

**Where Are They Now? Exploring Mental Health, Loneliness, and Self-distraction Avoidant Coping
in Young Adults**

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Abstract

Young adulthood is a critical period of development in an individual's life when they are particularly vulnerable to experience psychological distress. In the past decade, young adults have experienced a steady decline in mental health and increasing levels of loneliness, both of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In an effort to cope with the added stresses of the pandemic, young adults typically resorted to the use of avoidant coping strategies. Although avoidant coping has often been considered maladaptive, several studies have suggested that it may be adaptive in certain circumstances, such as when the stressor is uncontrollable, as with the pandemic. Notably, it may be particular facets of avoidant coping, for instance self-distraction, which are adaptive in stress reduction, though facets of avoidant coping are rarely studied individually. Therefore, the current study examined the relationship between young adults' mental health, loneliness, and self-distraction avoidant coping in addition to predictors of loneliness. An anonymized, online self-report survey was completed by participants aged 18-35 in rural Canada. Their use of self-distraction avoidant coping strategies were assessed using the Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory's Mental Disengagement subscale along with two additional items; their loneliness was assessed using the 6-item De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale; and their current mental health was assessed using the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales (DASS-21). According to the results, participants displayed moderate levels of psychological distress ($M = 45.7$, $SD = 23.4$) and loneliness ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.70$). Significant differences were observed between those with poor and good mental health as well as those who are lonely and not lonely in that those with poor mental health or higher levels of loneliness reported greater use of self-distraction avoidant coping strategies. A regression analysis was used to examine the effects of mental health and self-distraction avoidant coping on loneliness and

found that although greater use of self-distraction avoidant coping was predictive of higher loneliness levels, mental health was a stronger predictor. As a result of these contributions, this study was able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between young adults' mental health, loneliness, and self-distraction avoidant coping strategies, as well as provide important insights for planning effective supports for young adults.