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Social isolation and loneliness among Generation Z employees: can emotional intelligence help mitigate?

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ABSTRACT

The paper tested a moderated mediation model with social isolation, loneliness, emotional intelligence, and quality of life among Generation Z (Gen Z) employees. Approximately 568 Gen Z employees participated in this study. We used WHOQOL-BREF for measuring quality of life, Schutte's emotional intelligence test, UCLA loneliness scale and social isolation scale from Choi and Noh. We applied the PROCESS macro (model 7) by Hayes for a moderated mediation analysis, using emotional intelligence as a moderating variable and loneliness as a mediating variable between social isolation and quality of life. The results indicate that emotional intelligence moderates the mediating effect of loneliness on social isolation and quality of life and supports hypothesis 2. First, the indirect impact of social isolation on quality of life varies as a function of emotional intelligence moderating the path. Second, both social isolation and loneliness are negative and significant predictors of quality of life. Loneliness is not an individual problem anymore but a public health issue around the world. Individuals who are lonely experience both mental and physical health issues. Strong measures are needed to combat loneliness, and the current research results confirm that emotional intelligence-based interventions will help individuals fight loneliness.

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Introduction

Large-scale technological advancements in the recent past have led Generation Z (Gen Z) to grow up in a mostly technological environment, and it is naturally assumed that individuals born in this generation had access to mobile devices, cellular service, and Wi-Fi since a young age, contrary to the previous generations that had to adapt to these tools (Dimock, 2019). Because of this, Gen Z is said to be the most technologically sophisticated generation but also have a high dependency on technology, low attention span, and tend to be highly materialistic (Dangmei & Singh, 2016). Gen Z spends most of their time glued to a screen (Rue, 2018) and is said to be the loneliest generation (Williams & Braun, 2019), where over 70% of individuals sometimes, if not always, experience high levels of loneliness (Jenkins, 2022).

A generation can be defined as 'an identifiable group that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages divided by 5–7 years into first wave, core group, and last wave' (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Generation Z, also referred to as 'iGen' (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021), comprises individuals who were born between 1995 and 2012 (Pichler et al., 2021). Currently, the generations identified are as follows: the Veteran generation, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z, followed by the most recent generation, Gen Alpha (Bencsik et al., 2016).

Technology has been used in every aspect of Gen Z's lives, from learning to building friendships and even finding communities, causing them to develop an emotional reliance and attachment (Giray, 2022).

Since Gen Z finds more comfort in technology, they tend to feel lonely and isolated, which can have negative effects on both physical and mental health, such as anxiety, depression, and disturbed sleep cycles (Bowler, 2020). This isolation causes them to feel more comfortable sharing personal details on social media (Lyngdoh et al., 2023), thus furthering the cycle of dependency on technology and loneliness. This was only worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which raised even more concerns about the social isolation of young adults and adolescents (Beam & Kim, 2020). A younger generation is generally considered to be more fit and resilient than an older generation, but the pandemic showed that Gen Z struggled far more than older generations and raised questions about the long-lasting effects of such social isolation (Vacciano, 2023). Increased social isolation can also lead to psychological distress among youth (Rauschenberg et al., 2021). With much of the generation entering the workforce during and after the pandemic, questions about the management of Gen Z as employees also arise, and how remote work arrangements affect them in particular; studies have shown that they are more sensitive to isolation in such working arrangements (De Andres-Sanchez et al., 2023).

Studies have shown that younger generations prefer to work offline in office (Xiong et al., 2021; Watkins, 2023), so work-from-home arrangements may have a negative impact on them and lead to further isolation. Although the pandemic showed that remote working is beneficial for many and companies have even adopted it as a full-time arrangement, it could adversely affect the youth who are just entering the workforce and impact their ability to develop social skills, as well as be detrimental to their mental and physical health (Mahapatra et al., 2022). While they place a high level of importance on emotional awareness and emotional intelligence, Gen Z is seen to have the lowest emotional intelligence of all generations; Kašparová & Linhart, 2023). Emotional intelligence can be defined as the 'ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions' (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Gen Z may be the most tech-savvy generation to date, but their need for a constant digital environment makes them physically and emotionally unhealthy and makes it much more difficult for them to adapt to workplaces (Knapp et al., 2017). They are particularly known for 'phubbing' – the tendency to favour the use of one's phone instead of a live/present social interaction (Aagaard, 2020) – and are defined as 'the act of snubbing someone in a social setting by concentrating on one's mobile phone' (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). Phubbing can make one feel less connected and negatively affect ones mental health (Ducharme, 2018). Research has shown that phubbing among Gen Z can lead to increased distraction while completing tasks, loss of information during conversations, and a lack of empathy, among others (Rois & Purwani, 2021). It can also give the impression of impoliteness and an inattentive demeanor and can reduce the quality of the conversation and interaction (Vanden Abeele et al., 2016). As social animals, humans require a level of personal interaction to feel a sense of belonging and connection; however, phubbing can make people feel dissatisfied with social engagement, both on the giving and receiving end, and the benefits of socialization are lost through the excessive dependency on digital devices and technology (Dwyer et al., 2018). Although there is little conclusive data regarding the impact of phubbing specifically by Gen Z in the workplace, there is conclusive data about the effects of supervisor phubbing which can lead to decreased motivation, employee engagement, and job performance (Rasheed et al., 2022), as well as employees experiencing feelings of social exclusion and a higher power distance with their supervisor (Yasin et al., 2023). Gen Z is now beginning to climb up the ladder and enter more positions of leadership and the phubbing phenomenon in the generation will definitely see more effects in the workplace. The increased use of smartphones can reduce self-esteem (Bitar et al., 2021), adversely affect mental health, is a predictor of anxiety and depression, and can even increase hostility (Ergün et al., 2020). While Gen Z is especially differentiated from previous generations in terms of their use and dependency on technology, research has shown that gender can also play a role, and can influence internet usage patterns and it was observed that females used the internet for longer hours than males do, for activities including but not limited to education, entertainment, and social networking (Bajwa et al., 2021). The impact of gender is not only visible in terms of technology and its use, but also with regards to emotional intelligence. What is interesting is that while gender affects emotional intelligence, the qualifications and age of an individual do not (Mura et al., 2021). Workplaces of today are highly dependent on the emotional intelligence of its employees, as it can influence the kind of relationships that are fostered, styles of leadership that are implemented, training plans that are designed, and personal and

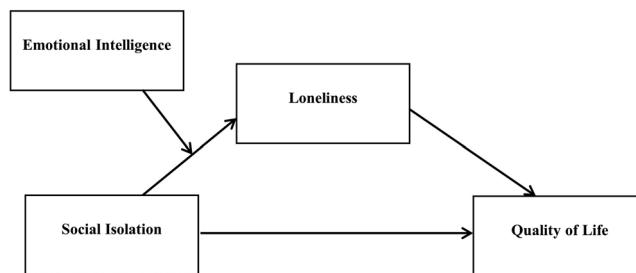


Figure 1. Conceptual model for testing.

professional satisfaction – employees who are more emotionally intelligent are less stressed and unstable than employees who struggle with emotional intelligence (Machová et al., 2020). Additionally, the use of technology, specifically digital connectivity, can have be detrimental to Gen Z's emotional intelligence (Imjai et al., 2024). This becomes incredibly important in the context of a professional workspace, where very often colleagues are connected digitally. Emotional intelligence is also seen to have an effect on organizational commitment, therefore reducing the chances of turnover (Tegegne & Wondimu, 2024). Loneliness can negatively impact organizational commitment too (Ayazlar & Güzel, 2014).

Considering the multigenerational workplace that we are in today, it is essential that organizations pay attention to employees' needs, given that emotional and social intelligence can impact employees' behaviour (Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014), especially since Gen Z is predicted to comprise approximately 27% of the workforce by 2025 (Koop, 2021), which will only increase as more and more individuals from the generation become employable. With issues such as phubbing leading to miscommunication and lack of participation (Atmaja & Alvin, 2023) and the current workplace setup that requires all employees to use laptops and smartphones, it will be challenging to guide Gen Z in the workforce, but a necessary task to take on. Overall, the purpose of the research paper is to test a causal model with variables namely, social isolation, loneliness, emotional intelligence and quality of life. First, we explored the association between social isolation and loneliness with emotional intelligence moderating that path. Second, we explored the path (direct effect) between social isolation and quality of life. Third, we performed a moderated mediation analysis, using EI as a moderating variable and loneliness as a mediating variable between social isolation and quality of life. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model used for the research.

Overview of issue/current situation

Majority of the world's population born in the last 3 decades have grown up with some form of technology – whether it was the early bulky desktop that evolved into the now sleek laptops, or the classic keyed phones that are now smartphones that only need a few swipes to book tickets to a movie. Gen Z in particular, grew up with a slightly more sophisticated level of technology than the previous generations did, and saw the most change, advancement, and adoption of these accessories. While it was largely a privilege for the older generations to have access to these technologies, today's youth have only known life with it – not having a laptop or phone is almost unfathomable. Naturally, a dependency developed – technology was integrated into every aspect of life, be it education, work, or entertainment. Today we are largely incapable of getting through any task in our personal or professional lives without the assistance of some devices.

Hypothesis

H1: Social isolation and loneliness significantly predicts the quality of life.

H2: Emotional intelligence moderates the mediating effect of loneliness between social isolation and quality of life.

H3: Emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between social isolation and quality of life.

Materials and methods

Participants and procedure

We, hereby declare that the manuscript was prepared following the protocols of the Helsinki Declaration or similar ethical statements. The research proposal was reviewed and approved by The Research Conduct and Ethics Committee (RCEC), Centre for Research CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru – 560029 with reference number CU: RCEC/173/02/24.

We approached individuals who belong to Gen Z (born between 1995 and 2012) employed in several organizations in India in multiple ways. The survey toolkit comprising all the scales used in the study was sent to everyone through electronic social media platforms such as WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and email. We used snowballing sampling to reach our respondents. Individuals who volunteered to participate in the study referred to the next level of respondents. Informed consent for participation in the study was obtained in the written format. No incentives were provided for their participation. Overall, we distributed 950 survey toolkits and received a completed data toolkit from 568 participants, which we used for our data analysis.

Measures

Quality of life

To determine quality of life, the WHOQOL-BREF (World Health Organization Quality of Life-BREF) instrument was used. We received formal permission to use this scale from the World Health Organization. The WHOQOL-BREF (The WHOQOL Group, 1998) has 26 items that measure quality of life. There are four broad categories, such as physical and psychological health, social relationships and climate, namely, 'In the last 2 weeks, to what extent do you feel that physical pain prevents you from doing what you need to do?'; 'How often do you have negative feelings such as blue mood, despair, anxiety or depression?'; 'How satisfied are you with your personal relationships?' and 'How safe do you feel in your daily life?'. A five-point Likert scale is used to rate each item. The overall total quality of life score was calculated for further statistical analysis. The scale is highly reliable, with a Cronbach alpha of 0.915.

Loneliness

We used the UCLA Loneliness Scale abbreviated as UCLALS (Russell, 1996) to assess the feelings of loneliness of the participants. It is a scale with 20 items. A few sample items, such as 'How often do you feel that you lack companionship?'; 'How often do you feel left out?'; and 'How often do you feel that your relationships with others are not meaningful?' were used in the scale. Participants score each object on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always). An overall loneliness score was calculated as the sum of all items to test the proposed model. The Cronbach's alpha level was calculated to check the reliability of the scale for the current study, which was 0.876.

Emotional intelligence

The Schutte Self-report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) (Schutte et al., 2009) was adopted to assess the emotional intelligence (EI) of the participants. EI is described as an ability to constructively identify, use and control our emotions to interact in an effective manner, reduce tension and develop empathy. It helps in resolving obstacles and diffusing conflict. The SSEIT comprises 33 items in self-report mode that emphasize emotional expression, assessment, control, and usage. Items such as 'I am aware of my emotions as I experience them'; 'By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing'; and 'I help other people feel better when they are down' are a few samples used in this scale. A 5-point Likert scale is used to rate each item. An overall EI score was computed as the sum of all items to run further tests. The Cronbach's alpha score for the present study is 0.936, which shows high internal consistency in the scale.

Social isolation scale

We used the social isolation scale from Lyngdoh et al. (2023), adapted from Choi and Noh (2020), for our study. Sample statements include 'I feel excluded from others around me', 'I have no one I can trust' and 'I do not have anyone to socialize with'. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale. The scale was found to be reliable for this study, with a Cronbach alpha of 0.894.

Data analysis

Moderated mediation analysis was conducted in SPSS using PROCESS MACRO (Model 7) provided by Hayes (2013). PROCESS was executed using one independent variable (social isolation), one mediator variable (loneliness), one moderator variable (emotional intelligence) and one dependent variable (quality of life). The number of bootstrap samples for bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals was 5,000.

Results

As a priori, we checked all the assumptions for running a moderation mediation analysis. First, the dependent variable was checked for normality of distribution. Second, the multicollinearity of the dependent variables and the linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables and their homoscedasticity were checked. Third, the outliers for all the variables were checked. Fourth, the scales used were checked for reliability. The results were within the conditions specified for running a regression, mediation and moderation analysis.

Table 1 presents the model summary of the centered variables indicating that emotional intelligence moderates the mediating effect of loneliness on social isolation and quality of life. The indirect effect of social isolation on quality of life varies as a function of emotional intelligence, which moderates the path from social isolation to loneliness.

The first part of the result contains the regression of loneliness onto emotional intelligence, social isolation and their interaction. We see that the interaction between social isolation and emotional intelligence (**Table 1** and **Figure 2**) is statistically significant ($b=-.0488$, $s.e.=.0058$, $p=.0000$), suggesting that emotional intelligence moderates the effect of social isolation on loneliness, supporting our third hypothesis framed. **Chart 1** depicts how an increase in emotional intelligence affects social isolation and loneliness.

Table 2 presents the simple slopes of the relationship between social isolation and loneliness at 3 points along with the scale of the moderator, emotional intelligence, using the conventional 'pick-a-point' approach (Hayes, 2013). At -1 SD, on emotional intelligence, the effect was positive and significant ($b=1.7627$, $s.e.=.1435$, $p=.0000$). At the mean of emotional intelligence, the effect of social isolation is positive and significant ($b=.9531$, $s.e.=.1317$, $p=.0000$), but at $+1$ SD of emotional intelligence, although social isolation is a distinctive positive predictor, the result is not statistically significant ($b=.1436$,

Table 1. Model summary, paths and coefficients, t and p values, index of moderated mediation.

Paths	Coefficients	SE	T value	P	LLCI	ULCI
SI → TL	.9035	.1333	6.7805	.0000	.6418	1.1653
EI → TL	-.0055	.0334	-.1632	.8704	-.0711	.0602
Interaction effect (SI and EI on loneliness)	-.0488	.0058	-8.4095	.0000	-.0602	-.0374
SI → TQL	-1.3438	.1358	-9.8935	.0000	-1.6105	-1.0770
TL → TQL	-.6585	.0419	-15.7261	.0000	-.7407	-.5762

Index of moderated mediation:

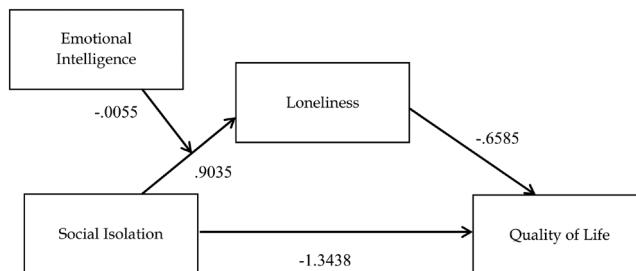
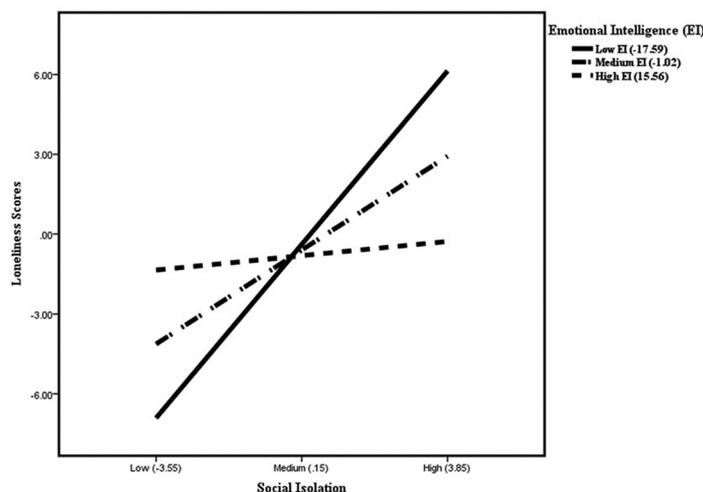
	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Emotional intelligence	.0332	.0040	.0246	.0405

Conditional indirect effects of social isolation (X) on quality of life (Y):

Indirect effect: social isolation → loneliness → quality of life

Emotional intelligence	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
-17.5901	-1.1606	.1026	-1.3691	-.9653
-1.0156	-.6276	.0958	-.8141	-.4349
15.5588	-.0946	.1290	-.3299	.1680

SI: Social isolation; TL: Total loneliness; EI: Emotional intelligence; SE: Standard error; ULCI: Upper limit of confidence interval; LLCI: Lower limit of confidence interval; TQL: Total quality of life.

**Figure 2.** Tested model with co-efficients.**Chart 1.** Change in emotional intelligence affecting loneliness at various stages of social isolation.**Table 2.** Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s).

TEI (mean centered)	Effect	se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
-1 SD level	-17.5901	1.7627	.1435	12.2815	.0000	1.4808
Mean level	-1.0156	.9531	.1317	7.2355	.0000	.6944
+1 SD level	15.5588	.1436	.1807	.7949	.4270	-.2113

s.e.=.1807, p>.001). Additionally, we can observe that the slopes become less positive as we move from low to high emotional intelligence.

The second part of the result contains the regression of quality of life onto loneliness and social isolation. We see that both social isolation and loneliness are negative and significant predictors (hypothesis 1) of quality of life (p=.0000 in both paths).

The third part of the result provides information on the conditional indirect effect (Preacher et al., 2007) reflected in the index of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2013). If the null of 0 does not fall between the lower and upper limits of the 95% confidence interval, we infer that the indirect effect is conditional on the level of emotional intelligence (moderator variable). Hence, we conclude that emotional intelligence significantly moderates the indirect effect of social isolation on quality of life.

As the fourth and final part, the conditional effects are to be probed. The conditional indirect effects of social isolation on quality of life are captured at 3 levels (-1SD, Mean, +1SD) on emotional intelligence. All three indirect effects are negative (at -1SD, IE=-1.1606, at mean, IE=-.6276, at +1SD, IE=-.0946) and significant for the first 2 levels, as the null of 0 does not fall between the lower and upper limits of the 95% confidence intervals for each effect but is not significant at the third level.

Discussion

Overall, the results indicate that emotional intelligence moderates the mediating effect of loneliness on social isolation and quality of life (hypothesis 2). First, the indirect impact of social isolation on quality

of life varies as a function of emotional intelligence, which moderates the path from social isolation to loneliness. Second, both social isolation and loneliness are significant negative predictors of quality of life. Third, emotional intelligence significantly moderated the indirect effect of social isolation on quality of life. Finally, all three indirect effects are negative. This is the first representative research work in which the moderation effect of emotional intelligence and the mediating effect of loneliness on social isolation and quality of life of the Generation Z population of India are studied (hypotheses 2 and 3).

In the current study, it was proven that social isolation and loneliness are negative and significant predictors of quality of life, which supports earlier research studies done by Sudiro et al. (2023). Although there are several measures used to study quality of life, the World Health Organization's QOL BREF focuses on four domains to measure quality of life, namely, physical health, psychological, social relationships and environment. The pain and discomfort experienced, adequacy of sleep and rest, fatigue level perceived, energy, working capacity, ease of mobility, ease of doing activities in daily life and dependency on medical aid and substances to live life are captured under physical health. The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Although this study did not target any existence of disease among Gen Z, we can observe that Gen Zs have reported that social isolation and their perception of loneliness have affected their physical health negatively. Similarly, the same argument can be placed for mental and social health.

Experiences at the early stages of life form the base characteristics for people belonging to a generation. In their lens, how the generation views the world develops their perspectives to life, priorities and values. For example, 'baby-boomers', born after the second world war grew up in an era of reforms and believe they can change the world. The silent generation grew up experiencing great depression, wars and civil rights movements, and they are perceived to be cautious and withdrawn. Likewise, when we explore Generation Z, the virtual world is equated to the real world. They spend several hours per day in their virtual, digital world, and depend on that world for everything from survival to growth. Generation Z is highly connected virtually but socially disconnected. They believe that all the needs, including developing and nurturing social relationships, one of the basic needs as social animals can also be done through the virtual world, and their socialization occurs primarily in the digital world. This pushes them deeper into social isolation than any other generation. People experiencing social isolation have a 32% higher risk of early death and affect their overall quality of life, as visible from the current research findings. Because Gen Z is identified with the virtual and digital world and is so dependent on it for socialization, their greatest fear is disconnection, and studies indicate that this extreme relationship with technology can have negative effects on their levels of happiness and contentment.

In the words of Dickens et al. (2011) loneliness refers to the perception of lack of closeness, affection, and social connection. It is an unpleasant emotion experienced when individuals want human contact but feel the absence of it. Individuals can have several contacts but still feel lonely. To the question asked in the survey, 'have you experienced loneliness at some point in your life?', almost all the Gen Zs have responded affirmatively. Self-induced social isolation, considering virtual lifestyle to be the only lifestyle preferred when imposed on human beings who are social animals, makes them feel restricted and suffocated. It releases an amount of stress, when not handled properly, affecting our quality of life.

In several research studies performed earlier, loneliness is considered to be an emerging, rapidly growing epidemic affecting Gen Zs (Altschul et al., 2021; Bhat et al., 2024; Bowler, 2020; Coombs, 2020; Hathaway & O'Shields, 2022) which influences their quality of life. The current research findings emphasize strongly the extant research studies. If one generation itself experiences a particular problem, then it is no longer an individual's issue, but it is a public health issue. As Generation Z grows up with loneliness, it will influence them as societal members and affect various roles they would play in their life. For example, it will affect how they groom the next generation, as parents and responsible societal members. A society will experience several negative consequences when societal members suffer from loneliness. They cannot be responsible societal members anymore, and their responsibility of fostering and guiding the next generations may not be possible.

Several extant research studies confirm that loneliness was triggered further after the COVID-19 pandemic started. Normal routine life was affected, and most of the Gen Zs started working from home and depended only on technology to fuel their emotional lives. Overall, human life during and after the

pandemic and lockdown challenged many of our routine practices. On the one hand, the fear of becoming sick, seeing others becoming sick and hearing much death news from the media triggered many negative emotions. Another side, a self-created prison, isolating oneself from others deprives us from our emotional and relationship needs. Every human establishes a personal space and enjoys that. It got disrupted. Home space sharing was disrupted. The personal space was disrupted. A balance between 'my time' and time for relationship was disrupted. For some, they get motivation by observing others. In the pandemic, Gen Z did not get that opportunity. Loneliness, when not handled properly, generates negative emotions. Individuals with low emotional intelligence are susceptible to experiencing loneliness when their social isolation score increases. Individuals who are emotionally intelligent can regulate and manage negative emotions. When we cannot avoid loneliness, at least we should have a remedial measure to manage the consequences of that. To combat loneliness among Gen Z employees specifically, managers and organizations can create a culture that fosters collaboration (Zhou et al., 2024). Mentorship can also be introduced to encourage employees across all generations to interact (Saxena, 2024).

Loneliness cannot be objectively defined. It is a feeling that is not welcomed and often manifests in one feeling as a lack of emotional attachment with others or a loss of companionship. Many studies have focused their interest on understanding the individual characteristics that predispose people to loneliness. They conclude loneliness doesn't spare anyone and it's just a matter of conditions inducing them. The cognitive approach to loneliness is characterized by a vivid distinction between perception and attribution. It takes into account the behavioural and attachment paradigm that leads to discrepancies in perceived relationships. It perpetuates further due to self-fulfilling prophecy, wherein poor social skills lead to personal relationships becoming unsatisfactory and negative self-attribution. We generally tend to have negative emotions when we are socially disconnected, as put forth by Wols et al. However, evidence suggests that poor emotion regulation skills increase loneliness. Cacioppo and Patrick assert that overcoming loneliness successfully mandates that people not only perceive but also manage negative feelings associated with loneliness effectively. Emotional intelligence helps us to understand our own emotions, become aware when it is triggered and regulate them. We are involved in self-motivation and develop resilience at times of negative emotion experience. Therefore, when we are habitually involved in social isolation, our emotional intelligence calms us down and helps us handle our negative emotions effectively, thereby helping us to handle loneliness as an emotion and regulate them. The results typically indicate that emotional intelligence moderates the mediating path of social isolation and loneliness, thereby influencing perceived quality of life. Employees with higher emotional intelligence are also seen to produce and execute more creativity and innovation in the workplace (Hadi et al., 2024; Yousaf et al., 2024) This can be increased by collaboration and interpersonal skills, and managers who can identify and understand emotions can improve overall motivation (Afolahade et al., 2024). Organizations can introduce training programs to improve emotional intelligence and awareness across all levels – this will lead to more open communication and an environment where employees feel comfortable being honest. Dialogue between employees will lead to more interactions which will in turns reduce loneliness and feelings of isolation, and also give employees a sense of belonging, thereby increasing loyalty.

Conclusion

Overall, the current study indicates that three variables, namely, social isolation, loneliness and emotional intelligence, have a significant effect on quality of life. Emotional intelligence influences the loneliness experience of the respondents and helps them manage loneliness, thereby enhancing their quality of life and making them better individuals and responsible societal members. Generation Z individuals shall give top priority to develop their knowledge about emotional intelligence, grooming themselves in understanding their own emotions, connecting with their peers emotionally and reciprocate the right kind of emotions in their workplace, to engage better with others. The result of the current study implies that organizations should constantly invest in emotional intelligence workshops, development programs and equip Gen Z employees with several interventions to mitigate their loneliness issues. Organizations need to devise special programs exclusively for Gen Z employees, to support them combating their loneliness issues and upskill in making them emotionally more intelligent. The paper has a few limitations, and we propose future researchers with new research directions. First, the paper focused on a

cause–effect research design where we developed a conceptual model and tested it. We could have followed up with an experimental research design to further check our conceptual model. Future researchers can conduct an experimental study providing emotional intelligence workshops for one group of Gen Zs as an intervention against a control group and check the results. Second, researchers can conduct an experimental study among two groups of Gen Zs, one group having high emotional intelligence and another group having low emotional intelligence and compare how emotional intelligence influences loneliness. Third, future researchers can study how emotional intelligence moderates the mediating effect of loneliness on physical health, mental health and social health separately. Our study focused on the overall quality of life and not specifically each of the health dimensions. Fourth, our study did not cover the qualitative aspects of the living experiences of Gen Z with perceived loneliness. Researchers in the future can focus on conducting a qualitative study exploring the living experience to gain insights into all the micro-factors affecting Generation Z so that organizations and other generations can support and help them in their journey of managing loneliness.

Authors' contributions

All authors to this research paper agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work and the following are the details connected to the contribution made by each author for this research paper [Sumathi Annamalai – SA; Aditi Vasunandan – AV; Avishi Mehta – AM]. Conception discussion – SA, AV, AM; design – SA. Analysis and interpretation of the data – SA and AV. Drafting, reviewing and revising of the paper – AV and AM. Revising it critically for intellectual content – SA. Final approval of the version to be published – SA, AV and AM.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The study was conducted as per the institutional guidelines and informed consent for participating in the survey was received before the respondents answered the questionnaire.

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Data availability statement

The dataset generated during the current study will be available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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