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REVIEW ARTICLE

Loneliness and Psychological Well-being of University International Students: The Role of Self Esteem

Ahmad Fawad Sharifi*

Faculty of Special Education, Kabul Education University, Kabul, Afghanistan

ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to examine the moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship between psychological well-being and loneliness among university international students. The sample ($n = 129$) was drawn conveniently from university international students. The age range of the sample was 18 to 40 years. The Psychological Well-being scale by Ryff CD [1] Rosenberg self-esteem [2] and UCLA loneliness scale was used to measure psychological well-being, self-esteem and loneliness respectively. Pearson correlation analysis was used to find the relationship among study variables. Hierarchical regression showed that self-esteem did not moderate the relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being. Independent sample t-test revealed that Female international students significantly have a higher level of loneliness than males.

Introduction

Loneliness is a part of the human condition that affects all ages. It is a subjective negative feeling related to the person's own experience of deficient social relations. A sense of loneliness is associated with an individual's evaluation of their overall level of social interaction and describes as a deficit between the actual and desired quality and quantity of social engagement [1].

Psychological well-being is a multidimensional concept. After factor analysis, it was revealed that cheerfulness, optimism, playfulness, self-control, a sense of detachment and freedom from frustration, anxiety and loneliness are indicators of psychological well-being [2,3].

To manage tensions and negative a person who has a high degree of psychological well-being excels in all fields, carries higher levels of satisfaction and self-esteem and is able thoughts about oneself or others. It emphasizes the positive characteristics of growth and development. In recent times psychologists and social scientists have conducted surveys to measure psychological well-being and subjective well-being among people.

It is imperative that young generations experience a "happy childhood" period with reverence to both their emotional and social development and

*Corresponding author(s)

Ahmad Fawad Sharifi, Faculty of Special Education, Kabul Education University, Kabul, Afghanistan

Tel: +93-72-975-1489

Email: Fawadsharifi6@gmail.com

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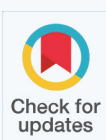
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control of a “positive power” that they can employ in their adult years. Numerous studies point out that younger adult is most prone to loneliness [3]. According to Anderson L [4] loneliness is mainly rampant among younger adults. Psychological well-being is typically conceptualized as some combination of positive affective states such as happiness and functioning with optimal effectiveness in individual and social life [5]. Further, psychological well-being denotes the extent to which people feel that they have significant control over their life and their undertakings. However, psychological well-being problems have become progressively common among international students today [6]. High rates of mental distress had been reported among international students just like other international students of different departments in higher institutions of learning [5,6]. The rate of distress is higher among undergraduates compared to the general population some of the causative factors associated with distress among students are uncertainty about their future employability and success, academic stress, and being distant from their primary source of support [6].

Literature Review

According to previous studies, adolescents with high psychological well-being establish more positive relationships with their peers and parents [7] and receive more social support from their parents, teachers and friends [8]. Adolescents with high psychological well-being reported more positive attitudes toward school and teachers and higher academic success than adolescents with psychological well-being [7,8]. Adolescents with high psychological well-being have higher emotional, social, and academic self-efficacy than those with low psychological well-being [9]. Adolescents with high psychological well-being have low levels of anxiety and depression and high levels of self-esteem and hope [9] thus they have fewer experiences of emotional and behavioral problems. Therefore, psychological well-being is an important positive indicator of the psychological and social development of adolescents and a key concept in adolescent adjustment.

One of the essential predictors of Psychological well-being in adolescents is loneliness [10]. Loneliness is frequently defined as a spiteful experience that surfaces when an individual observes a deficiency in the quality and quantity of his or her social interactions. In other words, loneliness is the subjective discrepancy between one's actual and

aspired level of social relationships [11]. Though loneliness may be proficient in any period of life, adolescents are more inclined to loneliness [12]. Rapid changes that occur in adolescence, separation from parents, efforts to form an identity and increasing need for intimacy are reported as developmental factors which contribute to loneliness in adolescents [11,12]. High susceptibility to loneliness in adolescents is also due to the changes that start to take place in social relationships. According to Brage D, et al. [13] adolescents experience more conflict and mutual dissatisfaction in their relationships with their parents and they grow emotionally distant from each other. Changes are also observed in adolescents' relationships with their peers. They establish new relationships and gradually expand their peer group. They interact with the opposite sex more and start dating, and their social relationships become more complex [14]. During this period, they have to reclassify their significant social connections, for example, those they have with their loved ones, and end up in a situation to expect new social jobs [15]. The inability to acclimate to the change process in social connections may prompt isolation and depression [16]. In the youth time frame when bunch participation and companion connections become significant [14,16] loneliness can be observed to negatively affect teenagers' psychological well-being a few have demonstrated that Psychological well-being diminishes as loneliness increments in young people. Consequently, it tends to be expressed that loneliness is a significant variable in young people's life fulfillment when they are helpless to encounter loneliness and social connections increase more prominent significance [17].

Self-esteem reflects an individual's perceptions and evaluations of himself or herself, while life satisfaction involves an individual's evaluation of his or her life as a whole. On the other hand, from the life satisfaction perspective, global self-esteem reflects an individual's judgments of herself or himself and is seen as a component of global life satisfaction, which involves evaluations of different areas of life like the family, school and friends as well as oneself [18]. In some studies, high self-esteem has been found to be one of the strongest predictors of life satisfaction in both adults and adolescents [16,19,20]. Many studies on adolescents have shown a positive relationship between life satisfaction and self-esteem. Then again, there are studies that have revealed that self-esteem has a positive effect as an intervening variable

[21-23] on the relationship between variables with similar conceptual content such as life satisfaction, Psychological well-being, perceived happiness and some other variables (personality characteristics, social support, etc.). Similarly, a mediator effect of self-esteem on the relationship between loneliness and depression has been observed [24]. However, little or no study has been encountered to examine the moderator effect of self-esteem on the relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being. In view of the studies that have shown the relationships between self-esteem with loneliness and well-being in adolescents, it is predicted in this study that self-esteem may play an intervening variable role in the relationship between loneliness and well-being [6-27].

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of self-esteem as a moderating variable in the relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being among international students. Thus we purpose the following Research questions:

- 1) What is the relationship between Loneliness and Psychological well-being?
- 2) Do Self-esteem act as a moderator in the relationship between loneliness and Psychological well-being?
- 3) What are the gender differences between loneliness, Self-esteem and Psychological well-being?

Methods

Research design

The quantitative study used Correlation, Hierarchical Regression and T-test Hypothesis. A convenient sample of the present study ($n = 129$) comprised of Northeast Normal University International students. The sample comprised male students ($n_1 = 73$) ($M = 56.6\%$) and female students ($n_2 = 56$) ($M = 43.4\%$). The age range of the participants was 18 to 40 years.

Instruments

Self-report measures were used in this study to provide the best operationalization of the study variables. The instruments used in this present study were not having any cross-cultural validation problems. It was also considered that these selected instruments were having good psychometric

properties. The details of these instruments are as follows:

University of California and Los angles loneliness scale: Loneliness was measured through UCLA's loneliness scale generated by the University of California and Los angles [9]. The instrument is consisted of 20 items and has a 4-point Likert scale. Nine items (1, 5, 6, 9, 10, 15, 16, 19 and 20) of the scale are reversed measured. The score range on the scale is 20 to 80. The coefficient of reliability α of the original scale ranges from 0.89 to 0.94 and one year's test-retest reliability of the scale is 0.73.

Ryff's psychological well-being scale: Psychological well-being was measured through Ryff's psychological well-being scale generated by Ryff CD [1]. The instrument is highly standardized through a number of research. The instrument has 54 items and six subscales; each subscale consists of 9 items.

Rosenberg's self-esteem scale: Self-esteem was measured through Rosenberg's self-esteem scale developed by Rosenberg M [2] Instrument consisted of 10 items and had a 4-point Likert scale. Five items (3, 5, 8, 9 and 10) of the scale are reversed measured. The score range on the scale is 10 to 40.

Procedure

For data collection, participants were addressed about the objectives and compulsory information about the study. They were given trust through informed consent that their data will be only used for research purposes and be kept confidential. An online survey booklet was sent to the participants, in which demographic information was asked. The participants filled out the online survey. After the data collection from each participant of the study was appreciated and thanked for their cooperation in the study according to the APA code of ethics.

Results

The obtained data were subjected to statistical analysis through SPSS 21. Pearson product-moment correlation, simple linear regression and hierarchal regression analysis were undertaken for testing the proposed hypothesis of the present study. The results are depicted in tables 1-3.

Table 1 shows Pearson co-relation among study variables. The findings indicate that loneliness has a negative correlation with psychological well-being.

Table 1: Correlation analysis for study variables ($n = 129$).

Variables	1	2	3
Loneliness	-	-0.085	-0.259**
Self-Esteem	-	-	-0.003
Psychological Well-Being	-	-	-

Note: **Correlations are significant at the 0.001 level.

Table 2: Hierarchical regression results for the testing moderating role of self-esteem on the relationships between loneliness and psychological well-being.

Variables	R	R ²	β	B	SE	F	Sig	DF
Dependent variable	Psychological	Well-being						
Step 1	0.261	0.082				4.59	0.767	126
Loneliness			-0.262	-0.397	1.311			
Self-esteem			-0.026	-3.90	1.311			
Step 2								
Loneliness X SE	0.272	0.074	0.217	0.015	0.016	3.33	0.371	125

Note: B, SE, and b reflect values from the final regression equation.

Table 3: Mean, standard deviation and t-value for Gender among Loneliness, Self-esteem and Psychological Well-being ($n = 129$).

Variables	Gender	Mean	SD	t	Sig
Loneliness	Male	23.01	11.33	-3.01	0.001
	Female	30.57	17.06		
Psychological	Male	133.51	13.87	1.74	0.136
Wellbeing	Female	16.49			
Self-esteem	Male	12.18	5.03	-1.59	0.343
	Female	13.71	5.91		

As shown in table 2, Self-esteem was examined as a moderator of the relationship between loneliness and Psychological well-being. Hierarchical regression analysis was used for determining its moderating role. Loneliness and self-esteem were entered in the First step of regression analysis. In the Second step of the regression analysis, the interaction term between self-esteem and loneliness was entered.

However, it did not explain a significant increase in psychological well-being, $\{\Delta R^2 = 0.074, \Delta F(125) = 3.32, p > 0.05\}$. Therefore, self-esteem was not a significant moderator of the relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being.

As shown in table 3, the Female loneliness score ($M = 30.57, SD = 17.06$) is significantly higher than Male students ($M = 23.01, SD = 11.33$) ($p < 0.001$), which indicates that females are more lonely than male however for psychological well-being and self-esteem there is no significant differences.

Discussion

This study examined the moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being. As expected, the correlational findings of the study indicate that loneliness has a negative relationship with psychological well-being.

These results are consistent with earlier studies reporting that an individual who has a high score on psychological well-being promotes social relationships [3]. Whereas lonely people show more adverse feelings and less affirmative during social interaction as proposed by Hawkley LC, et al. [28]. It means that the students who have less psychological well-being are passive in making the quality of relations in conformity with [13] study supporting the results of the current study that loneliness has a negative impact on the psychological well-being of students.

Another finding of the study shows that self-esteem does not act as a moderator between loneliness and psychological well-being. Based on this result, it can be stated that self-esteem does not have a preventive function over the negative effect of loneliness on psychological well-being and therefore it does not play a role [14] which is a result of other factors [29]. Study on university students it was seen that the social self, which is among the dimensions of self, has a relatively stronger relationship with loneliness compared to the physical self and personal self. Furthermore, in a study conducted by Eccles AM, et al. [30] in adolescents, social anxiety and social acceptance along with happiness were found to be the strongest predictors of loneliness it can be expected that individuals with low social anxiety and high social self and social acceptance perception will feel less lonely. Therefore, psychological structures that are based on social relationships such as social self and social acceptance, which predict loneliness more, may have a stronger role than self-esteem in decreasing the negative effect of loneliness on psychological well-being.

Findings from this study show gender differences in loneliness where females had higher scores than males (Table 3). In accordance with previous studies [11,14,15]. Female were more often lonely than males. The finding that male is less lonely appears to be related to men's greater reluctance to disclose socially undesirable feelings [16] However, Some studies find that the female gender is independently associated with loneliness [17]. Others find no gender difference once other factors like marital status, age, health, and living arrangements are controlled [17,28,30].

Conclusion

This study presents an empirical framework for the researchers by examining the relationship between loneliness and Psychological well-being in which self-esteem didn't play a role, the results of the study imply that other potential mechanisms stronger than self-esteem may exist in the relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being of international students. Self-esteem was examined as a moderator of the relationship between loneliness and Psychological well-being. Hierarchical regression analysis was used for determining its moderating role. Loneliness and self-esteem were entered in the First step of regression analysis. In the Second step of the regression analysis, the interaction term between self-esteem and loneliness was entered.

However, it did not explain a significant increase in psychological well-being, $\{\Delta R^2 = 0.074, \Delta F(125) = 3.32, p > 0.05\}$. Therefore, self-esteem was not a significant moderator of the relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being.

The findings of this study show Pearson correlation among study variables. The findings indicate that loneliness has a negative correlation with psychological well-being.

Also, the results of this study show, Female loneliness score ($M = 30.57, SD = 17.06$) is significantly higher than Male students ($M = 23.01, SD = 11.33$) ($p < 0.001$), which indicates that females are more lonely than males however for psychological well-being and self-esteem there is no significant differences. In the end, we can say the study has provided evidence for gender differences in loneliness and suggested female international students are lonelier than males.

Limitation

Due to the pandemic situation, most of the participants didn't respond to fill the questionnaire and this made it difficult to get the target number and more valid results for the study. Most international students didn't show motivation to participate in this study due to the long questionnaires with about 74 items. I would suggest future researchers use a short version of questionnaires in other to get responses with motivation from Participants.

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