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Percieved Social Support and Social-Emotional Loneliness

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Abstract

This study examined the the role of percieved social support in predicting loneliness levels of college students. Participants were 374 (195 girls and 179 boys) students selected from three different grade levels of different departments at Shiraz University. Participants completed Persian version of Social-Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults (SELSA-S) and Persian form of Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). To examine reliability of measures, Cronbach alpha coefficient and to determine validity, factor analysis method were used. A stepwise of multiple regression showed that the subscales of perceived social support from family, friends and other significant were negative predictors of loneliness.

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1. Introduction

Loneliness is a common and unlikable experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships is significantly deficient in either quality or quantity (Perlman & Peplau, 1984). Loneliness is a potent but little understood risk factor and a universal experience. Every person may experience loneliness and it exists within every age group but it is more common among adolescents and young adults (Ponzetti, 1990). It is estimated that 30 % of college students experience loneliness as a problem (McWhirter, 1997).

Loneliness is also a multidimensional phenomenon, varying in intensity, and across causes and circumstances. For example, the loneliness of a child who has lost their mother is experienced differently to the loneliness of a child who has no playmates (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). In order to discover this multidimensional nature of loneliness, Weiss (1973), distinguished between "emotional loneliness" that is an absence of close or intimate relationships, whereas "social loneliness" that is a lack of social networks. According to Weiss (1973) Emotional loneliness results from the lack of a close, intimate attachment to another person; whereas social loneliness results from the lack of a network of social relationships in which the person is part of a group of friends who share common interests and activities.

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Taking the fact that a great deal of college students face with loneliness into consideration (Pamukçu and Meydan, 2010), it worths to be aware of its antecedents and consequences. One of the most important factors relating loneliness is perceived social support. Perceived social support is a person's beliefs about being supported by friends, family, and others (Cotterell, 2007).

Recently, there is a surge of interest in the use of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). The MSPSS was originally developed on university students (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988) and was later validated in a wide range of samples. Although the MSPSS provides assessment of three sources of support: family (FA), friends (FR), and significant other (SO), it can be also used to evaluate the adequacy of total perceived social support (Zimet et al., 1988).

In the related literature, various studies examined loneliness in respect of perceived social support (e.g. Kozaklı, 2006; Ng, 2001; Yount, 2000, as cited in Pamukçu and Meydan, 2010). Most of the literature studies have shown that perceived social support is negatively correlated with level of loneliness. For example, Kozaklı (2006, as cited in Pamukçu and Meydan, 2010) found negative correlations among perceived social support (family, friends and others) and loneliness levels of college students. In another research, Yount (2000, as cited in Pamukçu and Meydan, 2010) concluded that the level of perceived social support was negatively correlated with level of loneliness among adolescents.

In the review of the previous studies, we did not found any research which investigated the role of perceived social support in predicting social-emotional loneliness. So, the aim of this study is investigation the role of perceived social support in predicting social-emotional loneliness.

2. Methods

Participants of this study were 374 (179 boys and 195 girls) students that selected by multi stages cluster random sampling; from University of Shiraz.

2.1. Measures

2.1.1. *Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults- short form (SELSA-S)*

The SELSA-S developed by DiTommaso, Brannen and Best (2004) and adapted to Persian by Jowkar and Salimi (2009). The SELSA-S is a 15-item multidimensional measure of loneliness and comprises three subscales: "Romantic", "Family" and "social" loneliness. "Emotional loneliness", comes out of adding of romantic and family loneliness scores.

The reliability of the measure examined by internal consistency Chronbach alpha method. Alpha coefficient for romantic, family and social loneliness were .81, .75, and .72, respectively. Validity of the measure investigated by factor analysis method. Result of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the validity of measure for use in Iran.

Adequate psychometric properties have been found with the SELSA-S in several studies (e.g. DiTommaso, Turbide, & Robinson, 2007; DiTommaso, Brannen McNulty, Ross, & Burgess, 2003; Rezan Çeçen, 2007).

2.1.2. *Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)*

The MSPSS (Zimet et al., 1988) is a 12-item scale that measures perceived support from three domains: family (FA), friends (FR), and a significant other (SO). Participants completing the MSPSS are asked to indicate their agreement with items on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from very strongly disagree to very strongly agree. Total and subscale scores range from 1 to 7, with higher scores suggesting greater levels of perceived social support.

Adequate psychometric properties have been found with the MSPSS in several studies (e.g. Cheng, & Chan, 2004; Edwards, 2004; Wongpakaran, Wongpakaran, & Ruktrakul, 2011; Mitchell, & Zimet, 2000).

The reliability of the measure examined by internal consistency Chronbach alpha method. Alpha coefficient for FA, FR and SO were .82, .86 and .86, respectively. Validity of the measures investigated by factor analysis method.

3. Results

Independent t-test analyses was used in order to whether the scores for subscales of Perceived Social Support and loneliness would vary according to student's gender. Table 1 presents the mean scores of study variables for boy and girls.

Table 1. Comparison of girls and boys participants in study variables

Variable	Boys		Girls		t	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD		
FA. Support	14.60	3.45	15.93	3.12	3.91	.000
FR. Support	12.75	3.40	13.55	3.44	2.25	.02
SO. Support	12.59	4.00	14.10	4.59	3.37	.001
T.Support	39.95	8.96	43.60	8.46	4.03	.000
T. Loneliness	39.35	9.64	35.20	9.90	4.10	.000
E. Loneliness	28.63	7.65	25.07	8.46	4.24	.000
S. Loneliness	10.72	3.27	10.12	3.33	1.75	N.S.

As shown in Table 1, girls FA Support, FR Support and SO Support, total loneliness and emotional loneliness scores are significantly higher than boy students. The results showed that there wasn't significant difference between girls and boys in terms of social loneliness level.

To investigate the association between FA Support, FR Support and SO Support and loneliness scores of students, Pearson correlation coefficient was computed. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation matrix of study variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.FA. Support	1					
2. FR. Support	0.39**	1				
3.SO. Support	0.49**	0.43**	1			
4. T.Loneliness	-0.53**	-0.52**	-0.73**	1		
5.E.Loneliness	-0.47**	-0.31**	-0.70**	0.95**	1	
6.S.Loneliness	-0.40**	-0.80**	-0.44**	0.63**	0.37**	1

* p<0.05

** p<0.001

As shown in Table 2, the results revealed considerable negative correlation between FA Support and loneliness($r=-0.53$, $p < 0.001$); FR Support and loneliness($r=-0.52$, $p < 0.001$); SO Support and loneliness($r=-0.73$, $p < 0.001$).

Regression analysis was used to determine the more predictive variable of perceived social support for loneliness (Table 3). The results revealed that all subscales of MPSS are negative predictors for loneliness, but prcieved social from significant another(SO) is the strongest negative predictor for loneliness.

Table 3. Regression analysis results in predicting the loneliness

Prediction Variables	R	R ²	β	t	Sig.
FA. Support	0.78	0.60	-0.18	4.54	000
FR. Support			-0.22	5.84	.000
SO. Support			-0.55	14.04	000

4. Discussion

The analyses have pointed out a meaningful difference between the subscales of perceived social support and the gender. Girls's FA social support (M=15.93) was higher than boys(M=14.60); Girls's SO social support (M=14.10) was higher than boys(M=12.59); Girls's FR social support (M=13.55) was higher than boys(M=12.75).

It seems that girls interpret their received social support from all resources such as family, friends and significant another higher than boys.

Another purpose of the study was relationship between perceived social support and loneliness that was examined by some researchers. Whereas many researchers have studied the importance of social support relating to loneliness, very little research has investigated the role of perceived social support in predicting loneliness (e.g. Kozaklı, 2006; Ng, 2001; Yount, 2000, as cited in Pamukçu and Meydan, 2010). Similarly, the results of this study revealed that all subscales of perceived social support, negatively correlated with loneliness.

The results of the present study showed also that SO social support is stronger negative predictor of loneliness rather than FA and FR social support. When significant others are experienced as helpful, loyal, and supportive they may prevent experiences of loneliness.

In this study, loneliness levels of the students were determined by using SELSA-S and perceived social support were determined by using MPSS. Male students' loneliness (M=39.35) was higher than females(M=35.20). This specific finding of the study is consistent with some previous findings(e.g., Tümkaya et al., 2008; Wiseman et al., 1995; Moore & Schultz, 1983).

A strong possible explanation is that females talk about feelings males and share their feelings with the friends more openly than males, so they experience the lower level of loneliness. Enochs and Roland (2006; cited in Tümkaya et al., 2008) have emphasized that males keep their feelings under control, and they do not cry in comparison with females. further analyses showed that this gender difference is only observed in emotional loneliness; hence males and females only have significant difference in emotional loneliness. According to Weiss's definition of social loneliness, It seems that, nowadays in big cities, there is no difference in quantity and expanse of social relationship of males and females. So the social loneliness level in males and females is not significantly different. On the other hand, in females, the quality of social relationships is better and intimacy in relationships is deeper than males; So the emotional loneliness of females is lower than males. As already mentioned, developing close and intimate relationships require self-disclosure and self-disclosure is easier for females, so females have less emotional loneliness than males.

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