Research Article

THE CORRELATION OF SELF-ESTEEM AND LONELINESS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Loneliness is usually defined as an unpleasant and emotionally disturbing subjective experience that occurs as response to the discrepancy between desired and achieved levels of social contact. The experience of loneliness is unpleasant and painful experience, followed by feelings of rejection from the people that we care, with simultaneous desire that they accept us and to be part of their lives. Self-esteem can be defined as self-evaluation by which an individual reflects an attitude of acceptance or non-acceptance of himself. Self-esteem is a value and emotional component of the notion of self. Because we live with other people who also value us, self-esteem depends in large part on how others value us. The main goal of the research was to determine the relationship between self-esteem and loneliness in students. The research was conducted on a sample of 200 students (82 males and 118 females) from different departments of the final years of social and technical sciences at the University of Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegowina. The following instruments were used in the study: the Rosenberg self-esteem scale and the Short version of the UCLA loneliness scale. The relationship between self-esteem (as measured by the RSE scale) and loneliness (measured on the eponymous scale) was investigated using the Spearman correlation coefficient. The mean negative correlation between these two variables was calculated (ro= -. 494, p <.05) with high levels of self-esteem accompanied by a low level of loneliness. The results showed a negative association of loneliness with students' self-esteem. The level of loneliness is lower in people who have a higher level of self-esteem, that is, people with low self-esteem have a higher level of loneliness.

Keywords: Self-esteem, Loneliness, Social contacts.

INTRODUCTION

The strongest feelings of loneliness are sometimes evoked when an individual is in the middle of a crowd of people, a "lonely crowd." Feelings of loneliness can be avoided only when there is a developed group life and identification with other people. The third level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs consists of the need to belong. People are a very social type and most people have a strong need to belong to groups (family, clubs, teams, etc.). Being accepted by others and welcomed into the group represents a greater psychological need than physiological needs or security needs. Some observers believe that modern society provides fewer opportunities to meet our need to belong than in the past, when there were ready-made groups and people were automatically members of groups (e.g. multigenerationally extended families and small towns where almost everyone felt like a member of the community) . Loneliness is a sign that these needs are not being met; alienation from one's own social group is another. Humans are social beings and as such have a need for a supportive social network and intimate social relationships in order to feel safe in exploring themselves and the world around them (Bowlby, 1988). Despite man's universal need to belong and create close, stable relationships, most people experience loneliness throughout their lives. Loneliness knows no age, gender, cultural or geographical boundaries.

Self-esteem

A special aspect of self-perception that has been most researched is self-esteem. There are several definitions of self-esteem, so Aronson *et al.* (2005) state that self-esteem is a person's perception of his or her own value, i.e., the degree to which he or she is considered good, capable, and honorable.

Rosenberg (1965, according to Bezinović, 1988, according to Kozjak, 2005) defines self-esteem as a positive or negative attitude about oneself. Individuals with high self-esteem respect themselves and consider themselves valuable, while individuals with low self-esteem are prone to self-rejection, self-dissatisfaction, and self-loathing (Rosenberg, 1965, according to Jelic, 2011). Self-esteem is a value and emotional component of the notion of self. Since we live with other people who also value us, self-esteem is largely dependent on how others value us (Kordić and Pajević, 2007). The authors conceptualize self-esteem both as a stable trait and as a state (Demo, 1992, according to Lacković-Grgin, 2000). Generalized self-esteem, as measured by the Rosenberg self-esteem scale, for example, shows a high degree of stability over time, that is, it is stable through various situations. This means that people with high self-esteem will perceive life events in a different way than people with low self-esteem. Self-esteem consists of two parts: a sense of self-worth and self-confidence. Self-esteem refers to our belief that we have the right to be happy and how we deserve success, love, friendship, and fulfillment. A person of low self-esteem lacks a basic sense of self-worth, he does not believe that he deserves the love and respect of other people. Self-confidence is the belief that we are capable of thinking, learning, making decisions, and overcoming life's challenges. A person of low self-esteem does not feel capable of it. Some findings support a multidimensional structure of self-esteem, while other authors emphasize the irreplaceability of the global measure of self-esteem (Jelić, 2011). Even Rosenberg (1969, according to Jelić, 2011) advocated the use of a measure of global self-esteem and the focus on individual aspects of self-esteem that make up the whole. Self-esteem has shown a negative association with loneliness in a number of studies (Penezić, 1999, Lacković-Grgin *et al.,* 1998b, McWhirter, 1997; Brage and Meredith, 1994, according to Kozjak, 2005). One study

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showed that people with low self-esteem show hostility and rejection of co-workers (Jacobs, Berscheid, & Walster, 1971, according to Peplau *et al.,* 1982, according to Lacković-Grgin, 2009). There is a great chance that situational loneliness will become chronic in people with low self-esteem (Lacković-Grgin, 2009). Levin and Stokes (1986, according to Kozjak, 2005) state that self-esteem could affect loneliness by acting on a person's social network in the sense that people with low self-esteem feel rejected and rarely initiate social interactions, and low self-esteem affects the size and quality of a person's social network, and the consequence of all this is a feeling of loneliness. The global level of self-esteem fluctuates around the usual, dispositional level of an individual, depending on achievements, obstacles, and circumstances that affect a sense of self-worth. Dispositional level of self-esteem is associated with life satisfaction and affects and is crucial for mental and social well-being, as it affects aspirations, personal goals and interaction with others (Mirjanić and Milas, 2009). Thus, individuals with high self-esteem respect themselves and consider themselves valuable, while individuals with low self-esteem are prone to self-rejection, self-dissatisfaction, and self-loathing (Rosenberg, 1965). Such an artificial, statistical division into high and low self-esteem, which is used in research, is not entirely justified. Namely, low self-esteem is found in depressed individuals and some other clinical populations, but rarely in students, who are the most common population in self-esteem research. Nevertheless, low self-esteem is often declared to be moderate self-esteem that corresponds to the mean value on the self-esteem scale. In other words, in most research, the term "low self-esteem" actually refers to people who are somewhat insecure about their notion of themselves. This is confirmed by research that has shown that low self-esteem is associated with less clarity of self-image. Specifically, individuals with high self-esteem cope better with failure compared with individuals with low self-esteem. Furthermore, people with higher self-esteem generally feel happier in life. Finally, research has shown that high self-esteem alleviates anxiety and predicts goal orientation and self-efficacy in students. At the same time, self-esteem proved to be the least stable during childhood, somewhat more stable in adolescence and early adulthood, and again relatively unstable in middle and old age, regardless of gender, ethnicity, nationality or self-esteem (Jelić, 2011). Some believe that people strive for high self-esteem because it allows them to achieve goals. For example, Bednar, Wells, and Peterson (1989; according to Primorac, 2014) state that self-esteem is subjective feedback about the appropriateness of the self. This feedback, or self-esteem, is positive when the individual copes well with the circumstances and negative when the individual avoids threatening situations. Self-esteem then subsequently affects the achievement of goals; high self-esteem improves coping and low self-esteem leads to further avoidance. Self-esteem is one of the foundations of mental health and is a mediator between stress and its psychological effects on the individual (Manenica *et al.,* 1995; according to Primorac, 2014). For this reason, people with low self-esteem have more emotional and motivational problems, are more prone to separation from people, and passively adapt to the demands of the environment as opposed to people with moderate or high self-esteem.

Loneliness

An important group of factors that can affect health are those related to the domain of social functioning, such as the size of the social network, the frequency of social contacts, social support, social isolation, loneliness and solitude. Psychosocial functioning can be an important factor in shaping the assessment of one's own health. The experience of loneliness is an unpleasant and painful experience, accompanied by a feeling of rejection from the people we care about, with a simultaneous desire for them to accept us and be a part of their lives. One of the main reasons we feel lonely is the feeling that we are psychologically alone, despite the fact that other people are around us, because we have not had a close relationship with them. When one's intimate and social needs are not adequately matched, a complex set of feelings called loneliness appears to motivate the search for the fulfillment of those needs (Baumeister and Leary 1995; according to Hughes *et al.,* 2004). There is now significant evidence that loneliness is a key part of the constellations of socioemotional states including self-esteem, mood, anxiety, anger, optimism, fear of negative evaluation, shyness, social skills, social support, dysphoria, and sociability (Shaver and Brennan, 1991; according to Hughes and *et al.,* 2004). Feelings of loneliness are not synonymous with being alone but instead include feelings of isolation, feelings of disconnection, and feelings of non-belonging. These feelings in turn are thought to reflect the difference between one's desire and one's actual relationship.

It is possible to distinguish between social and emotional loneliness. Emotional loneliness arises as a result of a lack of intimate, romantic connection, or an unmet need for emotional intimacy and intimacy in relation to others, and is accompanied by anxiety, restlessness and a sense of emptiness. Social loneliness arises as a result of lack of meaningful friendship and togetherness, and the perception of one's own social non-integration or insufficient social inclusion in various social networks, and is accompanied by a boredom of social marginality (Penezić, Lacković-Grgin and Sorić, 2000, according to Ružić and Bouillet, 2008).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The goal of research

The main goal of this research was to determine the relationship between self-esteem and loneliness on a sample of students.

Description of the research

This research was conducted as part of a master's thesis at the University of Tuzla and presented only part of the overall research work. Prior to the examination itself, permission was sought to test the students. The examination was conducted in groups, in agreement with professors / assistants, at the beginning of regular lectures at the faculty. Students were told that the test results would be used for research purposes, and that it was anonymous. After that, questionnaires were distributed on which detailed instructions were written.

Sample of respondents

The research was conducted on a convenient sample of respondents. Students from different departments of the final years of social and technical sciences at the University of Tuzla participated in the study. The final years of study were taken because students had already formed social networks by then and in order to avoid potential mistakes and get relevant results. The total number of respondents who participated in

the study was 200, of which 82 (41%) were male and 118 (59%) female. The average age of the respondents was 22.8 years (range 21 - 32).

Measuring instruments

The following measuring instruments were used in this study:

- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)
- A short version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)

In 1965, Rosenberg constructed the RSE scale. The scale consists of 10 statements of which 5 are positive and 5 are negative. In the original version, the scale was constructed using Guttman's scaling method. Later, the scale was more often used as a Likert-type scale with 4 or 5 degrees. It was adapted into the form of a Likert-type scale by Crandall (Goldsmith, 1986, according to Lacković-Grgin, 1994), whose report, as well as the report of some other authors, confirmed the good reliability and validity of such an adapted scale. This scale has been used in research for years and has been treated as a one-dimensional scale that reliably measures global self-esteem. However, when the age of the respondents varies significantly in the population, multidimensional solutions are obtained. The shortness of the scale and the good internal consistency, which, for example, on samples of students and young adults is 0.74 to 0.89 (data obtained in several studies by Bezinović and Lacković-Grgin et al.) make it suitable for testing for both scientific and practical purposes. The total score is formed as a linear combination of estimates on each of the particles, and before the summation of the estimates it is necessary to score some of the statements in reverse - statements that indicate a lack of self-esteem (2, 3, 4, 6 and 9). A higher score means more self-esteem. Results range from 10 to 40.

A short version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale

One-dimensional and multidimensional scales are used to measure loneliness. The most commonly used is the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell *et al.,* 1980, according to Lackovic-Grgin *et al.,* 2002), which measures global loneliness understood as a condition. However, numerous studies show that this scale is not one-factor and the number of factors varies from sample to sample. Also, as regards gender differences in loneliness, consistent results were not obtained on different samples of respondents. That is why Allen and Oshagon (1995, according to Lackovic-Grgin *et al.* 2002) proposed a short form of the UCLA scale containing seven particles. The scale is one-dimensional and proved to be invariant with respect to different characteristics of the respondents (by age, gender, race, education, economic status). The scale was also used on samples of Croatian participants - high school students, students, younger and older adults.

The scale contains seven statements that are answered on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 to 5). The total result is formed as a linear combination of results in each individual particle. A higher score indicates higher loneliness. The Cronbach alpha-type reliability coefficients ranged from .83 to .85, which is quite satisfactory given the small number of particles (Lackovic-Grgin *et al.* 1998; 1998a, according to Lackovic-Grgin *et al.* 2002). Scores range from 7 to 35.

Table 1. Reliability coefficients of the scales used for hypothesis testing purposes

	Cronbach α
Self-Esteem	.85
Loneliness	.86

The Cronbach α .70, .80, and .90 reliability coefficient values tell us how reliable the scales are. The coefficient value of .70 is the lower limit of acceptable reliability, the value of 0.80 is acceptable, ie good reliability, and .90 is the highest reliability. The reliability coefficient, Cronbach α, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale in previous studies on samples of students and young adults was .74 to .89 (data obtained in several studies by Bezinović and Lacković-Grgin et al.), while the reliability coefficient in this study is .85 (Table 1), which means that the Self-Esteem Scale consisting of 10 statements has good reliability. The reliability coefficients, Cronbach α, for the Short version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale in earlier studies ranged from .83 to .85 (Lackovic-Grgin *et al.* 1998, 1998a), while in this study it was .86 (Table 1), which shows good scale reliability.

RESULTS

In order to access data processing, it was necessary to check that the results on the scale of self-esteem and loneliness were distributed according to the principles of normal distribution. For this purpose, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-Sz) distribution normality test was applied.

Table 2. Minimum and maximum values, arithmetic mean, standard deviation and results of the normality distribution test (K-Sz) for the results on the scales used in the study

	Min	*Max*	*M*	*SD*	*K-Sz*	*p*
Self-Esteem	10.00	50.00	40.63	6.26	0.11	.000
Loneliness	7.00	35.00	14.04	6.23	0.12	.000

It can be seen from Table 2 that the results on the scales deviate statistically significantly from the normal distribution. The distribution on the Self-esteem scale is negatively asymmetric, while on the Loneliness scale it is positively asymmetric, which could be expected, since most respondents achieve lower results on the Loneliness scale (higher results indicate a higher level of loneliness). The distribution of results on the Self-esteem scale is negatively asymmetric, while the distribution of results on the Loneliness scale is positively asymmetric, but the obtained values of the asymmetry and flatness index are in the range of acceptable values (asymmetry $<| 1 |$, flatness $<| 3 |$). It is considered possible to use parametric statistics if the distributions are relatively regular (not bimodal or U-shaped), and if the samples are large enough and of similar size (Petz, 1997).

Table 3. Descriptive parameters for the results obtained on the loneliness scale

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Total loneliness	200	7.00	35.00	14.04	6.23
Valid N	200				

Table 3 shows the descriptive parameters for the obtained results on the loneliness scale. The arithmetic mean on the Short Version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale is 14.04, and the standard deviation is 6.23. 31 subjects scored a minimum of 7

points and a maximum score of 35, or more precisely 1 respondent has 35 points. The most frequent result is 10 or 18 respondents out of 10 points, and on this basis we can conclude that our respondents generally have a low level of loneliness.

Table 4. Descriptive parameters for the results obtained on the self-esteem scale

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Total self-esteem	200	10.00	50.00	40.63	6.26
Valid N	200				

Table 4 shows the descriptive parameters for the obtained results on the self-esteem scale. The average level of self-esteem for the total sample of respondents (N = 200) is 40.63, and the standard deviation is 6.26. The minimum score achieved on this scale is 10, more precisely 1 respondent scored 10 points, while the maximum 50 points was scored by 3 respondents. The most frequent result is 47, ie 18 respondents scored 47 points.

Examining the connection between self-esteem and loneliness

To determine whether there is a correlation between self-esteem and loneliness, a correlation between these variables was calculated.

Table 5. Coefficients of correlations between self-esteem and loneliness in students (N = 200)

		Total Loneliness	Total Self-Esteem
Total Loneliness	Spearman coefficient		-.494
	p		.000
Total Self-Esteem	Spearman coefficient	-.494	
	p	.000	

The Spearman correlation coefficient (-.494) is negative, which shows a negative correlation between self-esteem and loneliness. The higher the self-esteem, the less loneliness students have. According to Cohen (1988) there are the following guidelines for correlation magnitude: small r = 0.10 to 0.29; mean r = 0.30 to 0.49; large r = 0.50 to 1.0. Following these guidelines, we can conclude that there is a mean correlation between these two variables (above 0.49), which supports the claim that the relationship between self-esteem and loneliness is medium to strong. In our case, Spearman's correlation is -.494, when squared, we get 24.40 percent of the common variance. Self-esteem explains almost 25% of the estimated variance in respondents 'responses on the loneliness scale. This is quite a decent part of the explained variance, when compared to many researches conducted in the social sciences.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between self-esteem and loneliness in a sample of students. The relationship between self-esteem (as measured by the RSE scale; scores on a scale ranging from 10 to 40) and loneliness (measured on a UCLA scale; scores on a scale ranging from 7 to 35) was investigated using the Spearman correlation coefficient. The mean negative correlation between these two variables was calculated (ro = -. 494, p <.05) with high levels of self-esteem accompanied by a low level of loneliness. We conclude that the level of loneliness is lower in people who

have a higher level of self-esteem, or people with low self-esteem have a higher level of loneliness. Similar results have been obtained in a number of domestic and foreign studies to date. Kozjak (2005) also obtained a negative correlation between self-esteem and loneliness in research. Personal characteristics such as social anxiety, shyness and low self-esteem contribute to loneliness. People with loneliness for a long time usually have a negative evaluation of themselves and others, are reluctant to talk about themselves (which makes it difficult for them to develop intimate relationships) and are less socially sensitive. This behavior causes negative reactions in other people and further reduces self-esteem, creating a vicious circle in which low self-esteem, maladaptive social behavior and feelings of loneliness are maintained with each other. Penezić (1999; according to Kozjak, 2005), using also a short form of the UCLA loneliness scale and the Rosenberg self-esteem scale on three samples of participants of different ages, obtained a moderate negative correlation (r = -.53, p <0.01) of these variables at all ages. groups of participants. Lackovic-Grgin *et al.* (1998b; according to Kozjak, 2005) correlated r = -.47 (p <0.01) on a sample of students using the same instruments. Furthermore, McWhirter (1997; according to Kozjak, 2005) applied a second version of the UCLA loneliness scale (1980) to a sample of students aged 18 to 37 as a measure of loneliness. There was also a moderate negative correlation with the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (r = -.51, p <0.01). In order to examine the self-esteem of adolescents (N = 239), the Rosenberg self-esteem scale was applied in the Kozjak study (2005). The research showed the existence of a moderate negative relationship between loneliness and self-esteem (rs = -.277, p <0.01), which means that lonely adolescents also have lower self-esteem.

Conclusion

A statistically significant negative association between loneliness and self-esteem was found. We conclude that the level of loneliness is lower in people who have a higher level of self-esteem, or people with low self-esteem have a higher level of loneliness.

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