Social-Emotional Loneliness and Life Satisfaction

Azimeh Salimi

*Department of Educational Psychology, University of Shiraz, Shiraz, Iran

Abstract

The intent of this study was to examine the effects of social and emotional loneliness on life satisfaction. Gender differences in loneliness is examined, too. A sample of 396 (172 male, 224 female) university students were selected from Shiraz University. The short version of Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults (SELSA-S); the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS); and Demographic Information Form. Results of the independent t-test revealed that gender has an effect on loneliness levels of the students and male students reported significantly greater emotional loneliness than female students. In addition, the results of stepwise regression, indicated that social and emotional loneliness were significant negative predictors of the life satisfaction, however emotional loneliness was stronger predictor, rather than social loneliness.

Keywords: Social Loneliness, Emotional Loneliness, Life Satisfaction, Gender Differences.

1. Introduction

Loneliness is a basic fact of life and thus experienced to differing extents by everyone at some stage in their life. Loneliness has been defined as the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships is significantly deficient in either quality or quantity (Perlman & Peplau, 1984). In particular, the discrepancy that exists between the interpersonal relationships one wishes to have, and those that one perceives they currently have, makes the individual to experience loneliness. 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.

Despite loneliness is experienced by both males and females, some demographic variables such as gender, has been shown to be related to individual differences in severity of loneliness. Nonetheless, gender differences that have reported in adult loneliness are not consistent together. Some studies have shown males tended to be lonelier
than females (e.g., Tümkaya, Aybek & Çelik, 2008; Wiseman, Guttfeaturesd, & Lurie, 1995; Schultz, & Moore, 1986). Whereas several studies show females are lonelier than males (e.g., Borys, & Perlman, 1985; Bugay, 2007; Page, & Cole, 1991), or no significant difference (e.g., Tornstam, 1992).

On the other hand, loneliness is one important indicator and vulnerability factor for life satisfaction. The life satisfaction depends on one’s cognitive and subjective evaluation. In other words, the life satisfaction is one’s global evaluation of some aspects of the quality of his/her life such as family, school, friend etc according to his/her criteria (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985).

Numerous studies, In the literature, have proved that lonely people report lower rates of life-satisfaction (e.g., Swami et al., 2007; Neto, 1993; Goodwin, Cook, & Yung, 2001; Kim, 1997; Moore & Schultz, 1983), but little research focuses on the distinction between emotional and social loneliness. This article provides insight into these overlooked dimensions of loneliness and their relationships with life satisfaction in order to find out (1) whether the loneliness and life satisfaction vary in accordance with gender of students; (2) whether there would be a significant relationship between students’ loneliness and life satisfaction; (3) which one of the loneliness dimensions (social loneliness or emotional loneliness) is the stronger predictor of the life satisfaction.

2. Methods

Data were obtained from 396 (172 male, 224 female) university students that selected through multi-stages cluster random sampling; from Shiraz University (medicine, engineering and human sciences), Iran.

2.1. Measures

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

The SELSA-S developed by DiTomasso, 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 .92, .77 and .83, respectively. Validity of the measure investigated by factor analysis method.

2.1.2. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

The SWLS (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) is a 5-item scale that measures global life satisfaction. The reliability of the measure examined by internal consistency Chronbach alpha method. Alpha coefficient for life satisfaction was .82. Validity of the measures investigated by factor analysis method.

2.1.3. Demographic Information Form

A Demographic information form was used to obtain detailed information such as age, gender, grade, etcetera.

3. Results

Concerning the first aim of the study, independent t-test was used in order to whether the scores for loneliness and life satisfaction would vary according to student’s gender (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Male M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Female M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>39.89</td>
<td>9.81</td>
<td>35.35</td>
<td>9.94</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Loneliness</td>
<td>11.08</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>10.53</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>N.S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Loneliness</td>
<td>27.52</td>
<td>7.77</td>
<td>23.60</td>
<td>8.27</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>14.92</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>15.45</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>N.S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in Table 1, male loneliness score (M= 39.89, SD= 9.81) is significantly higher than female students (M=35.35, SD=9.94)(t= 4.52, p<0.001). Further analysis showed that this distinction is only in the emotional loneliness and males reported significantly greater emotional loneliness (M= 27.52, SD= 7.77) than females(M= 23.60, SD= 8.27)(t= 1.30, p<0.001).

The second aim of the study was to investigate the association between loneliness and life satisfaction. For this reason, Pearson correlation coefficient was computed (Table 2). As shown in Table 2, there is a considerable negative correlation between loneliness and life satisfaction (r= -0.44, p <0.001). Furthermore, the correlation between emotional loneliness and life satisfaction (r= -0.38, p <0.001) is stronger than the correlation between social loneliness and life satisfaction (r= -0.27, p <0.001).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable 1</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Loneliness</td>
<td>0.58**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Loneliness</td>
<td>0.93**</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>-0.44**</td>
<td>-0.27**</td>
<td>-0.38**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05 ** p<0.001

For the third research question, a stepwise regression analysis was used to determine the more predictive variable for life satisfaction (Table 3). The stepwise results revealed that social loneliness and emotional loneliness have a considerable contribution in predicting the life satisfaction, but emotional loneliness is the stronger negative predictor of the life satisfaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Prediction Variables</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Emotional Loneliness</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
<td>7.89</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Emotional Loneliness</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Loneliness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Discussion

In this study, loneliness levels of the students were determined by using SELSA-S and Male students’ loneliness (M=39.89) was higher than females(M=35.35). 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. In addition, developing close relationships require self-disclosure. Regarding to Dindia and Allen (1992) women disclosed themselves slightly more than men; So that they have experience loneliness less. Another possible explanation is that the social support networks, such as family or peer are likely to be stronger for females than males in Iranian culture.

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 (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. 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.

The analyses have not pointed out a meaningful difference between the life satisfaction and the gender. According to Tümkaya et al., (2008) in our century, both males and females carry equal responsibilities regarding the life and they, both, struggle with the similar daily life concerns such as finishing the school, being successful at exams, finding a job, having a good career and establishing good job relationships.

Another purpose of the study was relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction that was examined by some researchers who have stressed that there is a significant negative association between life satisfaction and loneliness( e.g., Goodwin et al., 2001; Kim, 1997; Schumaker, Shea & Marnat,1993; Moore & Schultz, 1983). Similarly, the results of this study revealed that life satisfaction negatively correlated with loneliness. The life satisfaction depends on one’s cognitive and subjective evaluation of life. Additionally a person's thoughts about themselves and others, influence the likelihood of their forming satisfying relationships, because these cognitions impact on how they interact, as well as how they interpret interpersonal situations (Murphy & Kupshik, 1992; cited in Heinrich, & Gullone, 2006). According to the Previous studies lonely individuals have generally negative view of themselves and the world(Perlman & Peplau, 1981); So that these negative subjective evaluations of these people from life lead to life dissatisfaction.

The results of the present study showed also that emotional loneliness is stronger negative predictor of life satisfaction rather than social loneliness. As would expect Social friendships are almost the source of close friendships; however social friendships are much easier to achieve than close friendships. Hence the absence of close relationships (i.e., emotional loneliness) is more painful than the absence of social friendships(i.e., social loneliness). Therefore emotional loneliness is a stronger negative predictor for life satisfaction.

References


