical evidence also showed that children who enjoy parental support in making relationships had better chances to develop social skills and competencies, for example, parents who promote their children's friendships, enable them to learn certain social competencies and important skills which are essential for the social adjustment. According to Pope and Ward (1995), parents who motivate their children to interact with peers provide them the opportunities to become socially competent; this in turn reduces their loneliness. Henricsson (2006) found that loneliness is associated with low social competence. Hair, Jagar, and Garret (2002) stated that healthy, supportive, and warm parent child relationships play a great role in learning social skills which lead to good friendships.

According to Pavri and Luftig (2000), children with learning disabilities are lonelier than the children without disabilities. Such children lack social skills, which makes them unpopular among peers. This research shows the importance of social skills in establishing healthy relationships and reducing loneliness. In a longitudinal study, it was found that healthy relationships between mother and the child are associated with children's social adjustment, that is, children with good mother-child relationships also show good child-peer relationships (Gallagher, 2008). McDowell and Parke (2009) found that when parents help their children in forming social networks with their peers they, in fact, deepen their friendships. Pedersen, Vitaro, Barker, and Borge (2007) reported that peer rejection is associated with loneliness. Peer rejection in early childhood can cause internalizing problems, such as, loneliness. The present findings suggest that there was significant negative relation between social competence and loneliness. However, parental promotion of peer relations did not have a significant relation with loneliness. Possibly because loneliness is a subjective feeling, a child may feel lonely even if he/she has friends and may not feel lonely even if he/she is alone. Another reason would be defensiveness of the participants, as sharing with one's parents can be a sensitive issue in our society; thereby, altering the actual outcome of the proposed relationship.

Results showed non-significant gender differences regarding social competence, parental promotion of peer relations, and feelings of loneliness. Earlier evidence also found non-significant gender differences on the loneliness scale (Adel, 2004).

Mother's education was also analyzed regarding social competence, parental promotion of peer relations, and feelings of loneliness. In the present research, it was seen that less educated mothers' children experienced more loneliness as compared to the children of highly educated mothers, possibly because educated mothers are usually social and are more aware of their children's social needs. Glenn and Weaver (1981) reported that mother's education may have a positive effect on their children's psychological well-being. Kose (2009) found that children of less educated mothers have high risk of social isolation, emotional disturbance and depression as compared to high educated mothers.

Findings also revealed significant differences on parental promotion of peer relations favoring non-working mothers. This particular trend can be possibly explained as working mothers may be demanding in their work and give quality time to their children regarding their social life. On the other hand, non-working mothers are there for their children most of the time and may keep vigilant

track on their friends; therefore, promoting their children's interaction with others. According to Arya (2005), mother's employment affects their children sociability to a greater extent. It has been established that daughters of employed mothers showed less information in activities as compared to those of non-working mothers, who could devote more time to their studies. According to Baker (1981) children of employed mothers do well in studies; whereas, Doornik and Dronkers (1996), found that children whose mothers worked more than full time had a negative effect on their physical and psychological well being. Furthermore, children of mothers having high white collar jobs, exhibit better well-being as compared to the children of non-working mothers. There is a strong need for further research on parental promotion of peer relations, social competence, and loneliness of children with regard to mother's education and employment.

Limitations and Suggestions

There are also some identifiable limitations of this research. Primarily, there would be low generalizability of results owing to limited sample size. Regarding the demographic variables, the findings of mother's employment and education may possess weak validity because of the size of the sample. Inclusion of larger sample would enhance better reliability and generalizability of results. Additionally, children from schools of Rawalpindi only were approached. Therefore, it is suggested for future pursuits to incorporate different schools from varying cities so as to provide comprehensive understanding of the constructs under study. Another limitation is that the subscales of Parental Promotion of Peer's Relations Inventory are not analyzed with the other variables separately. Furthermore, parental promotion of peer relations is a sensitive topic and children may feel defensive while answering the questions regarding their parents and would like to rate themselves positively, thereby altering the results. Hence, variables of the present study may also be explored in conjunction with other factors as well, to offer broad perceptive of the related constructs.

Implications

Finding of the present study provides base line to understand the importance of social competence and role of parents in promoting peer relations to reduce loneliness among adolescents. The findings suggest that social competence is positively related with parental promotion of

peer relations and that social competence has significant negative relation with loneliness. Empirical evidence also suggests that loneliness, poor social skills, and poor peer relations can lead to certain emotional and adjustment problems in adolescence and later, in adulthood. Therefore, it can be assessed that special training to enhance social competence may have positive effect on the wellbeing of adolescents. Furthermore, if parents are trained and skilled about their role in helping their children to establish relations with peers thereby improving the social skills of children. Therefore, findings of the present study may assist psychologists, teachers, and parents to understand the role of social competence and peer relations in reducing loneliness. Finally, findings of the present study may pave the way for further exploration of other dimensions regarding these variables.

Conclusion

The research was conducted on a sample of early adolescents, recruited from government and private schools, to study the relationship between social competence, parental promotion of peer relations and loneliness. It can be said that loneliness has a significant negative relationship with social competence. Furthermore, significant positive relationship existed between social competence and parental promotion of peer relations. The overall findings suggest that greater the social competence the lesser will be the loneliness. It is recommended that if adolescents are taught essential social competencies and their parents help them in forming peer relations; they can easily cope with loneliness.

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