

# Shun Facebook to kill loneliness before it totally eliminates you

New Delhi

If you think that no other age group is more vulnerable to loneliness than the elderly, go check your backyard. The mammoth rise of the internet and emergence of various social media platforms have left many young Indians - some as young as 14 - socially isolated, lonely and, eventually, in the grip of chronic depression that can take their lives.

Not just leading to suicidal tendencies, the feeling of being lonely can make you sick, very sick if not addressed clinically and socially well in time. According to Dr. Samir Parikh, director, (mental health and behavioural sciences) at Fortis Healthcare in the capital, loneliness can be a trigger to self-suicidal ideation in young people. It can also affect their overall well-being.

"Loneliness can affect you physically and psychologically - draining people and leaving a huge vacuum in their life, thus putting



them at suicide risk," Parikh told IANS.

Although in some cases, forming communities and groups on social media can be helpful but the social media can never be a substitute for the real human experience, he added. "Total social isolation in young people can lead to depression, increases chances of Alzheimer's later in life and chances of death by suicide or increased physical ailments," Dr. Madhuri Singh, a leading psychiatrist from Nanavati Super Specialty Hospital in Mum-

bai, said.

In the virtual world, such lonely souls will, in fact, drift further away from the real interaction which is a must for the healthy functioning of mind and body, she added. The rise in internet and smartphone addiction among children is fast becoming a worrying trend for Indian parents.

"I recently came across 14-year-old Tanay who was admitted to the psychiatric ward at the hospital as he could not switch off his mobile and was addicted to the social media. He was

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treated for screen de-addiction or else he could have suffered a serious mental disorder," Dr. Sandeep Govil, consultant (mental health and behavioural sciences) at Saroj Super Speciality Hospital in New Delhi, noted.

According to a global research, loneliness leads to fight-or-flight stress that can ultimately affect the production of white blood cells. Essentially, lonely people had a less effective immune response and more inflammation than non-lonely people, a team from the University of Chicago and the University of California-Los Angeles found.

"The 'danger signals' activated in the brain by loneliness ultimately affect the production of white blood cells. The resulting shift may both propagate loneliness and contribute to its associated health risks," the researchers noted in a paper published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.