

Psychological Loneliness Among Arab Students At Irbid National University, Jordan

Khawla Al-Kadoumi, Irbid National Universities, Jordan
Abdel Muhdi Sawalha, Irbid National Universities, Jordan
Mr. Mohammad Al Momani, Irbid National Universities, Jordan

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the level of psychological loneliness among Arab students studying at Irbid National University, and to investigate the effect of year of study and gender of students on the level of psychological loneliness. The sample of the study consisted of 149 students, 133 males and 16 females from first, second, third and fourth years. Means and standard deviations and T-tests were used to analyze the results. The results show that there are statistically significant differences in psychological loneliness among Arab students studying at Irbid National University. The results indicate that there are statistically significant differences at ($\alpha= 0.05$) in the level of psychological loneliness among Arab students due to year of study variable but no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha= 0.05$) in psychological loneliness among Arab students due to gender variable.

Keywords: Psychological Loneliness among Arab Students

INTRODUCTION

Students have to cope with many problems while at university. According to prior research, university students have psychological, social, and sexual problems (Baysal & Buluş, 2001; Gizir, 2005; Wechsler, Rohman, & Solomon, 1991). In addition, they have problems with ego, identity development, and their relationships with others.

Students are worried about their future employment status (Şahin, Sezgin, Taş, & Rugancı, 1989). Students who must move to cities where there are universities are especially likely to suffer from loneliness in the new environment (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2007). Loneliness is an unsatisfactory, subjective, and psychological state occurring as a result of inconsistency between the person's existing social relations and the relations s/he aspires to (Ponzetti, 1990). Loneliness is a feeling resulting from perceived social network of relations when it is smaller or less satisfactory than what s/he wishes to have (Peplau & Perlman, 1979). Loneliness is positively related to feeling depressed, abandoned, empty, hopeless, isolated, self-enclosed, nonsociable, and dissatisfied (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980). Loneliness may be experienced emotionally as isolation from intimate relationships with family members or peers (Weiss, 1974). In several studies it has been found that socio demographic variables such as gender, age, and marital status are predictors for loneliness (Kim, 2001; Pinquart, 2003).

For Horney (1945), the fear of loneliness is one of the basic fears of people. An individual gives love and congeniality to people to defeat this fear. He looks for ways of exiting and escaping from this fact when he needs. Studies conducted on the topic verify that loneliness is a very common problem today (Rokach, & Brock, 1997; Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980; Storr, 1989). Page and Cole (1991) found that 10% of the adult population had this problem of loneliness.

Loneliness, far beyond personal destruction, can cause serious diseases which may end up depression at the end. The person, who cannot avoid the vicious circle he is trapped into, feels unhappy, isolated, and lonely (Ministre de Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada, 2006).

Loneliness appears in different forms. For example, Leonard (1979) and Kalliopuska (1986) classified loneliness as deep loneliness which comes with depression, social status loneliness which is formed by sensing self estranged in society, sensual loneliness which is formed when the person cannot get a respond to his mental expectations even if he is in fine physical and environmental circumstances, and hidden loneliness in which the behaviors are apparently normal.

For Sadler (1978), loneliness emerges as a feeling of intensive sadness and emptiness along with the sharpened need of depending someone and manifests itself in five different ways, namely interpersonal loneliness, social loneliness, cultural shock, psychological loneliness, existential loneliness some personal characteristics of people who experience loneliness are explained in the literature as well. While Horowitz and French (1979) determined these properties as non-functionality, Jones, Hobbs and Hockenbury (1982) determined them as lack of social skills and interests, and zodaşık (1989) purposed them as pessimism, anxiety, lack of confidence, and introversion.

Loneliness is a universal emotional and psychological experience. Loneliness is also seen as a normal experience that leads individual to achieve deeper self-awareness, a time to be creative, and an opportunity to attain self-fulfilment and to explore meaning of life (Yalom, 2001; Borys S, & Perlman D.1985) Loneliness is also a condition of human life, an experience of humanizing which enables the person to sustain, extend, and deepen his/her humanity (Moustakas, C. 1961). According to Weiss (Weiss R, 1993), loneliness is caused not by being alone but being without some definite needed relationship or set of relationships. Loneliness appears always to be a response to the absence of some particular relational provision, such as deficits in the relational provisions involved in social support (DiTommaso et al, 2003).

However, the experience of loneliness is likewise unpleasant and distressing. Loneliness may also lead to people to submerge themselves into dependency relations, following direction, imitation, being like others, and striving for power and status (Peplau, L. 1982; Rokach A, Brock H.1997) Reading, watching TV, using the internet, social activities, attending parties, drinking, and also using drugs do not only signal loneliness, but these also may be some adaptive or maladaptive coping strategies university students use to overcome this unpleasant and distressing experience – loneliness (Yeh, M.2002) Researchers have indicated that adolescents experience more loneliness than any other age groups (Jones, W. Carver, M.1991) Late adolescence and early adulthood (i.e., university age) are especially high risk for experiencing loneliness (Deniz, M. Hamarta, E. Ari, R. 2005; Ponzetti, J. 1990; Cutrona, C. 1982) University is a transition period from being an adolescent to being an adult. It is a period for university students to seek and fulfil their sense of individuality and, at the same time, to seek and build close and social relationships with others. For many university students, this may be the first time they live away from their parents. They may move from the emotional and social support of their families. They leave home as well as their hometown friends. The separation of university students from their homes for the first time may create feelings of doubt, confusion, and anxiety, which the close companionship of residential halls may not totally prevent (Weiss, R.1993) Once entering the university, they need to re-evaluate their past relationships with parents, teachers, friends, and girlfriend/boyfriend. They begin to learn how to deal with the attachment and separation processes of interpersonal situations in normal psychological growth and begin to create their own unique self-image. Lack of social and emotional support for university students, may lead to the experience of social and emotional loneliness (Cutrona, C. 1982)

For the most part, loneliness research has tended to focus on individual factors, that is, either on personality factors or lack of social contacts (DiTommaso et al .2003) However, if one accepts the premise that loneliness is expressive of an individual's relationship to the community, then it is conceivable that the ways social relations are organized within the community will result in cross-cultural variations in the way people experience loneliness. Cross-cultural and individual differences, including personality (Goswick, R. Jones, W. 1981) gender (Borys, S. Perlman, D. 1985; Clinton, M. Anderson, L. 1999) and religious engagement (Hood, R. et al 1996) also have been considered as relevant factors in the study of loneliness.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Friends are a common occurrence. Separation reduces the frequency of interaction, makes the satisfactions provided by a relationship less available, and may raise fears that the relationship will be weakened by absence. Such events as moving to a new community, going away from home to summer camp or to university, or spending extended periods in institutions such as hospitals or prisons all affect social relationships, in addition the requirements of work often impinge on social relations outside of work in the form of business trips, extended hours spent working overtime, or the necessity of moving as part of career advancement. Evidence that physical separation puts people at risk for loneliness is readily available: for example Weis (1973) has noted the difficulties experienced by wives forced to move by their husband's work. However, Rubenstein *et al.* (1979) maintain that the loneliness passes quickly for most people who move to a new community.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The most obvious determinant of loneliness among students is the level of a student's social relationships. Changes in social contacts have already been treated as a precipitating factor in loneliness. There are several indications that lonely people have fewer social contacts than do other people (see Jones, in press). For instance, lonely students have been found to date less, and report fewer social activities, and to spend more time alone; whilst lonely senior citizens have less frequent contacts with their friends (Perlman *et al.*, 1978).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to investigate the level of psychological loneliness among Arab students studying at Irbid National University in light of the year and gender variables.

QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Are there any statistically significant differences in psychological loneliness among Arab students studying at Irbid national university?
2. Are there any statistically significant differences in psychological loneliness among Arab students studying at Irbid national university due to year variable?
3. Are there any statistically significant differences in psychological loneliness among Arab students studying at Irbid national university due to gender variable?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Loneliness can be viewed as a psychological state in which people consider their relationships to be limited or inadequate in terms of quantity or quality (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). Arab students from many Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and are studying at Irbid National University. This study is limited to all Arab students who are studying at Irbid National University and to any other similar sample.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies were carried out on loneliness, loneliness is found to be related with psychosocial difficulties (e.g., low self-esteem, low social competence, and poorer social interactions), mental health problems (e.g., anxiety, depression, suicidal behaviors) and with physical health issues (e.g., poorer immune and cardiovascular functioning, sleep deficiencies). Based on the findings of the studies, a typical lonely person has several characteristics such as negative feelings like desperation, depression, impatient boredom, and self-depreciation; negative attitudes about oneself, other people, and about the causes of events; and passive, self-absorbed and ineffective social behavior (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006).

In literature, various factors were examined for the purpose of determining loneliness. According to the research findings, there were no differences between the loneliness levels of university students in terms of their grade (Le Roux & Connors, 2001). In addition, the findings that the level of loneliness does not differ with respect

to gender (Neto & Barros, 2003) but there are still other findings that the loneliness levels of male individuals are higher than that of female individuals (Karahan et.al. 2004). Moreover, relationships were found between loneliness and certain personality factors. A relationship was found between loneliness and neuroticism, and neuroticism was reported to be the predictor of loneliness (Neto & Barros, 2003). Furthermore, studies show that cultural background also plays an important role in loneliness experience (Neto & Barros, 2003). Consequently, loneliness, a significant multi-dimensional phenomenon, has significant outcomes for mental health (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006).

Little research focuses on the distinction between emotional and social loneliness, despite the fact that social loneliness specifically indicates a lack of companionship and is related to the number of close friends. Emotional loneliness, in its turn, indicates a lack of intimacy with close friends and has nothing to do with the number of friendships (Havens, & Gierveld, 2004). Qualter and Munn found that individuals can be socially isolated without feeling lonely, while other individuals feel lonely without being socially isolated. It is evident that objective and subjective feelings of isolation are not as clearly related.

The quantitative and qualitative aspects of social relationships are distinct. In other words, the lack of specificity in the concept of loneliness has been discussed, and more research is needed to distinguish the different aspects of loneliness throughout the process of aging (Hughes et al., 2004). In this study, the researcher focused specifically on perceived subjective emotional loneliness. Developing a close relationship implies self-disclosure as a first step in establishing a confidant relationship, which is scary because of the potential rejection factor. Generally it has been agreed upon that the subjective situation of loneliness entails negative consequences at the level of both physical and mental health (Ernst & Cacioppo, 1999).

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Population of the study

The population of the study consisted of:

All Arab students studying at Irbid National University enrolling in the first semester 2011/2012 whom they form (587)

Sample of the study

The sample of the study comprised of (149) Arab students who are studying at Irbid National University, 133 male and 16 female students and a questionnaire was distributed among them as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

		Frequency	Percent
Year	1	59	39.6
	2	43	28.9
	3	28	18.8
	4	19	12.8
Sex	Male	133	89.3
	Female	16	10.7
	Total	149	100.0

Instrument of the study

A questionnaire was distributed among the students and this questionnaire was designed by the researchers. To ensure the questionnaire reliability, the researchers applied it to a pilot sample of (20) subjects excluded of the study sample in the same university from which the subjects were chosen with a two-week period between the first and second time it was distributed. The reliability of the test was calculated using correlation coefficient, it was found to be 79 and this is suitable to conduct such a study. This study was conducted over one semester period. This study was quantitative in nature. At the beginning of the study, a questionnaire about students' attitudes towards

their feelings of loneliness was given to (149) students who are studying at Irbid National University. After that the researchers collected the questionnaires and collected data, and then this data was analyzed statistically. The results were analyzed for each item in the questionnaire using suitable statistical methods such as mean and standard deviation. The researchers also used figures to clarify the results more.

Findings of the Study

To answer the first question about the level of psychological loneliness: Are there any statistically significant differences in psychological loneliness among Arab students studying at Irbid national university? A questionnaire was distributed among them and means and standard deviation were calculated. Results were shown in Table 2.

Table 2: level of psychological loneliness means and standard deviations

Rank	No	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	19	Q19	3.19	1.018
2	25	Q25	3.14	.923
3	22	Q22	3.08	.962
4	21	Q21	3.00	1.084
5	20	Q20	2.74	.807
6	12	Q12	2.68	1.092
7	4	Q4	2.65	.846
8	11	Q11	2.58	.931
8	23	Q23	2.58	.938
10	9	Q9	2.54	.912
11	24	Q24	2.53	.941
12	6	Q6	2.39	.836
13	10	Q10	2.35	1.059
14	5	Q5	2.34	.859
15	30	Q30	2.28	1.034
16	28	Q28	2.23	1.009
17	17	Q17	2.15	.933
18	29	Q29	2.06	.799
19	1	Q1	2.02	.881
20	7	Q7	1.97	.809
21	8	Q8	1.93	.827
22	2	Q2	1.89	.755
23	26	Q26	1.86	.885
24	27	Q27	1.78	.853
25	15	Q15	1.67	.784
26	16	Q16	1.52	.731
27	3	Q3	1.50	.741
28	14	Q14	1.48	.768
29	13	Q13	1.46	.793
30	18	Q18	1.37	.738
		All items	2.23	.336

Table 2 shows the level of psychological loneliness among Arab students studying at Irbid National University; means and standard deviations were calculated. 149 students answered the questionnaire and the highest mean was (3.19) for the 19th question. The lowest mean was (1.37) for the 18th question. Standard deviation for the 19th was not statistically significant as it was higher than ($\alpha \leq 0, 05$). The total items standard deviation was (0.336) which is not significant. Questions 10, 12, 19, 21, 28 and 30 show a great statistically significant difference at the level ($\alpha \leq 0, 05$) when they were (1.059, 1.092, 1.018, 1.084, 1.009 and 1.034 respectively).

To answer the second question about psychological loneliness and year variable: Are there any statistically significant differences in psychological loneliness among Arab students learning at Irbid national university due to year variable? Means and standard deviations were computed and Table 3 shows the results.

Table 3: Means, standard deviations and t-test according to year variable

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	59	2.31	.347
2	43	2.22	.285
3	28	2.14	.368
4	19	2.17	.338
Total	149	2.23	.336

Table 3 shows there are statistically significant differences due to year variable. It shows the results of the questionnaire which was distributed among (149) male and female students about the level of their psychological loneliness. Means and standard deviations were calculated and results show that first year students got a higher mean which was (2.31); this indicates that first year students have more psychological loneliness. Third and fourth year students got a little bet lower mean than first year which was (2.14, and 2.17).

Standard deviation for first year students was (0.347) which is lower than ($\alpha \leq 0, 05$) so it means that it is statistically significant. Standard deviation for the third and fourth year students was nearly the same; it was (0.368, and 0.338) which is also statistically significant. So, there is statistically significant difference in the level of psychological loneliness due to year variable.

1	2.31
2	2.22
3	2.14
4	2.17

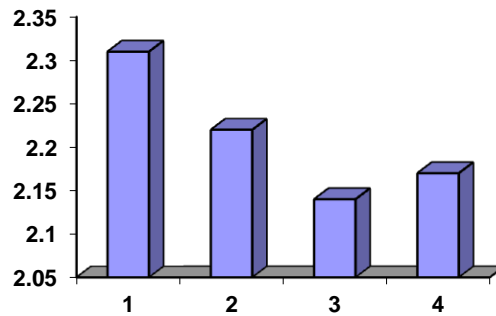


Diagram 1: T-Test (level of psychological loneliness due to year variable)

Diagram 1 show the level of psychological loneliness due to year variable, questionnaires was distributed among 149 Arab students and as it is clear here first year students have a higher mean than third and fourth students.

Table 3 shows a clear variance in the means of level of psychological loneliness according to year variable, to find out whether there are statistical significant differences in these means, one way ANOVA was conducted and the results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: One way ANOVA results students related to year variable.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.651	3	.217	1.954	.124
Within Groups	16.094	145	.111		
Total	16.744	148			

Table 4 shows there are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the level of psychological loneliness among Arab students due to year variable.

To answer the third question about psychological loneliness and gender variable: Are there any statistically significant differences in psychological loneliness among Arab students learning at Irbid national university due to gender variable? Means and standard deviations were computed and Table 5 shows the results.

Table 5: Means, standard deviations and t-test according to gender variable

	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
QALL	Male	133	2.22	.338	-1.240	147	.217
	Female	16	2.33	.314			

Table 5 shows there are no statistically significant differences due to gender variable. It shows the results of the questionnaire which was distributed among (149) male and female students about the level of their psychological loneliness. Means and standard deviations were calculated and results show that male students got a nearly a similar mean as females which was (2.22, and 2.33) respectively; this indicates that first male students have the same psychological loneliness as female students.

Standard deviation for the male students was (0.338) which is higher than ($\alpha \leq 0, 05$) so it means that it is not statistically significant. Standard deviation for the female students was nearly the same; it was (0.314) which is also not statistically significant. So, there is no statistically significant difference in the level of psychological loneliness due to gender variable.

Table 5 shows There are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) in psychological loneliness among Arab students due to gender variable.

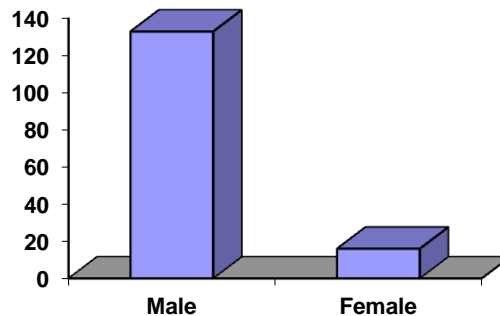


Diagram 2: T-Test (level of psychological loneliness due to gender variable)

Diagram 1 show the level of psychological loneliness due to gender variable, questionnaires was distributed among 149 Arab students and as it is clear here male students and female students have the same level of psychological loneliness.

CONCLUSIONS

Loneliness is a topic ripe for research. Studies have documented that loneliness is an unpleasant and widespread experience. The research literature on loneliness is relatively small (and thus easier to master) yet flourishing; and useful theoretical concepts and data collection instruments have been developed. Although the experimental manipulation of loneliness by researchers may be difficult and raises ethical issues, alternative research strategies have proved fruitful. Initial efforts to investigate loneliness empirically have been rewarded and available evidence suggests that psychologists are beginning to learn how to help people alleviate loneliness.

Yet despite these advances in the field, many important questions remain unanswered. All these factors make loneliness an attractive topic for research. Loneliness and depression are two main problematic areas for counseling-seekers, and there are gender and year-level differences for both. The research findings reveal the

necessity to take gender and year-level into consideration in order to make effective interventions against the loneliness and depression problems of students applying university counseling centers.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Dr. Khawla Al-Kadoumi, Assistant Prof in Educational psychology, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Irbid National University, 009627773000131, E-mail: kawla_qa@hotmail.com

Dr. Abdel Muhdi Sawalha, Assistant Prof in Educational Counseling, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Irbid National University, 00962779636399, E-mail: abdalmuhdi@hotmail.com

Mr. Mohammad Al Momani, Master degree in Educational Counseling, 00962776574302, E-mail: dr_m8260@yahoo.com

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NOTES