

Examining the predictability of loneliness levels of college students with various variables

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Abstract

Social support is a basic need for a young person. Social relations are of great importance to maintain psychological well-being and social relations at a satisfying level, to stop feeling lonely and adapt oneself to society. This study was planned and conducted within a descriptive framework in order to examine the factors related to the social loneliness levels perceived by the students of Vocational School of Health Services, Faculty of Health Sciences and Faculty of Education at Biruni University. Method: a total of 218 students from Vocational School of Health Services, Faculty of Health Sciences and Faculty of Education at Biruni University who agreed to participate in the research were included with a participation rate of 83 percent. Data was collected with socio-demographic information form and 20-question UCLA Loneliness Scale at the beginning of 2014-2015 academic year. Written and oral permissions were taken from the related institutions and the students before the study was conducted. Independent t test correlation, variance analyses and descriptive statistics were utilized for data analysis with SPSS 20.0 package. This study is a descriptive one and general screening method was used.

Keywords: Social support, medical school students, loneliness.

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1. Introduction

Loneliness is the perception that social relationships do not go right as expected (Karaoglu et al, 2009). It is universal and it is the result of a sense of belonging. Not having strong communications and interactions in a social circle affects the individuals in various ways, which often causes individuals to feel lonely. According to Bulus (1997), loneliness is a common phenomenon in society that triggers depression and personality disorders.

Anyone can make an individual definition of the loneliness they suffered during a certain period in their lives regardless of ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, gender or age. However, loneliness is a subjective phenomenon by nature which can be judged based on the expectations and satisfaction of both sides. A person may not feel lonely when alone while it is possible to see oneself lonely among the crowds (Qualter & Munn, 2002). On the other hand, loneliness is a problem related to the quality of the relationships, it is not the quantitative side. Weiss (1973) defines loneliness as a feeling that is a result of lack of intimacy, rapport and sharing in social relationships (as cited in Ilhan, 2012).

Loneliness is expressed as an unpleasant and undesirable experience accompanied with anxiety, anger, sadness and alienation in literature (Russell et al., 1980) and contrary to what is believed, it is more common among teenagers and young adults than old ages. The research showed that (as cited in Durualp & Cicekoglu, 2013) loneliness is positively correlated with a number of psychological disorders, such as poor sense of self (Olmstead et al., 1991), social incompetence (DiTomasso, 1997), depression (Anderson & Harvey, 1988), alcohol dependence (Sadava & Pak, 1994), obesity (Schumaker et al., 1985) and suicide (Weber et al., 1997) and located in a wide range of psychological problems such as suicide of a team that is associated with reveals.

Individuals might feel lonely if they are not able to find other individuals or mature enough to form the social relations when they need the support of a social group in which they feel safe and intimate (Erozkan, 2009). One of the most interesting points in literature is that most of the research done focused on the explanation of loneliness as a phenomenon. Therefore, the number of studies that examines how the individuals cope with loneliness falls short of the number of studies explaining loneliness (Duy, 2003).

Human beings are social creatures by nature. For that reason, our existence depends on interpersonal relations, understanding and socialization. Loneliness might bring critical and vital changes to people's lives. Thus, the variables that affect loneliness should be well understood. In this study, variables that might influence loneliness include, age, gender, being employed/unemployed, the current residence, the place where an individual stays most, and family income.

2. Materials and Method

2.1. Problem Statement

Do the total UCLA-LS-Loneliness scale scores and the total UCLA-LS-Loneliness scale scores of the freshmen at Biruni University Faculty of Health Sciences, Faculty of Education and Vocational School of Health Services differ by age, gender, being employed/unemployed, current residence, the place where the students spent most of their lives, and family income?

2.2. Method

This is a cross-sectional and descriptive study whose participants were freshmen from different faculties at Biruni University Topkapı Campus during 2014 Fall and 2015 Spring.

2.3. Study Group

A total of 218 freshmen studying at Biruni University Faculty of Health Sciences, Faculty of Education and Vocational School of Health Services make up the population of this study.

2.4. Data Collection Instruments

Personal data form asking demographic information such as the participants' age, gender, educational background and UCLA Loneliness Scale were used.

UCLA Loneliness Scale: The scale was developed by Russell et al, (1980) in order to assess the individuals' feelings of loneliness and adapted to Turkish by Demir, (1989). There are a total of 20 items, 10 of which are positive and the rest negative and they are graded between 1 (never) and 4 (always) in Likert type. The maximum score that can be obtained is 80 while the minimum score is 20. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient for the scale was found to be .82.

2.5. Data Analysis

SPSS 20 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was used for the analysis of the data. Percentage and frequency analysis were used for the demographic distribution. One-Way Anova, Independent Sample T-Test and Cronbach Alpha internal consistency test for $p < .05$ level of significance were used to show the difference between groups.

3. Findings

The frequency and percentage distributions for participants' age, gender, being employed / unemployed, current residence, the place where the students spent most of their lives, and family income are presented here. Findings for UCLA-LS-Loneliness scale analyses with the variables are also covered.

The gender, age, employment status distributions are as follows; there were 174 females (79.8%), and 44 males (20.2%); there were 183 people between 17-20 (83.9%), 27 people between 21-24 (12.4%), 6 people between 25-28 and two people over 29 years old (0.9%); 24 of the participants (11%) were employed while the rest 194 students did not have a job at the time. 162 of the participants (74.3%) were staying with the family, 35 of the participants (16.1%) at a dormitory while the rest 21 participants (9.6%) were sharing a flat with a friend. In terms of the place where the students spent most of their lives, 173 of the participants (79.4%) reported that they lived in a city (province) while 38 students said they lived in a town (county) and the rest 7 students (3.2%) said that they lived in a village or a small town. With respect to the family income, 34 of the participants (15.6%) reported that their income is higher than their expenditures while 141 of the participants (64.7%) stated that their income and expenditures are almost equal. The other 43 participants (19.7%) said that their expenditures exceed their income.

The Loneliness levels of the students were analyzed and the results are presented in Table 1.

Groups of Loneliness	N- %	\bar{X}	Min.	Max.
20-40 Score	159- 73%			
41-60 Score	57- 26%	36	25	71
61-80 Score	2- 1%			
Total	218 -100%			

When we look at Table 1, we see that the minimum and maximum scores that the students got for Ucla-Ls Loneliness Scale are 25 and 71 respectively. The maximum score that can be obtained is 80 while the minimum score is 20. As higher scores are regarded as higher levels of loneliness, it can be

said that the loneliness levels the students showed were quite low. Demir (1989) stated that the scores of 20-40, 41-60 and 61-80 should be interpreted as low, medium and high respectively. In this case, 73% of the participants seemed to have low levels of loneliness while 26% remained at medium levels. The rest 2% signaled high levels of loneliness. Similar studies support these findings. In a similar study conducted by Ozturk et al. (2006) 55.4% of the students were found to have low levels of loneliness with only 2.3% showing high levels of loneliness. Seginer et al. (2004) imply that adolescents might actually have low loneliness scores. In their study to test the relationship between life quality in terms of health, social support, social networks and loneliness, Arka, Sari and Fidaner (2004) found the average loneliness score as 36.16 ± 10.0 . Starch et al. (2004) reported that the average loneliness score for adolescent girls in their study was 25.82 ± 8.76

Table 2. One-Way Anova and T-Test Results for Students' Scores of UCLA-Ls Loneliness Scale Based on Gender, Being Employed/Unemployed, Age, Current Residence, the Place Where the Students Spent Most of Their Lives, and Family Income

Variables		N	\bar{X}	P
Gender	Female	174	36,35	.149
	Male	44	38,38	
Being employed/unemployed	Yes	24	36,70	.971
	No	194	36,77	
Age	17-20 age	183	36,80	
	21-24 age	27	35,77	.52
	25-28 age	6	37,50	
	29 and above	2	44,50	
The place where the students spent most of their lives	City	173	36,20	
	Country	38	39,21	.119
	Village	7	37,42	
Current residence	With Family	162	36,08	
	With Dormitory	35	37,77	.05
	With Friend	21	40,38	
Family income	Income is little from expenditure	43	39,58	
	Income is same expenditure	141	36,17	.039
	Income is high from expenditure	34	35,67	

When we look at UCLA-Ls Loneliness Scale scores in Table 2, there is a statistically meaningful difference between UCLA-Ls total score and the mean score [$P < 0.05$] with respect to gender ($X_{\text{female}} = 36.35$ $X_{\text{male}} = 38.38$); being employed/unemployed ($X_{\text{yes}} = 36.70$ $X_{\text{no}} = 36.77$); age ($X_{17-20} = 36.35$ $X_{21-24} = 38.38$ $X_{25-28} = 37.50$ $X_{29+} = 44.50$); the place where the students spent most of their lives ($X_{\text{city}} = 36.20$ $X_{\text{country}} = 39.21$ $X_{\text{village}} = 37.42$); current residence ($X_{\text{with family}} = 36.08$ $X_{\text{with dormitory}} = 37.77$ $X_{\text{with friend}} = 36.3$) and family income ($X_{\text{little}} = 39.58$ $X_{\text{same}} = 36.17$ $X_{\text{high}} = 35.67$).

The students who live with their families compared to the ones who live in a dormitory and the students living in a dormitory compared to the ones who share a flat with a friend seem to have lower levels of loneliness. Also, the students whose income is lower than their expenditures compared to the ones who have balanced income and expenditures and the students who have balanced income and expenditures compared to the ones whose income does not meet their expenditures seem to have higher levels of loneliness.

3. Results and Discussion

In this study, although there were no significant differences found between gender and loneliness level, it appears that the male participants had higher means. Similarly, Cecen (2007) stated that male participants had higher averages for emotional loneliness compared to girls in his study, which focused on gender and life satisfaction levels.

It is known that being apart from family and familial problems can have a negative impact on an individual's social and emotional development (Durualp & Cicekoglu, 2013). In this study, the individuals who live with the family seem to have lower levels of loneliness. In their study of the loneliness levels among college students, Karaoglu et al. (2009) stated that the loneliness levels of

individuals who live with their families is more likely to be lower than the ones who stay in a dormitory or share a house/flat with a friend(s).

When we look at the results regarding the family income, it can be claimed that the individuals whose incomes do not meet their expenditures have the highest levels of loneliness. In their study examining the social support and loneliness levels among university students, Yılmaz et al. (2008) reached a similar conclusion. They also did not observe a meaningful difference between employment status and loneliness level.

There was not a meaningful difference found between loneliness scores and age. In their study to examine the loneliness levels among teachers, Yuksel and Ozcan (2013) also concluded that age did not have a significant impact on loneliness levels. Similarly, Tel et al. (2006) implied that age does not make a significant difference in terms of loneliness. However, there are some studies supporting the idea that age does have an influence on loneliness (Khorshid et al., 2004; Dereli et al., 2010).

The population of this study was healthy university students, thus it is not possible to generalize the results to the society as a whole and it cannot go further except representing the students of the university where the study was conducted. However, it can be regarded as a guiding study for other students and other members of the society. This study provides data for the prevalence of loneliness among university students with no health problems. For the population investigated, 73% of the students were found to have low levels of loneliness (20-40 points) while only 26% of them were identified to have medium levels of loneliness (41-60 points). Therefore, it can be concluded that the students who made up the population of this study do not feel lonely, which is a pleasing results on behalf of the students.

As the number of participants of this study was limited, the interactions between depression levels and satisfaction with physical appearance, residence and family income all of which are likely to have an impact on loneliness levels can be a subject of future research with larger populations. Qualitative research that examines loneliness levels more thoroughly can be done in order to prepare educational programs in the light of the solution offers.

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