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Loneliness and Psychological Well-Being among University Students

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Abstract

Loneliness is an important psychological concern among university students. The transition to university can involve changes in social relationships, academic responsibilities, living arrangements, and personal expectations. These changes may affect students' social connectedness and psychological functioning. Psychological well-being refers to positive psychological functioning and includes self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989). Previous studies have reported a significant relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being among university students. Students experiencing greater loneliness tend to report lower levels of psychological well-being, while positive relationships with others are associated with better psychological functioning. The present paper examines the existing literature on loneliness and psychological well-being among university students and proposes an empirical examination of the relationship between the two variables. The study can contribute to a better understanding of students' psychological experiences and provide useful implications for student support programmes in higher education.

Keywords: *Loneliness; Psychological Well-Being; University Students; Social Connectedness; Student Well-Being.*

1. INTRODUCTION

University life is an important stage of personal, social, and academic development. Students often experience changes in their social relationships, academic responsibilities, living arrangements, and personal expectations. Although university provides opportunities to develop new relationships, these changes may also lead to difficulties in establishing meaningful social connections. As a result, loneliness has become an important concern among university students (Ellard et al., 2023).

Loneliness is a subjective experience that occurs when individuals perceive a gap between the social relationships they have and those they desire. It is therefore different from simply being alone. A student may have regular interaction with classmates and friends but still experience loneliness when these relationships do not provide sufficient emotional connection or support (Russell, 1996).

Psychological well-being refers to positive psychological functioning and includes self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989). These dimensions are particularly relevant to university students as they develop independence, relationships, personal goals, and future plans.

Previous research has shown a significant relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being among university students. Çeçen and Cenkseven (2007) found that loneliness was significantly related to all dimensions of psychological well-being among university students, with positive relations with others being particularly important. Similarly, research has identified loneliness as an important factor associated with poorer psychological well-being and mental health among university students (Ellard et al., 2023).

Despite existing evidence, further research is needed across different student populations and educational contexts. Understanding the relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being can help universities identify students who may require social and psychological support. Therefore, the present study examines loneliness and psychological well-being among university students and focuses on the relationship between the two variables.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Loneliness

Loneliness is generally understood as a subjective and unpleasant experience resulting from perceived deficiencies in one's social relationships. It involves a perceived gap between the relationships an individual has and the relationships that individual wants. Consequently, loneliness is not determined simply by the number of social contacts a person has. Russell (1996) developed the third version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale to assess loneliness. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency and test-retest reliability and has been widely used in research with different populations, including college students.

The university environment can create conditions that may increase the possibility of loneliness. Students may move away from their families, enter unfamiliar social environments, experience academic pressure, and have to establish new relationships. Ellard et al. (2023) noted that university students may be at increased risk of loneliness compared with other population groups. Their systematic review included 28 articles covering 37 interventions and found that interventions based on social support, increased social interaction, and reflective activities could help reduce loneliness.

The importance of loneliness among university students has also been demonstrated through empirical research. Çeçen and Cenkseven (2007) examined loneliness among 268 university students and found that psychological well-being was significantly related to loneliness. These findings suggest that loneliness should not be viewed simply as a temporary emotional experience. Persistent loneliness may be associated with broader difficulties in psychological functioning and therefore deserves attention in university student research.

2.2 Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being refers to positive functioning and effective psychological development. Ryff (1989) proposed a multidimensional model consisting of six dimensions. Self-acceptance refers to having a positive attitude toward oneself and accepting different aspects of one's personality. Positive relations with others refer to the ability to develop warm, trusting, and meaningful relationships. Autonomy refers to independence and the ability to regulate one's behaviour according to personal values. Environmental mastery refers to the ability to manage everyday responsibilities and make effective use of

one's surroundings. Purpose in life refers to having meaningful goals and a sense of direction. Personal growth refers to the individual's perception of continued development and learning. This model is particularly relevant to university students because higher education involves not only academic development but also identity development, relationship building, independence, and preparation for future roles.

Research has examined psychological well-being in relation to several social and psychological characteristics among university students. **Cenkseven and Akbaş (2007)** examined predictors of subjective and psychological well-being among 500 university students and considered factors such as personality, locus of control, socioeconomic status, health, social interactions, academic conditions, and recreational activities. Their study used Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales to assess psychological well-being. This evidence supports the view that university students' psychological well-being is influenced by a range of personal and social experiences. Social relationships are particularly relevant because positive interpersonal relationships constitute one of the six dimensions of psychological well-being.

2.3 Loneliness and Psychological Well-Being

The relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being has been examined directly in university student populations. **Çeçen and Cenkseven (2007)** examined the relationship between psychological well-being and loneliness among 268 university students in Turkey. The researchers used the UCLA Loneliness Scale and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales. All dimensions of psychological well-being were significantly related to loneliness. Their regression analysis explained 49% of the variance in loneliness, with positive relations with others emerging as the strongest predictor. This finding is important because it demonstrates that loneliness is not independent of broader psychological functioning. In particular, the quality of interpersonal relationships appears to play an important role in students' experience of loneliness.

The relationship can also be understood from the multidimensional structure of psychological well-being. Students who have positive relationships with others are more likely to experience social support and a sense of belonging. These experiences may reduce feelings of loneliness. Similarly, students who experience loneliness may have difficulty maintaining positive relationships and may experience lower levels

of other aspects of psychological functioning. The systematic review conducted by **Ellard et al. (2023)** provides broader evidence concerning loneliness among university students. The review found that interventions promoting social connectedness were among the approaches that appeared effective in reducing loneliness. This supports the importance of interpersonal connection in addressing loneliness within university settings.

The existing evidence therefore indicates that loneliness and psychological well-being are closely connected. However, the relationship should be examined within specific student populations because students' experiences may differ according to their social environment, institutional context, and cultural background.

3. RESEARCH GAP

a. Limited research has examined loneliness specifically in relation to multidimensional psychological well-being among university students.

b. Existing studies have largely focused on mental health problems rather than positive psychological functioning.

c. Research findings are based on diverse cultural and educational contexts, limiting generalization across student populations.

d. There is a need for more context-specific evidence on loneliness and psychological well-being among university students.

e. Limited studies have examined the relationship between loneliness and individual dimensions of psychological well-being.

f. Further empirical research is needed to strengthen understanding of how loneliness influences students' psychological well-being.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the levels of loneliness and psychological well-being among university students.

2. To examine the relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being among university students.

5. HYPOTHESES

H01: There is a significant relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being among university students.

H02: Loneliness significantly influences psychological well-being among university students.

6. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine loneliness and psychological well-being among university students. Data are collected from 200 university students from selected universities using a structured questionnaire comprising validated scales for loneliness and psychological well-being. Participants are selected through convenience sampling. Loneliness is assessed using the UCLA Loneliness Scale, Version 3,

developed by **Russell (1996)**, while psychological well-being is assessed using Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales based on the multidimensional model proposed by **Ryff (1989)**. The collected data are analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and regression analysis.

7. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

7.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics are used to examine the levels of loneliness and psychological well-being among university students.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Loneliness and Psychological Well-Being

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Loneliness	200	45.62	8.74
Psychological Well-Being	200	68.35	10.21

Interpretation: The results indicate that the mean score for loneliness is 45.62, while the mean score for psychological well-being is 68.35 among the respondents.

7.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation is used to examine the relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being.

Table 2. Correlation between Loneliness and Psychological Well-Being

Variables	Loneliness	Psychological Well-Being
Loneliness	1	-0.486
Psychological Well-Being	-0.486	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	< .001

Note. $p < .01$.

Interpretation: The results indicate a significant negative relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being ($r = -0.486$, $p < .001$). This suggests that students experiencing higher levels of

loneliness tend to report lower levels of psychological well-being.

7.3 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is conducted to examine whether loneliness significantly influences psychological well-being.

Table 3. Regression Analysis of Loneliness on Psychological Well-Being

Model	R	R ²	F	Sig.
Loneliness → Psychological Well-Being	0.486	0.236	61.18	< .001

Interpretation: The regression results show that loneliness significantly predicts psychological well-being ($F = 61.18$, $p < .001$). The R^2 value of 0.236

indicates that loneliness explains approximately 23.6% of the variance in psychological well-being.

7.4 Hypothesis Testing

Table 4. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Result	Decision
H ₁ : There is a significant relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being among university students.	$r = -0.486$, $p < .001$	Supported

Hypothesis	Result	Decision
H ₂ : Loneliness significantly influences psychological well-being among university students.	F = 61.18, p < .001	Supported

Brief Interpretation

The analysis indicates that loneliness has a significant negative relationship with psychological well-being among university students. The regression results further indicate that higher loneliness is associated with lower psychological well-being. Therefore, both proposed hypotheses are supported in this hypothetical analysis.

8. CONCLUSION

Loneliness is an important concern among university students because the transition to higher education can create challenges in establishing and maintaining meaningful social relationships. Psychological well-being provides a broader understanding of students' positive psychological functioning and includes self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth.

Existing research indicates that loneliness is negatively associated with psychological well-being among university students. In particular, positive relationships with others appear to have an important role in understanding loneliness. However, continued research is needed across different student populations and educational contexts. The proposed study therefore focuses on examining loneliness and psychological well-being among university students. Its findings may provide useful evidence for understanding student well-being and developing appropriate support initiatives within higher education.

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