

Cross-Cultural, Interdisciplinary Health Studies

# Predicting the Feeling of Loneliness Based on Perceived Social Support, Satisfaction with Life, and Religious Attitude in Non-Indigenous Students Living in Dormitories

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# **Quantitative Study**

### **Abstract**

**Background:** Changes in the university course can create a cluster of diverse emotions in addition to feelings of excitement and expectation, such as loneliness and disappointment, in students. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships of perceived social support, life satisfaction, and religious attitude with the feeling of loneliness in students.

**Methods:** The research method was descriptive and correlational. The statistical population consisted of all non-indigenous students residing in Rasht city dormitories in the academic year 2016-2017. Using multistage cluster sampling method, 160 subjects were selected and answered the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), Serajzadeh's Religious Attitude Questionnaire, the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS), and UCLA Loneliness Scale (1996). Data were analyzed using regression and Pearson correlation in SPSS software.

**Results:** The findings showed that perceived social support, life satisfaction, and religious attitude had a relationship with the feeling of loneliness (P < 0.01). In addition, the results showed that perceived social support, life satisfaction, and religious attitude could explain 33% of the variance in the feeling of loneliness (criterion variable).

**Conclusion:** It can be concluded that the authorities of dormitories can increase the level of life satisfaction and reduce students' feeling of loneliness by promoting social support and religious attitudes among students.

Keywords: Perceived social support, Life satisfaction, Religious attitude, Feeling of Ioneliness

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# **Introduction**

The feeling of loneliness is one of the most

Corresponding Author: Seyedeh Maryam Mousavi Email: mmousavi.msc@gmail.com important crises in youth and even other lifestages; it causes individuals difficulty in adapting to their environment (Hosein Chari & Kayyer, 2003). Since the 1970s, researches in the fields of conceptualization, definition, and constituent elements of the feeling of loneliness have progressed and reported their prevalence in the general population and students (Wawrzyniak & Whiteman, 2011). In addition, some researchers believe that while adolescents experience loneliness more than any other age group, the risk factor for experiencing the feeling of loneliness increases in late adolescence and early stages of youth (Ang & Abu Talib, 2012). The feeling of loneliness can be influenced by the objective and quantitative characteristics of social relations (such as the frequency of interactions or the number of friends); however, it is further affected by the subjective and qualitative assessments of these relationships, such as satisfaction with communication or perceived social competence (Priest, Perry, Ferdinand, Kelaher, & Paradies, 2017).

A study has shown that the feeling of loneliness can be predicted by lack of a reliable friend and the level of perceived social support (Pamukcu & Meydan, 2010). In addition, perceived social support has a great on physical, mental, and satisfaction and various aspects of the quality life (QOL) of individuals Fernandez Munoz, Navarro-Pardo Murphy, 2017). Received social support emphasizes the amount of support received by the individual, and perceived social support is the individual assessment of the availability of support in the time of necessity (Siedlecki, Salthouse, Oishi, & Jeswani, 2014). Additionally, social support appropriate and almost accessible tool can be used in interventions designed to increase the welfare level, especially mental well-being (Seeman, Lusignolo, Albert, & Berkman, 2001). Moreover, during the university course, there are many problems in each individual's personal and social life. Life satisfaction is one of the variables influenced by the feeling of loneliness; it includes cognitive-judgmental assessment of personal life which is a comparison of the living conditions of a person with the criteria he has set for himself. Life satisfaction represents the

individual's positive attitude towards the world in which he/she lives (Siedlecki et al., 2014; Seeman et al., 2001). Lack of consistency between goals, desires, and needs can have effect on dissatisfaction that often arises because of certain issues and problems (Vakili, Mirzaei, & Modarresi, 2017). Life satisfaction is a subjective and unique concept for every human being, it constitutes the essential part of mental well-being, and generally refers to personal cognitive life assessments (Delahaij, Gaillard & van Dam, 2010). Religion, as a way to cope with these problems, can play an important positive role including filling the empty spaces in life, increasing social support and management of stress, adapting to the situation, life and death conceptualization, and increasing the sense of happiness. Research has shown that religiosity and mental health have a negative and significant relationship with loneliness (Ciobanu & Fokkema, 2017). Moreover, who received adequate social support from family and friends were more satisfied with life and suffered less from loneliness (Azarian, Aghakhani & Ashuri, 2016). Similarly, elderly people with a religious attitude have a greater sense of happiness and meaningfulness in their lives and feel less lonely than those lacking this attitude (Aliakbari Dehkordi, Peymanfar, Mohtashami, & Borjali, 2015). The prevalence of feeling of loneliness was lower among elderly people with a good general health (Hemmati Alamdarlou, Dehshiri, Shojaie & Hakimi Rad, 2008). Paolini, Yanez, and Kelly (2006) showed that social support perceived by friends and other important people did not have a significant relationship with mental health and life satisfaction; however, life satisfaction had a significant relationship with mental health. By studying loneliness, social support in stress, and young adolescents, Lee and Goldstein (2016)showed that the relationship between social support (from a friend or a romantic partner, but not a family member) and loneliness was negative and meaningful. Hu, Hu, Huang,

and Zheng, (2016) in a study on life satisfaction, self-esteem, and loneliness in adults and adults with the tendency toward the opposite sex in China, showed that life satisfaction can be predicted by demographic variables, feeling of loneliness, and selfesteem in both groups. Kearns, Whitley, Tannahill, and Ellaway (2015) examined the sense of loneliness, social relationships, health, and well-being in deprived societies. The results of the study showed that the place of residence is one of the predictors of the feeling of loneliness, and communication with neighbors is one way to deal with loneliness. In studying the impact of social support on the sense of coherence of users of mental health services, Langeland and Wahl (2009) showed that social support was a good predictor of coherence. Regarding importance of the role of students in the advancement and excellence of societies, it is natural that the study of psychological factors affecting the physical and psychological wellbeing of this stratum is of particular importance (Anderson, Steen Stavropoulos, 2017). Considering the role of psychological factors on students' mental health, this study was conducted to examine the prediction of the feeling of loneliness based on perceived social support, life satisfaction, and religious attitude in nonindigenous students living in dormitories.

### Methods

This research was performed using a descriptive correlational method. The statistical population consisted of all nonindigenous female students of the University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran, living in dormitories in the academic year 2016-2017. Based on the number of variables and type of research, for each variable, 20 to 50 subjects were selected by multistage cluster sampling method (total: participants). To select a sample, 2 dormitories were selected from among all Medical Sciences dormitories in Rasht. Then, 80 students were randomly selected from among the students in each dormitory. In each field of study, students of a class (specialized classes in the same field and 20 students from each class) were selected randomly. The study inclusion criteria included being students, non-indigenous, and living in student dormitories. The exclusion criteria included lack of interest in participation in the research and presence of physical and mental illness. To comply with ethical principles, students completed the pre-participation inform consent form for the research, and the code of ethics was issued with IR.IAU.RASHT.REC.1395.85 number from the Islamic Azad University, Rasht Branch, Iran. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), Serajzadeh's Religious Attitude Questionnaire, and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) were used. The MSPSS was designed by Stewart et al. (2000) to measure perceived social support from family, friends, and important persons in the individual's life. The MSPSS consists of 12 items scored on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree). Bruwer, Emsley, Kidd, Lochner, and Seedat (2008) measured the internal reliability of this instrument in a sample of 788 high school students using Cronbach's alpha; they reported an internal reliability of 90 to 86% for the subscales of the tool, and 86% for the entire tool. Salimia and Jowkar (2011) have reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 89%, 86%, and 82% for the social support received from the family, friends, and other important persons in individual's life, respectively. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the 3 dimensions of social support from family, friends, and important person's in an individual's life were reported as 0.69, 0.71, and 0.75, respectively.

The Muslim Religious Attitudes Questionnaire has been adapted to Islam (especially Shiite Islam) by Serajzadeh based on Golak and Sattar's (1965) model. This questionnaire has a 4 dimensional measurement (subscale) of religiosity; belief, religious emotions, consequence, and rituals.

Belief is the truths expected to be believed by the followers of a religion (e.g., that on the Day of Judgment, our actions and behavior accurately judged). The aspect of experience religious or emotions concerns emotions, perceptions, and feelings is related to having a spiritual connection with God (e.g., sometimes I feel that I am close to God). The consequential aspect or effects of religion that supervise the influence of beliefs, deeds, experiences, and religious knowledge on the daily lives of followers of that religion (e.g., the phenomenon of nonveil must be resolutely fought). Certain religious rituals or practices that include worship and prayer, participation in certain religious ceremonies, fasting, and etc., which is expected to be followed by the followers of any religion (e.g., "Do you pray?", or "How often do you go to the mosque for congregational prayers?"). All items of the questionnaire are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from totally disagree to completely agree (Sharify, Mehrabizadeh, & Shokrkon, 2005). The formal validity of the questionnaire was obtained through a survey from some PhD students who had a complete knowledge of Islam. The relationship between their religiosity scores on Golak and Sattar's scale and their self-assessment of religiosity was reported through a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.61. This amount was considered as an external validity. In this research, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the four aspects of belief, experience or religious emotions, consequence, and ritual were obtained at 0.79, 0.69, 0.77, and 0.77, respectively. The SWLS was developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) for all age groups and revised by Pavot and Diener (1993). The SWLS is a 5-dimensional scale and the items are scored on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (completely agree). Thus, the total score of the questionnaire ranges between 5 (low satisfaction) and 35 (high satisfaction). Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith, (1999) evaluated the reliability of this scale; they

reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87 and the coefficient of re-test scores as 0.82 after 2 months of implementation. The reliability of the SWLS was verified. The reliability of this scale was obtained at 85% by Russell, Cutrona, Rose, and Yurko (1984) using Cronbach's alpha.

The UCLA Loneliness Scale designed by Russell et al. (1984) is used to measure loneliness, is the most well-known loneliness scale, and has more psychometric health questions than other scales. This scale consists of 20 questions scored on a 4-point Likert scale.. Cronbach's alpha of the scale ranged from 0.89 to 0.94. The reliability of this scale was reported as 0.77 using Cronbach's alpha. To analyze the statistical data, descriptive and inferential statistics were used. In order to describe the demographic characteristics of the subjects and the data of descriptive statistics, frequency, percentage, and mean and standard deviation were used. To determine the significance of the research hypotheses, multivariate regression and Pearson correlation were used. Data were analyzed in SPSS software (version 20, IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA).

## Results

Demographic data showed that the mean age of the subjects was  $26.81 \pm 4.47$  years, with minimum and maximum age of 18 and 43 years, respectively. All the participants in the study were students, single, and female. Furthermore, descriptive measures indicated that the average score of feeling of loneliness of the students participating in this study was  $13.55 \pm 12.18$ . The students' mean perceived social support score was  $44.71 \pm 10.36$ , and their average life satisfaction score was  $14.5 \pm 6.14$ . Among the dimensions of religious attitude, the highest average score was  $20.68 \pm 7.56$ .

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to test the assumptions of using regression, including the normality of distribution. At a significant level of 0.12, the value of Ks-z = 1.04 represents the normal distribution of criterion variable, so parametric tests may be used in the hypothesis testing.

Table 1. Correlation matrix of perceived social supports, satisfaction with life, religious attitude, and feeling of loneliness

Variable	Feeling of loneliness	Social support	Life satisfaction	Belief	Religious emotions	Consequence	Ritual
Feeling of loneliness	=	0.51**	0.34**	0.43**	0.09	0.28**	0.12
Social support		-	0.34	0.25	0.15	0.14	0.22
Life satisfaction			-	0.49	0.29	0.35	0.17
Belief				-	0.11	0.19	0.31
Religious emotions					-	0.24	0.32
Consequence						-	0.14
Ritual							-

<sup>\*:</sup> Significance at the level of 0.01

In addition, the multiplicity assumption was used by determining the amount of tolerance and the acting of aggregate factor. Moreover, to determine the independence of errors, the nonlinear relationship between the remaining data was checked and the Watson camera data values (D-W = 1.87) were obtained. Furthermore, Cook's distance index was 0.01. Therefore, the independence of the residuals (errors) and the same dispersion were confirmed and regression could be used.

As can be seen in table 1, the correlation of perceived social support, life satisfaction, and religious attitude (except for the religious attitude dimensions of religious emotions and rituals) with loneliness was statistically significant (P < 0.01).

The results of regression analysis using the concurrent method showed that perceived social support, life satisfaction, and religious attitude can explain 33% of the variance in loneliness (criterion variable) (Multiple correlation R: 0.57; Multiple correlation squared R<sup>2</sup>: 0.33; Modified R<sup>2</sup>: 0.31; Standard error: 9.9; F Changes: 13.51; P = 0.001).

As shown in table 2, the obtained value (F = 19.61, 15.39) is significant (P < 0.01); therefore, it can be concluded with confidence that the feeling of loneliness can be predicted based on perceived social support, life satisfaction, and religious attitude. The predictive variable (perceived

social support, life satisfaction, and religious attitude) has the power of predicting the criterion variable (feeling of loneliness). Therefore, the results of regression are permissible to analyze and report.

According to the results presented in table 3, social support, life satisfaction, belief dimension, and consequential aspect with B-standard of -0.024, -0.154, -0.273, and -0.166, respectively, have inversely been able to predict the feeling of loneliness (P < 0.01); the dimensions of religious emotion and ritual did not have a significant role in explaining the variance in the feeling of loneliness.

# **Discussion**

The results of this study showed that perceived social support, life satisfaction, and religious attitude had a relationship with the feeling of loneliness in single female students. Moreover, the correlation of perceived social support, life satisfaction, and religious attitude (except for the dimensions of religious emotions and rituals) with the feeling of loneliness, was statistically significant. Social support, life belief satisfaction, dimension, and consequential dimension had an inverse relationship with the feeling of loneliness. This finding is consistent with the results of researches by Mellor, Stokes, Firth, Hayashi, and Cummins (2008), Vahedi and Nazari (2011), and Aliakbari Dehkordi et al. (2015).

**Table 2.** Results of analysis of variance for the significances of variables prediction

Sources of changes	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	P-value
Regression	10664.26	6	1777.38	19.15	0.001**
Remaining	14199.98	153	92.81		
Total	24864.24	159			

<sup>\*\*:</sup> Significance at the level of 0.01

df: Degree of freedom

**Table 3.** Summary of regression results of loneliness prediction based on perceived social support, life satisfaction, and

religious attitude

Model	Non-standard coefficient (b)	Standard error	Standard coefficients b	t	P-value
Constant amount	99.88	4.84	-0.312	20.62	0.01
Social support	-0.51	0.08	-0.420	-6.70	0.01
Life satisfaction	-0.31	0.14	-0.154	-2.25	0.03
Belief	-0.61	0.16	-0.273	-3.78	0.01
Religious emotions	-0.12	0.14	-0.055	-0.85	0.40
Consequence	-0.54	0.21	-0.166	-2.62	0.01
Rituals	0.07	0.11	-0.042	-0.62	0.54

Chen et al. (2017) concluded that there was a more inverse relationship between students' loneliness and their QOL. Dastgheib (2014) did not find a meaningful relationship between religious orientation and QOL in students.To clarify this finding, it can be pointed out that social support is of particular importance for several reasons; first, the human being is a social being and social relation is considered as one of the main factors in the OOL of individuals. A strong evidence to confirm this is the undesirable effects of social isolation or loss of social links on people's lives. In addition, social protection as an appropriate and almost accessible tool may be used in interventions designed to increase the welfare level, especially mental wellbeing (Priest et al., 2017). Social support can increase people's resistance to the negative effects of stressful conditions (Kobasa & Puccetti, 1983). Therefore, the existence of supportive resources, such as friends, family, and important persons in an individual's life, can reduce the effects of loneliness. In addition, lack of trust among peers may lead to loneliness. Due to lack of financial autonomy, dormanent students are less likely to be supported by the family and have low social interactions with friends. The lack of acceptance of peers and the lack of peer relationships may reduce the sense of social value and this can increase loneliness in these individuals (Lotvonen, Kyngas, Koistinen, Bloigu, & Elo, 2017). Therefore, dormitory life can provide a ground for the feeling of loneliness in students because of academic problems. Furthermore, indigenous students living in a dormitory

experience more problems in life and are require more relationships with friends and in the community. Lack of satisfactory relationships and inadequate support sources from family, friends, and other persons in an individual's life make these students unenthusiastic about having relationships with others, which is one of the reasons for their feeling of loneliness. Moreover, life satisfaction can be attributed to internal traits and adaptive processes. These internal traits and psychological processes, along with access to supportive resources, can explain negative relationship between life satisfaction and feeling of loneliness (Carlson, Hunter, Ferguson, & Whitten, 2011). Religion and faith create motivations towards the world in humans and help them in facing the horrific events of life. Moreover, an individual's life goals are determined so as to prevent mental problems in their life. In fact, religious attitudes help people to have a more tolerable life and add to their feeling of existential value. Religious systems, in this context, provide comprehensive and complete frameworks that provide a comprehensive definition of the universe and identify the position of man in it. Present-day modern cities have changed the shapes of social networks in the city and have weakened them.

This instability in social relationships and the weakness of the networks itself is increasing the feeling of loneliness. Religion affects the health of the community as a coherent factor that brings people together and reestablishes social links (Carlson et al., 2011). The more developed the religion is, the healthier, more integrated, and socially supported the people

are in that society. The level of isolation and loneliness will reduce with the development of social health and religions' expansion, and therefore, social relations and social support in societies. A limitation of this research was the lack of control of some variables such as socioeconomic status that can affect the responses to questionnaire questions. In addition, the use of selfmonitoring tools to measure variables may lead to inaccurate responses in some individuals.

### Conclusion

According to the results of the research, there is a relationship between perceived social support, life satisfaction, religious attitude and feeling of loneliness. Therefore, the welfare department of the university can tailor recreational programs to the students' needs and interests to help them use their leisure time optimally. This will improve their mental health and the efficiency of dormitory students. It is suggested that descriptive indicators such occupation, and socioeconomic level be considered in future studies in order to determine the effect of these factors on individual feeling of loneliness. Furthermore, it is suggested that, in addition to questionnaires, other methods (interview, observation, and etc.) be used to gather information.

# **Conflict of Interests**

Authors have no conflict of interests.

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