Loneliness and Life Satisfaction of Turkish University Students

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Abstract

The intent of this study was to examine the relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction. In this study, data was gathered by administering three instruments, namely, Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona, 1980) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin, 1985) and Demographic Information Form which was developed to collect personal information such as gender, age and grade. Data were obtained from 214 (96 male, 118 female) volunteer undergraduate university students from Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara. The mean age of the participants was 21 years ranging from 17 to 26 (SD = 1.91). In this study, statistical analysis included calculation of such descriptive statistics as proportions, means, standard deviations, and inferential statistics like independent samples t-test and MANOVA. Initial results of the study revealed that gender has an effect on loneliness and life satisfaction levels of the students. Thus, male students reported significantly less loneliness and significantly greater life satisfaction than female students. The data is still being analysed. The findings of the study will be discussed in the light of the current cultural context.

Introduction

Loneliness is an unlikable experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships is significantly deficient in either quality or quantity (Peplau, and Goldston, 1984). We all experience it from time to time, but some people live it day after day for years on end. It is emotionally depleting, interpersonally inhibiting, and psychologically regressing. When we are lonely, we feel unfilled and very much alone. Intimacy needs are not met and, if they are, they somehow remain fundamentally unsatisfying. It is important that mental health professionals have become acquainted with the condition of loneliness. For these reasons, loneliness has gained the attention of researchers throughout the last three decades.

Adolescence is a period in which loneliness is a common phenomenon. University life is a transition period for students from high school to college in which loneliness is a common phenomenon because of moving from home, breaking social networks and attempting to develop new social networks. Much of the research indicates that loneliness is felt more intensively in adolescence and late adolescence rather than the other developmental stages of life (Brennan, 1982; Rubenstein and Shaver, 1982; Williams, 1983). Most of the adolescents who are isolated from their peers suffer from intense loneliness and accordingly demonstrate typical indications of loneliness (Bilgiç, 2000; Cheng and Furnhan, 2002;). Research also pointed out that loneliness is related to depression and low self esteem (Lau, Chan and Lau, 1999; Hudson, Elek and Grossman, 2000; Erim, 2001), loneliness is related to suicide as well (Brown, 1996) and negatively correlated with life satisfaction (Schumaker, Shea, Monfries and Marnat, 1992). Loneliness is probably experienced differently in various cultures. Thus, cultural comparisons could offer new insights into the social factors that contribute to feelings of loneliness and to perceived dissatisfaction with life. However, there is very little cross-cultural research regarding the association between loneliness and life satisfaction in Japanese, Australian, Italian, Anglo-Canadian and Chinese-Canadian populations (Schumaker et all., 1992; Goodwin, Cook and Yung, 2001).

Even though studies have been made in Turkey for investigating the relationship between loneliness and several variables, such as age, sex, family education status etc. and assertiveness, depression and anxiety throughout the last two decades (Yaparel, 1984; Özodaşık, 1989; Demir, 1990; Eren, 1994; Buluş, 1996; Yaşar, 1999; Saraçoğlu, 2000; Tan, 2000), research on loneliness and life satisfaction are very limited in Turkish culture. In this light, the intent of this study was to make a contribution to the literature on different-cultural studies by examining the relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction among Turkish university students.

Method
Participants
Data were obtained from 214 (96 male, 118 female) volunteer undergraduate university students from Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara. The mean age of the participants was 21 years ranging from 17 to 26 (SD = 1.91). Forty participants (18.7%) were freshmen, 36 (16.8%) were sophomores, 65 (30.4%) were juniors, 59 (27.6) were seniors, and 14 (6.5) were graduate students.

		Grade					Total
		1	2	3	4	Graduate	
Gender	Male	18	20	29	23	6	96
	Female	22	16	36	36	8	118
Total		40	36	65	59	14	214

Instruments

Three instruments, Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona, 1980), The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin, 1985), and Demographic Information Form were used to collect data.

Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale

The University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Loneliness Scale is a 20-item measure of loneliness, comprised with 10 positively sated items (1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 15, 16, 19, 20) and 10 negatively stated items (2, 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18) (Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona, 1980). These statements concern an individual's satisfaction with his or her interpersonal relationships. Responses on a 4-point Likert-type scale are summed for a total score in which high scores indicate greater loneliness. The Turkish version of Loneliness scale was adapted by Demir (1989) and Yaparel (1984). Demir (1989) reported an internal consistency coefficient for the Turkish version of this scale to be .96, and a test-retest (1 month interval) reliability coefficient to be .94.

The Satisfaction with Life

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) is a measure of life satisfaction developed by Ed Diener and colleagues (Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin, 1985). Life satisfaction is one factor in the more general construct of subjective well being. The SWLS consists of 5-items that are completed by the individual whose life satisfaction is being measured. Each item is scored from 1 to 7 in terms of "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Items are summed for a total score, which ranges from 5 to 35, with higher scores reflecting more satisfaction with life. The Turkish version of The Satisfaction with Life Scale was adapted by Köker (1991). Köker (1991) reported an internal consistency coefficient for the Turkish version of this scale to be .80, and a test-retest reliability coefficient to be .85. In addition, 18 students (8.4%) were not satisfied, 52 (24.2) were rarely satisfied, 13 (6.1%) were sometimes satisfied, 83 (38.8) were mostly, 48 (22.4) were always satisfied with their relationships.

Demographic Information Form

A Demographic information form was used to obtain detailed information on basic demographics such as age, gender and relationship satisfaction. This form appeared on the first page of the instruments.

Data analysis

In this study, statistical analysis included calculation of such descriptive statistics as proportions, means, standard deviations, and inferential statistics like independent samples t-test, and MANOVA.

Results

Loneliness Level of Participants.

Table 2 presents the mean scores for men and women on the loneliness level of participants. The mean *UCLA Loneliness Scale* score was 50. 8 (SD=16.8) for the total sample. Female students loneliness level (M=55.9, SD= 14.2) is higher than male students (M=44.5, SD= 17). To determine if the observed differences between gender was statistically significant an independent t-test was applied to the data. The results showed that there was significant difference between female and male in terms of loneliness level ($t= 5.24$, $df=211$, $p<0.05$). To examine the relationship between relationship satisfaction and loneliness level of participants Pearson product-moments correlation was used according to the correlation coefficient, there is a significant negative relationship between relationship satisfaction and loneliness level of students. ($r=-0.87$ $p <0.01$).

Table 2. Loneliness Level of Participants

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.
Loneliness	Male	96	44.55	14.15	211	5.24	0.00*
	Female	118	55.9	17.08			

*p<.01

Life Satisfaction Level of Participants.

Table 3 presents the mean scores for men and women on the life satisfaction level of participants. The mean *The Satisfaction with Life Scale* score was 25.6 (SD=5.2) for the total sample. Male students life satisfaction level (M=27.6, SD= 4.2) is higher than female students (M=24, SD= 5.4). The t-test results showed that there was significant difference between female and male in terms of life satisfaction level (t= 5.37, df=211, p<0.05). Pearson product-moments correlation coefficient was calculated to investigate the association between relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction level of participants. According to the correlation analysis there was a significant positive relationship between relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction level of students. (r=0.85, p <0.01).

Table 3. Life satisfaction Level of Participants

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.
Life satisfaction	Male	96	27.66	4,2094	211	5.37	0.00*
	Female	118	24.00	5,4898			

*p<.01

Relationship between Loneliness and Life Satisfaction Level of Participants

The intent was also to investigate the association between loneliness and life satisfaction scores of university students. For this reason, Pearson correlation coefficient was computed. The analyses showed a significant negative correlation between loneliness and life satisfaction scores of the participants. (r=0.91, p <0.01).

MANOVA was conducted to examine a possible relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction as a function of gender and relationship satisfaction. The results revealed that a significant association emerged between loneliness and life satisfaction as a function of gender [Wilks lambda (λ) = 0.877, F (2, 210) = 14.74, p< 0.01]. In addition, MANOVA results showed that the relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction changed as a function of relationship satisfaction [Wilks lambda (λ) = 0.067, F (8,414) = 156.36, p< 0.01].

Discussion

Culture is important as it deals with the way people live and approach problem solving in their social context. Thus, intuitively, it is reasonable to expect that the varying degrees of loneliness and life satisfaction felt in different cultures. This has been substantiated by empirical research (Schumaker et all., 1992; Goodwin, Cook and Yung, 2001) although it wasn't an aspect of this research. In this study, total loneliness levels of the students were determined by using UCLA Loneliness Scale. Female students' loneliness level (M=55.9) is higher than male students (M=44.5) as reported by some researchers (WoodwardandFrank, 1988; PageandCole, 1991). Whereas several studies show males are lonelier than females (Russell et al., 1980; Davis and Franzoi, 1986; Schultz and Moore, 1986; Page, 1990; Booth, Bartlett ve Bohnsack, 1992), other studies show no significant difference (Berg and Peplau, 1982; Tornstam, 1992; Brage, Meredith, and Woodward, 1993). The findings of significant difference in loneliness levels in terms of gender may be caused by the characteristics of the participants, and more probably their gender role in Turkish society. In addition, it can be stated that the social support networks are likely to be stronger for males than females in Turkish culture. Another possible explanation is that females talk about feelings more openly than males do in Turkish society. Both explanations stem from the differential socialisation of males and females, which is still very prominent in the Turkish culture.

Another variable of the study is relationship satisfaction. A link between loneliness and relationship satisfaction was examined by some researchers who have stressed that there is a significant negative association relational satisfaction and loneliness (Gove, Hughes, and Style, 1983; Kiecolt-Glaser, Kennedy, Maldoff, Fisher, Speicher, and Glaser, 1988). Similarly, the results of the study revealed that relational satisfaction adversely correlated with loneliness. Loneliness experiences in different cultures may also vary due to culturally unique expectations concerning close relationships. For people in individualistic cultures, loneliness is primarily induced by unfulfilling and unsatisfactory intimate relationships (Rokach, 1998). On the other hand, for individuals in collectivistic cultures, the primary cause of loneliness and dissatisfaction is personal inadequacies (Rokach, 1998), that is, perceptions of their own lack of relational competence. According to Hofstede (2001) in the past, Turkish people were collectivist, but there has been a change toward individualism in recent years. Since Turkey has been living though a transition period between individualism and collectivism, it is largely unknown the reason of loneliness. In this research, life satisfaction of university students was assessed by use of the SWLS. In the study, the mean of life satisfaction levels was 25.6. It was found that life satisfaction levels of university students change according to their gender. Literature on life satisfaction shows that most study have only examined this relationship in the elderly. Those studies demonstrated males have higher life satisfaction scores than females (Knapp, 1956; Snyderand Spreitzer, 1974; Liang, 1982). Thus, these findings contribute evidence to literature on gender differences in life satisfaction on other age groups.

Finally, the results of the study revealed that loneliness was negatively related to life satisfaction. Similarly, measures of loneliness have been shown to correlate negatively with reported life satisfaction in elderly subjects (Doyle and Forehand, 1984; Moore and Schultz, 1987; Bowling, Eldermann, Leaver and Hoekel, 1989), but similar research has not been conducted using other age groups and populations. Hence, this study was to make a contribution to the literature on different-cultural studies and on other age groups by examining the relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction among Turkish university students. The present study has also some limitations. The sample did not represent all university students because of the convenience sampling. Based on the limitation, the findings need to be replicated with more representative sample of the university students. Finally, more direct indicators of individualism-collectivism are required that will allow for a more extensive assessment of the impact of both individual-and cultural level values and beliefs on loneliness and life satisfaction. There is a dearth of cross cultural studies examining loneliness and life satisfaction, and it would be useful to establish frameworks that can guide future research. That might contribute to how people respond to loneliness. The findings may be beneficial for academic staff, counsellors, psychologists, and researchers.

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