

The Interactional Role of Dysfunctional Attitudes in the Relationship Between Religiosity and Existential

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Research Article

History

Received: 02.07.2025

Accepted: 19.11.2025

Published: 15.12.2025

Plagiarism

This article has been reviewed by at least two referees and scanned via a plagiarism software.

Ethical Statement: It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited.

Funding: The author declares that have no competing interests.

Competing Interests: The author declares that have no competing interests.

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Abstract

According to the findings of the Turkish General Social Survey (TGSS), feelings of loneliness are more prevalent among young people. Due to the frequent changes in values, emotions and thoughts that characterise individuals during this period of life, it can be said that they are particularly vulnerable to loneliness. Existential loneliness, a deeper form of loneliness, is also referred to as ultimate loneliness. Potential triggers for young individuals to experience existential loneliness include meaninglessness and the inability to make oneself understood or express one's feelings. However, loneliness has been associated with various mental and physical health problems, there is insufficient research on individuals experiencing existential loneliness during adolescence. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to examine the mediating role of dysfunctional attitudes in the relationship between religiosity and existential loneliness in individuals in early adulthood. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Gümüşhane University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee on 28/05/2025 (approval number 2025/5). The study included 408 participants (294 women and 114 men) aged between 18 and 29. Data were obtained using the Religiosity Scale, the Existential Loneliness Scale, and the Dysfunctional Attitudes Scale. These were analysed using IBM SPSS AMOS and the PROCESS add-on module for SPSS. Correlation analysis revealed that religiosity was negatively associated with existential loneliness and dysfunctional attitudes, while existential loneliness and dysfunctional attitudes were positively associated with each other. Additionally, the analyses revealed that dysfunctional attitudes played a mediating role in the relationship between religiosity and existential loneliness. The mediation analysis conducted within the scope of the study was performed using the PROCESS macro (Model 4). Interventions targeting dysfunctional attitudes and promoting a healthier self-concept/self-image could be crucial in safeguarding young adults against existential loneliness. These results shed light on potential psychological mechanisms that explain the effect of religiosity on loneliness experienced by young people.

Keywords: Psychology of Religion, Religiosity, Existential Loneliness, Dysfunctional Attitudes, Adolescence.

Cite as

ERİCEK MARAŞLIOĞLU, Şerife. "The Interactional Role of Dysfunctional Attitudes in the Relationship Between Religiosity and Existential". *Journal of Kocatepe Islamic Sciences* 8/2 (2025), 566-580. <https://doi.org/10.52637/kiid.1733222>

Dindarlık ile Varoluşsal Yalnızlık Arasındaki İlişkide Fonksiyonel Olmayan Tutumların Etkileşimsel Rolü

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Araştırma Makalesi

Süreç

Geliş Tarihi: 02.07.2025

Kabul Tarihi: 19.11.2025

Yayın Tarihi: 15.12.2025

İntihal

Bu makale, en az iki hakem tarafından incelendi ve intihal içermediği teyit edildi.

Etik Beyan: Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.

Finansman: Yazar, bu araştırmayı desteklemek için herhangi bir dış fon almadığını kabul eder.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazar, çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan eder.

Telif Hakkı

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Öz

Türkiye Genel Sosyal Saha Araştırması (TGSS) bulgularına göre genç bireyler arasında yalnızlık hissinin daha yaygın olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Gençlik döneminde bireyi karakterize eden değerler, duygular ve düşüncelerin sıklıkla değişmesi ve gelişmesi nedeniyle, bu dönemdeki bireyler özellikle yalnızlık karşısında savunmasızdır denilebilir. Daha derin bir yalnızlık hissi olan varoluşsal yalnızlık, aynı zamanda nihai yalnızlık olarak da tanımlanan yalnızlığın bir yönüdür. Anlamsızlık, kendini anlamlı kılmak veya duyguları ifade etmek, özellikle genç bireyler için varoluşsal yalnızlık deneyimlemek için potansiyel tetikleyicilerdir. Ancak, literatüre bakıldığında yalnızlık çeşitli ruhsal ve fiziksel sağlık sorunlarıyla ilişkilendirilmiş olsa da gençlik döneminde varoluşsal yalnızlık deneyimleyen bireyler hakkında yeterince çalışma yapılmadığı gözlemlenmiştir. Bu bağlamda çalışmada ilk yetişkinlik döneminde olan bireylerin dindarlık ile varoluşsal yalnızlıkları arasındaki ilişkide fonksiyonel olmayan tutumların aracılık rolünün incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Çalışmanın etik onayı Gümüşhane Üniversitesi Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Kurulu'ndan 28/05/2025 tarihinde (onay numarası 2025/5) alınmıştır. Çalışmaya 18-29 yaş aralığında değişen 408 (294 kadın 114 erkek) katılımcı dâhil edilmiştir. Veriler; Dindarlık Ölçeği, Varoluşsal Yalnızlık Ölçeği ve Fonksiyonel Olmayan Tutumlar Ölçeği kullanılarak elde edilmiştir. Elde edilen veriler IBM SPSS AMOS ve SPSS eklenti modülü PROCESS programı kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Korelasyon analizi sonuçları, dindarlığın varoluşsal yalnızlık ve fonksiyonel olmayan tutumlar ile negatif ilişkili; varoluşsal yalnızlık ve fonksiyonel olmayan tutumların ise birbirleri ile pozitif yönde ilişkili olduğunu göstermiştir. Ayrıca, yapılan analizlerde fonksiyonel olmayan tutumların dindarlık ile varoluşsal yalnızlık arasındaki ilişkide aracılık rolünün olduğu belirlenmiştir. Çalışma kapsamında gerçekleştirilen aracılık analizi PROCESS makrosu (Model 4) kullanılarak yürütülmüştür. Bu bağlamda, bireylerin işlevsel olmayan tutumları azaltmayı ve daha sağlıklı bir öz-kavrayış geliştirmeyi amaçlayan psikolojik müdahalelerin, özellikle ilk yetişkinlik dönemindeki bireyleri varoluşsal yalnızlığın olumsuz etkilerinden korumada etkili bir rol oynayabileceği öne sürülebilir. Bu sonuçlar dindarlığın genç bireylerdeki yalnızlık deneyimi üzerindeki etkisini açıklayan potansiyel psikolojik mekanizmalara ışık tutmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Psikolojisi, Dindarlık, Varoluşsal Yalnızlık, Fonksiyonel Olmayan Tutumlar, Gençlik Dönemi.

Atıf

ERİCEK MARAŞLIOĞLU, Şerife. "The Interactional Role of Dysfunctional Attitudes in the Relationship Between Religiosity and Existential". *Kocatepe İslami İlimler Dergisi* 8/2 (2025), 566-580. <https://doi.org/10.52637/kiid.1733222>

Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), loneliness¹ is a growing social problem that cognitive and psychological disorders to physical illness and even death.² In recent years, some health experts have described the widespread loneliness experienced by many people as a global public health problem.³ In line with this, the United Kingdom and Japan have established ministries to address loneliness. Existential loneliness,⁴ which has accompanied humanity since the beginning of time, can occur momentarily or over long periods, frequently or rarely. Due to its intensity and internal nature, existential loneliness is considered a unique emotional state for each individual.⁵

According to existential phenomenology, all humans experience existential loneliness to some degree due to their awareness of mortality, vulnerability and limitations.⁶ Existential loneliness is not only the absence of meaningful relationships,⁷ but also an ontological human characteristic expressing a sense of alienation from others and the world.⁸ Literature often emphasises that existential loneliness frequently occurs alongside meaninglessness, which is defined as the feeling of being lost in one's internal and external worlds due to a lack of meaning in life.⁹

Existential loneliness has mostly been observed among vulnerable individuals, such as the sick, the elderly¹⁰ and immigrants.¹¹ However, existential loneliness, which typically arises during transitional periods, has also become an issue in early adulthood due to shifting social integration dynamics, unstable relationships, and evolving consumption habits brought about by the digital revolution.¹² Early adulthood is a vulnerable period for mental health development. It represents a developmental transition between childhood and adulthood. During this stage, individuals experience significant changes in their bodies, identities, and social relationships.¹³ Existential philosophers argue that individuals are influenced by their past, present, and future, all of which affect their lives.¹⁴ For example, early adulthood brings with it the freedom to make choices. While this may seem liberating to some, others may struggle to find meaning in life as a result.¹⁵ If the search for meaning fails, however, the individual may experience feelings of alienation, meaninglessness and inner emptiness. Furthermore, uncertainty about whether the physical, psychological and relational changes experienced during this period are normal can give rise to dysfunctional attitudes¹⁶ - a fundamental concept in cognitive behavioural therapy - creating emotional

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- 3 Murthy Vivek, "Work and the Loneliness Epidemic", Harvard Business Publishing 9/3 (2017).
- 4 Linda Carman Copel, "A Conceptual Model", *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services* 26/1 (1988), 14-19.
- 5 Louise Mansfield etc., "A Conceptual Review of Loneliness in Adults: Qualitative Evidence Synthesis", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18/21 (2021), 1-19; Ben Mijuskovic, "Loneliness and Human Nature", *Psychological Perspectives* 12/1 (1981), 69-77.
- 6 Martin Heidegger, *Varlık ve Zaman*, trans. Kaan H. Ökten (İstanbul: Alfa Yayınları, 2021); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Varoluşçuluk*, trans. Asım Bezirci (İstanbul: Say Yayınları, 2022); Paul Tillich, *Olmak Cesareti*, trans. F. Cihan Dansuk (İstanbul: Okyanus Yayınları, 2014).
- 7 Eric J. Ettema etc., "Existential Loneliness and End-of-Life Care: A Systematic Review", *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 31/2 (2010), 141-169.
- 8 Abir K. Bekhet etc., "Loneliness: A Concept Analysis", *Nursing Forum* 43/4 (2008), 207-213; Irvin D. Yalom, *Varoluşçu Psikoterapi*, trans. Zeliha Babayiğit (İstanbul: Pegasus Yayınları, 2018); Heidegger, *Varlık ve Zaman*; Aviva M. Mayers etc., "The Existential Loneliness Questionnaire: Background, Development, and Preliminary Findings", *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 58/9 (2002), 1183-1193.
- 9 Bk. Viktor E. Frankl, *İnsanın Anlam Arayışı*, trans. Selçuk Budak (İstanbul: Okuyan Us Yayınları, 2018); Yalom, *Varoluşçu Psikoterapi*; Betty PM Chung etc., "Overcoming Existential Loneliness: A Cross-Cultural Study", *BMC Geriatrics* 20/1 (2020), 1-12; Marina Sjöberg etc., "Being Disconnected from Life: Meanings of Existential Loneliness as Narrated by Frail Older People", *Aging & Mental Health* 22/10 (2018), 1357-1364; Albert Camus, *Sisifos Söyleneni*, trans. Tahsin Yücel (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 1997).
- 10 Theo G Van Tilburg, "Emotional, Social, and Existential Loneliness Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Prevalence and Risk Factors Among Dutch Older Adults", ed. Jessica Kelley, *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 77/7 (2022), 179-184.
- 11 Chung etc., "Overcoming Existential Loneliness", 1-12.
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- 13 Tide Garnow etc., "Trapped and Lost in Transition Existential Loneliness during Adolescence Described in Retrospect by Swedish University Students", *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 29/1 (2024), 1-15.
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- 15 Viktor E. Frankl, *İnsanın Anlam Arayışı*, trans. Selçuk Budak (İstanbul: Okuyan Us Yayınları, 2018).
- 16 Rachel J.M. Slavny etc., "Age-Related Changes in Cognitive Biases during Adolescence", *Journal of Adolescence* 74/1 (2019), 63-70.

chaos in the individual.¹⁷ These emotional developments create a fertile and vulnerable environment for existential loneliness.

According to the cognitive behavioural therapy framework, people have rules, beliefs and assumptions that they use to interpret situations relating to themselves, others and the world. If these rules, beliefs and assumptions are rigid and inflexible - often becoming unrealistic - they can cause individuals difficulty in adapting to themselves and others. The rigid and inappropriate beliefs that guide a person's life are called 'dysfunctional attitudes'.¹⁸ Such attitudes are shaped by early close relationships and family relationships,¹⁹ representing permanent personality traits that persist throughout life. Dysfunctional beliefs stem from negative core beliefs about the self, the world, and the future.²⁰ In other words, dysfunctional attitudes are a tendency to perceive, evaluate and respond negatively to reality in relationships with oneself and the external world.

Studies conducted on various groups of people have revealed that those with dysfunctional attitudes are prone to mental health problems such as severe depression,²¹ anxiety,²² stress²³ and addiction.²⁴ Such individuals may develop the belief that they are powerless, that other people are untrustworthy and that the world is an unjust place. Over time, these beliefs can weaken social bonds, cause withdrawal from personal responsibilities and lead to an increasing sense of loneliness. Literature emphasises that identifying such attitudes and implementing cognitive behavioural therapy interventions, utilising various behavioural and cognitive techniques, can effectively reduce the perceptual changes that accompany loneliness.²⁵ In this regard, applications of cognitive behavioural therapy have indicated that religious beliefs are an important factor in alleviating negative mental states.²⁶

In this context, numerous cross-sectional and prospective studies conducted with community and clinical samples have demonstrated a significant association between religiosity and positive mental health indicators, such as a better perceived quality of life,²⁷ happiness,²⁸ mercy²⁹, well-being,³⁰ self-esteem,³¹ optimism,³² life satisfaction³³ and healthy social relationships.³⁴ Conversely, studies have shown that religion can be a protective factor against psychopathological conditions such as depression, anxiety, stress,

¹⁷ James J. Gross, "Emotion Regulation: Taking Stock and Moving Forward.", *Emotion* 13/3 (2013), 359-365.

¹⁸ Aaron T. Beck, "Cognition, Affect, and Psychopathology", *Archives of General Psychiatry* 24/6 (1971), 495; Aaron T. Beck, "Thinking and Depression: I. Idiosyncratic Content and Cognitive Distortions", *Archives of General Psychiatry* 9/4 (1963), 324; Beck, "Cognition, Affect, and Psychopathology"; Gary P. Brown - Aaron T. Beck, "Dysfunctional Attitudes, Perfectionism, and Models of Vulnerability to Depression.", *Perfectionism: Theory, Research, and Treatment*, ed. Gordon L. Flett - Paul L. Hewitt (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2002), 231-251.

¹⁹ Matthew C. Morris etc., "Interactive Models of Depression Vulnerability: The Role of Childhood Trauma, Dysfunctional Attitudes, and Coping", *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 53/2 (2014), 245-263.

²⁰ Beck, "Cognition, Affect, and Psychopathology", 495-500.

²¹ Hatice Odacı, "Correlation between Self-Perception and Aggressiveness: The Mediating Role of Loneliness", *Journal of Mood Disorders* 7/4 (2017), 1; Muhammed Yıldız, "Üniversite Öğrencilerinde Fonksiyonel Olmayan Tutumların ve Olumsuz Otomatik Düşüncelerin Depresyona Etkisi", *Ulusal Eğitim Akademi Dergisi* 1/1 (2017), 1-7.

²² Adabel Lee - Benjamin L. Hankin, "Insecure Attachment, Dysfunctional Attitudes, and Low Self-Esteem Predicting Prospective Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety During Adolescence", *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology* 38/2 (2009), 219-231; Muhammed Ali Ağca, *Kanser Hastalarında Otomatik Düşünce ve Fonksiyonel Olmayan Tutumların Kaygı Düzeylerini Yordayıcı Gücü* (Konya: Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi, Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2021).

²³ Christopher C. Conway etc., "Dysfunctional Attitudes and Affective Responses to Daily Stressors: Separating Cognitive, Genetic, and Clinical Influences on Stress Reactivity", *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 39/3 (2015), 366-377.

²⁴ Feride Ercan etc., "Genç Yetişkinlerde Fonksiyonel Olmayan Tutumlar ve Dijital Bağımlılık Düzeyi İlişkisi", *Bağımlılık Dergisi* 24/3 (2023), 361-370.

²⁵ Karen S. Rook, "Promoting Social Bonding: Strategies for Helping the Lonely and Socially Isolated.", *American Psychologist* 39/12 (1984), 1389-1407; Stephanie Cacioppo etc., "Loneliness: Clinical Import and Interventions", *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10/2 (2015), 238-249.

²⁶ Donald F. Walker etc., "Addressing Religious and Spiritual Issues in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Children and Adolescents.", *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 41/2 (2010), 174-180.

²⁷ Ahmet Albayrak - Emine Kurt, "Meme Kanseri Hastalarında Ağrı ve Uvuz Kaybına (Mastektomi) Bağlı Depresyon Düzeylerinin Yaşam Kalitesi ve Dindarlık ile İlişkisi", *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, (2016), 41-81.

²⁸ Mehmet Akgül, "Yaşlılık ve Dindarlık Dindarlık, Hayattan Zevk Alma ve Mutluluk İlişkisi - Konya Huzurevi Örneği", *Dini Araştırmalar* 7/19 (2004), 19-56.

²⁹ Zeynep Özcan, "Bireylerin Kendilerine ve 'Öteki'lere Karşı Merhamet Düzeylerinin Dinî Yönelimleri Açısından İncelenmesi", *Kocatepe İslami İlimler Dergisi* 5/1 (2022), 47-66.

³⁰ Necmi Karşlı, "Psikolojik İyi Oluş ve Dindarlık İlişkisi: Trabzon İlahiyat Örneği", *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 15 (2019), 173-205.

³¹ Asım Yapıcı - Hasan Kayıklık, "Ruh Sağlığı Bağlamında Dindarlığın Öz Saygı ve Kaygı ile İlişkisi: Çukurova Üniversitesi Örneği", *Değerler Eğitimi Dergisi* 3/9 (2005), 177-206.

³² Fatih Kandemir, *Umut-İyimsellik ve Dindarlık İlişkisi* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2016).

³³ Volkan Yeniaras - Tugra Nazlı Akarsu, "Religiosity and Life Satisfaction: A Multi-Dimensional Approach", *Journal of Happiness Studies* 18/6 (2017), 1815-1840.

³⁴ Gökmen Arslan, "Childhood Maltreatment, Spiritual Wellbeing, and Stress-Related Growth in Emerging Adults: A Conditional Approach to Responsibility", *Current Psychology*, 44 (2025), 1372-1381.

and anger by giving meaning to an individual's existence and guiding individuals toward purposeful and legitimate goal. Similarly, research has found that religion creates a powerful sense of meaning and belonging by making individuals feel part of something greater than themselves through prayer, worship, and rituals. Within this framework of literature, the hypothesis was proposed that, through its role as a source of meaning and religious practices, religiosity could enhance the mental health, sense of belonging, and social connectedness of young adults, thereby alleviating existential loneliness, which is characterised by isolation. Conversely, studies have shown that religion can be a protective factor against psychopathological conditions such as depression,³⁵ anxiety,³⁶ stress³⁷ and anger.³⁸ Furthermore, religious practices such as prayer, worship, and rituals foster a profound sense of meaning and belonging,³⁹ allowing individuals to feel connected to something greater than themselves.⁴⁰ Within this theoretical framework, it was hypothesised that religiosity - through its role as a source of meaning and its associated practices - could enhance young adults' mental health, sense of belonging, and social connectedness, thereby alleviating existential loneliness characterised by feelings of isolation.

Due to numerous developmental changes and uncertainties, individuals in early adulthood may be considered a vulnerable group. During this period, they may be at risk of existential loneliness which can negatively affect both their inner world and their social life. From both theoretical and practical perspectives, further research into the psychological determinants that promote well-being and improve quality of life in this population is essential. A limited number of studies have been conducted on the young adult population, and these studies have found that existential loneliness is negatively associated with life meaning, life satisfaction, perceived social support, and optimism.⁴¹ Conversely, mental health, behavioural health, and social health indicators such as social exclusion, feelings of being stuck in the middle,⁴² depression, hopelessness, loneliness, suicide, and cognitive decline have been identified as factors that threaten the well-being of young people.⁴³ In line with these findings, existential loneliness is recognised as a key factor in various psychosocial issues, leading to social exclusion and isolation. Furthermore, severe loneliness can lead individuals to seek excessive healthcare, resulting in significant economic and medical costs.⁴⁴ Therefore, identifying, interpreting, and understanding the risk and protective factors associated with existential loneliness is essential. Such an approach will contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying loneliness. It will also provide important insights for its management and for the development of preventive intervention programmes.

Although various studies have examined the relationship between religiosity and loneliness, few have focused on young adults undergoing transitions in countries with sizeable young populations, such as Turkey. For example, large-scale surveys conducted in Western contexts, have demonstrated that religious participation reduces feelings of loneliness. Similarly, the limited research available among undergraduate students indicates that higher levels of religiosity are associated with lower levels of loneliness. However, existing studies have primarily treated religiosity and loneliness as directly correlated constructs without examining the potential cognitive mechanisms that might explain this relationship. This study contributes to the existing literature by introducing a mediation model that incorporates dysfunctional attitudes as an explanatory variable, thereby bridging existential and cognitive behavioural perspectives. Specifically, the model is based on the idea that religiosity reduces dysfunctional beliefs, such as feelings of unlovability,

³⁵ Muhammet Enes Vural - Ali Ayten, "Dindarlık ve Depresyon İlişkisinde Anlamsızlığın Aracı Rolü", *İlahiyat Tetkikleri Dergisi* 55 (2021), 379-395.

³⁶ Kübra Nur Kayacan - Mebrure Doğan, "Varoluşsal Kaygı ile Dindarlık Arasındaki İlişkiler: Nicel Bir Araştırma", *Pamukkale Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 12/1 (ts.), 297-334.

³⁷ Behlül Tokur, *Stres ve Din* (İstanbul: Çamlıca Yayınları, 2017).

³⁸ Necmi Karşlı, *Öfke Kontrolü ve Dindarlık İlişkisi (Erzurum Örneği)* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2011).

³⁹ Muharrem Aka, "Kahramanmaraş Depremi Sonrası Travmatik Belirtiler, Dini Başa Çıkma ve Psikolojik İyi Oluş İlişkisi", *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 28/2 (2024), 956-977; Talip Küçükcan - Ali Köse, *Doğal Âfetler ve Din: Marmara Depremi Üzerine Psiko-Sosyolojik Bir İnceleme* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2000).

⁴⁰ Allon Vishkin etc., "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life: Religiosity, Emotion Regulation and Well-Being in a Jewish and Christian Sample", *Journal of Happiness Studies* 20/2 (2019), 427-447; Chaeyoon Lim - Robert D. Putnam, "Religion, Social Networks, and Life Satisfaction", *American Sociological Review* 75/6 (2010), 914-933.

⁴¹ B. P. Gökdemir-Bulut - Özlem Bozo, "The Psychometric Validity and Reliability of the Turkish Version of the Existential Loneliness Questionnaire", *Current Psychology* 37/1 (2018), 401-413.

⁴² Tide Garnow etc., "Deeply Lonely in the Borderland between Childhood and Adulthood - Experiences of Existential Loneliness as Narrated by Adolescents", *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being* 17/1 (2022), 2-12.

⁴³ Heather McClelland etc., "Loneliness as a Predictor of Suicidal Ideation and Behaviour: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Prospective Studies", *Journal of Affective Disorders* 274 (2020), 880-896; N. Leigh-Hunt etc., "An Overview of Systematic Reviews on the Public Health Consequences of Social Isolation and Loneliness", *Public Health* 152 (2017), 157-171; Gökdemir-Bulut - Bozo, "The Psychometric Validity and Reliability of the Turkish Version of the Existential Loneliness Questionnaire", 401-413.

⁴⁴ Kerstin Gerst-Emerson - Jayani Jayawardhana, "Loneliness as a Public Health Issue: The Impact of Loneliness on Health Care Utilization Among Older Adults", *American Journal of Public Health* 105/5 (2015), 1013-1019.

helplessness and worthlessness, thereby mitigating tendencies towards existential loneliness. Therefore, this study seeks to fill a significant empirical and theoretical gap by investigating the relationship between religiosity and existential loneliness, and by testing the mediating role of dysfunctional attitudes in this relationship. Two key research questions guide this investigation: (1) What is the relationship between individuals' levels of religiosity and their existential loneliness, and (2) do dysfunctional attitudes mediate this relationship? The aim of the research is to answer these questions using quantitative data analysis techniques. In the context of the research topic and purpose, hypotheses have been developed based on the relevant literature. Accordingly;

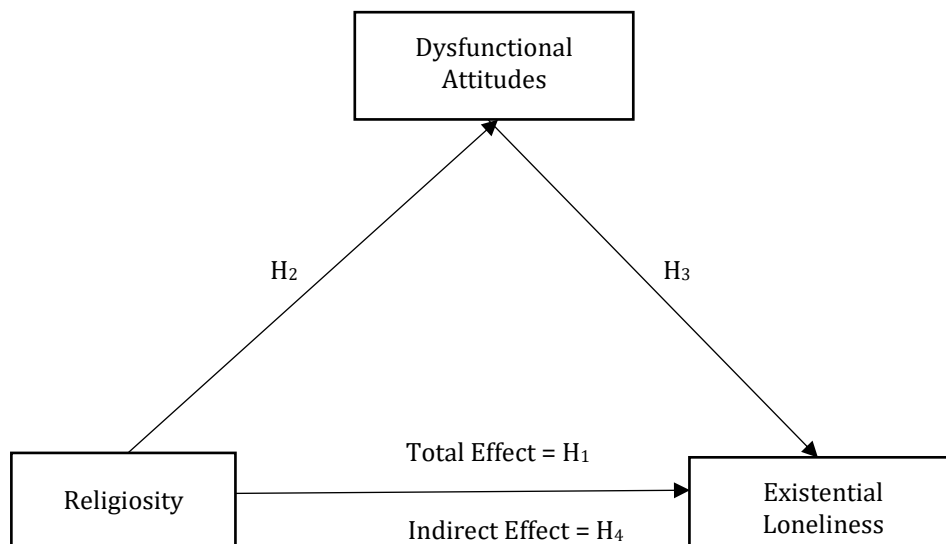
H1: There is a meaningful and negative relationship between religiosity and existential loneliness.

H2: There is a significant negative correlation between religiosity and dysfunctional attitudes.

H3: There is a meaningful and positive relationship between dysfunctional beliefs and existential loneliness.

H4: There is a mediating effect of dysfunctional attitudes in the relationship between religiosity and existential loneliness.

Mediation Model and Hypotheses



1. Method

1.1. Sample and Procedure

The current study was conducted with participants enrolled at a university, which was selected using a simple random sampling method. Approval for the study was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Gümüşhane University on 28 May 2025 (approval number 2025/5). Participants were provided with detailed information about the purpose, scope, and use of data in the study, and informed consent was obtained. All participant data was kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were clearly informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Data were subsequently collected via an online survey from volunteers who were informed about the scope and purpose of the study, and who provided consent. Participants took 15–20 minutes to complete the self-report scales. The study included 408 participants (294 women and 114 men) aged 18–29, with an average age of 21. The sampling frame was created using the university's current student records and was designed to cover all faculties and departments. Participants were selected using simple random sampling to reflect the demographic and academic diversity of the university population. The data were collected in 2025 using the Personal Information Form, Religiosity Scale, Existential Loneliness Scale and Dysfunctional Attitudes Scale, all of which were prepared by the researchers.

1.2. Data Collection Tools

Demographic Information Form. Prepared by researchers to obtain information about participants' demographic information such as age, gender, marital status, education, and socioeconomic status.

Religiosity Scale. A 5-point Likert scale developed by Ayten⁴⁵ was used to measure individuals' levels of religiosity. High scores on this six-item scale indicate high levels of religiosity. The scale consists of two sub-dimensions: Belief-influence and knowledge-worship. In the short form of the scale, the Cronbach's Alpha value indicating the internal consistency of the scale was reported as .77 for the scale as a whole, .67 for the belief-influence dimension, and .67 for the knowledge-worship dimension. In the current study, the Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated as .76 for the overall questionnaire, .79 for the belief-influence factor, and .78 for the knowledge-worship factor. The results of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were found to be $\chi^2/df = 1.891$, RMSEA = 0.047, GFI = 0.991, AGFI = 0.968, CFI = 0.995, TLI = 0.986, and SRMR = 0.016.

Existential Loneliness Scale. This six-point Likert-type scale, developed by Mayers et al.,⁴⁶ was used to assess existential loneliness. Although the scale was initially developed with HIV-positive participants, Gökdemir et al.⁴⁷ adapted it for a broad non-clinical sample group in Turkey. The Turkish version of the scale consists of three subscales — loneliness in social ties, loneliness in close relationships, and finding meaning in life — and 20 items. High scores on the scale indicate high levels of existential loneliness in individuals. The Turkish version of the scale had internal consistency coefficients of .80 for finding meaning in life, .85 for loneliness in social connections and .70 for loneliness in close relationships. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.71, 0.74 and 0.77, respectively, while the total scale coefficient was 0.83. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results were as follows: $\chi^2/df = 3.560$, RMSEA = 0.079, GFI = 0.890, AGFI = 0.852, CFI = 0.902, TLI = 0.882 and SRMR = 0.1202.

Non-Functional Attitudes Scale. This scale, developed by Weissman and Beck,⁴⁸ was used to determine the frequency of non-functional attitudes associated with depression. Adapted into Turkish by Şahin and Batıgün,⁴⁹ the scale consists of two subscales (perfectionism/achievement and need for approval/dependence) and 13 items. High scores on the scale indicate higher levels of dysfunctional attitudes. The Turkish version of the scale had an internal consistency coefficient of .77 for the perfectionism sub-dimension, .74 for the dependency sub-dimension and .81 for the overall scale. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were found to be 0.83 for perfectionism, 0.79 for dependency, and 0.88 for the overall scale. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed the following results: $\chi^2/df = 1.833$, RMSEA = 0.045, GFI = 0.971, AGFI = 0.968, CFI = 0.995, TLI = 0.963 and SRMR = 0.035.

1.3. Data Analysis

The IBM SPSS AMOS software and the PROCESS v4.2 macro (an SPSS add-on module) were used to analyse the data. First, outliers in the data set were identified and excluded from the analyses. To assess the distribution of the data, skewness and kurtosis values were calculated and the Shapiro-Wilk test was applied, confirming that the assumption of normal distribution was largely satisfied. Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients were then calculated for the dataset. Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted for the dependent and independent variables using the SPSS AMOS software package to test the structural validity of the model, and the results of the analysis showed that the model fit indices were at an acceptable level. To test whether dysfunctional attitudes mediate the relationship between religiosity and existential loneliness, a mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Macro Model 4.⁵⁰ To determine the statistical significance of the mediation analysis results, a 95% confidence interval and the 5,000 resampling method were employed. The results of the mediation analysis indicate that the calculated confidence intervals do not include zero, thus demonstrating that the indirect effect is significant.⁵¹

2. Results of Findings

⁴⁵ Ali Ayten, "Din ve Sağlık: Bireysel Dindarlık, Sağlık Davranışları ve Hayat Memnuniyeti İlişkisi Üzerine Bir Araştırma", *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 13/3 (2013), 7-31.

⁴⁶ Mayers etc., "The Existential Loneliness Questionnaire", 1183-1193.

⁴⁷ Gökdemir-Bulut - Bozo, "The Psychometric Validity and Reliability of the Turkish Version of the Existential Loneliness Questionnaire", 401-413.

⁴⁸ Arlene N Weissman - Aeron Beck, *Development and Validation of the Dysfunctional Attitude Scale: A Preliminary Investigation* (Toronto: Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, 1978).

⁴⁹ Ayşegül Durak Batıgün - Nesrin Hisli Şahin, "Fonksiyonel Olmayan Tutumlar Ölçeği Kısa Formu (FOTÖ-17) Uyarlama Çalışması", *Türk Psikoloji Yazıları* 19/38 (2016), 91-99.

⁵⁰ Andrew F. Hayes, "Partial, Conditional and Moderated Moderated Mediation: Quantification, Inference, and Interpretation", *Communication Monographs* 85/1 (2018), 4-40.

⁵¹ Andrew F. Hayes, *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Analysis* (New York: Guilford Press, 2013).

2.1. Correlation Results Between Research Variables

This study involved performing reliability and correlation analyses on three main variables: Religiosity, existential loneliness and dysfunctional attitudes. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between these variables. The results showed a positive relationship between existential loneliness and dysfunctional attitudes ($r = 0.43, p < 0.01$), indicating that dysfunctional attitudes increase as the level of existential loneliness increases. Additionally, a significant negative relationship was observed between dysfunctional attitudes and religiosity ($r = -0.12, p < .01$), indicating that dysfunctional attitudes decrease as religiosity increases. Skewness and kurtosis coefficients were also calculated in the study to assess whether the data were normally distributed. According to the results of the analysis, the kurtosis and skewness values of all the variables were found to be within the recommended ± 1 values for normal distribution. The correlation results, descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients for the variables are presented in detail in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlation and Reliability Findings of Variables

	EL	DA	R	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Existential Loneliness	0,1			3.38	.42	-0,328	-0,135
Dysfunctional Attitudes	0,43**	1		3.97	.58	-0,154	-0,522
Religiosity	-0,12*	0,195**	1	1.84	.55	0,154	-0,663

Note. R= Religiosity; DA; Dysfunctional Attitudes; EL= Existential Loneliness; M = Mean; SD; Standart Deviation.

2.2. Measurement Models

At this stage of the research, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to validate the structure of the variables employed in the research model. This model was based on previous studies and had a theoretical foundation. The primary purpose of CFA is to verify whether the hypothesised factor structure is supported by the observed variables.⁵² CFA was used to test the structural validity of the measurement model created using the religiosity, existential loneliness and dysfunctional attitudes scales. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis showed that the model fit values were within an acceptable range. Standard cutoff values accepted for evaluating the model's fit with observed data and its structural validity were used as a reference.⁵³ Table 2 shows the goodness-of-fit values for the three-factor measurement model including all the study's variables. Additionally, the factor loadings obtained from each item were above 0.50 and were found to be statistically significant. This supports the validity and reliability of the relevant latent structure.

Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Variables

Variables	X ² df	RMSEA	CFI	GFI	TLI	AGFI	SMR
Religiosity	1.891	0,047	0,995	0,991	0,986	0,968	0,016
Existential Loneliness	3.560	0,079	0,902	0,890	0,882	0,852	0,120
Dysfunctional Attitudes	1.833	0,045	0,995	0,971	0,995	0,968	0,035

2.3. Intermediary Analysis

In the present study, the mediating role of dysfunctional attitudes in the relationship between religiosity and existential loneliness was examined. The findings of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Direct and indirect effects of predictive variables and mediators.

Way	B	SE	β	C.R	R ²	P
Direct Effects						
R → DA	-0,179	0,044	-.195	-4,017	0,38	0,000

⁵² Rex B. Kline, *Yapısal Eşitlik Modellemesinin İlkeleri ve Uygulaması*, trans. Sedat Şen (Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2019).

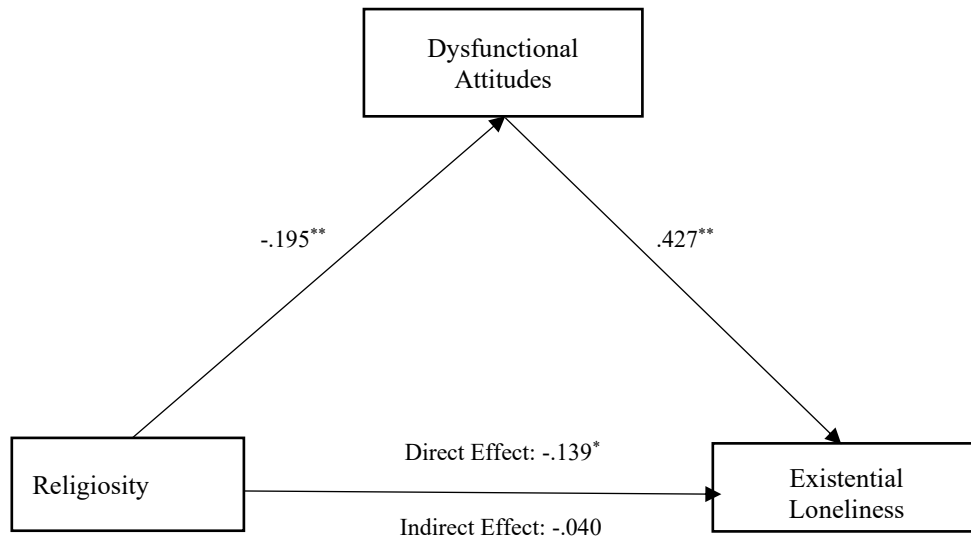
⁵³ Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E., *Multivariate Data Analysis* (Pearson, 2014), 640.

R → EL	-0,109	0,024	-.139	-2,337	0,022
				0,183	
DA → EL	0,225	0,024	0,427	9,519	0,000
Indirect effects	B	SE	β	%95 GA	P
R → DA → EL	-0.032	0,045	-0.040	[-0,153, -0,046]	0,467

Note. R= Religiosity; DA; Dysfunctional Attitudes; R= Religiosity; EL= Existential Loneliness; β = Standardised Regression Number; SE= Standard Error; B= Non-standardised coefficient; Critical ratio / t-value.

The following findings were obtained as a result of the mediation analysis. The negative effects of religiosity ($\beta = -0.139$, $p < 0.05$) and dysfunctional attitudes ($\beta = -0.195$, $p < 0.001$) on existential loneliness are statistically significant. Furthermore, when dysfunctional attitudes were added to the model as a mediator, the direct effect of religiosity on existential loneliness decreased from $\beta = -0.139$ ($p < 0.05$) to $\beta = -0.045$ ($p > 0$). In other words, while the initial direct effect of religiosity on existential loneliness was negative and significant, adding dysfunctional attitudes to the model weakened this effect and rendered it insignificant. These results suggest that dysfunctional attitudes fully mediate the relationship between religiosity and existential loneliness. Since the confidence interval obtained in the mediation analysis does not include the value 0, the indirect effects were found to be statistically significant.⁵⁴ The model fit values for the research model are as follows: $X^2/sd = 1.886$; TLI = .969; CFI = .988; RMSEA = .047; SRMR = 0.25. Examining the model goodness-of-fit values indicates that the general research model incorporating mediating variables exhibits an almost perfect fit. In conclusion, all hypotheses were confirmed in the study (see Table 3). The path diagram for the mediation analysis is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Path Analytical Model of the Mutual Relationship between the Study Variables



Intermediary model * $p < .05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion

This study examined the mediating role of dysfunctional attitudes in the relationship between religiosity and existential loneliness in a sample of young adults. Previous studies have shown that existential loneliness in early adulthood may stem from a sense of belonging, a sense of self and a search for meaning.⁵⁵ These studies have also shown that existential anxieties are always present during the process

⁵⁴ Andrew F. Hayes, "An Index and Test of Linear Moderated Mediation", *Multivariate Behavioral Research* 50/1 (2015), 1-22.

⁵⁵ Jessica Hemberg etc., "Loneliness as Experienced by Adolescents and Young Adults: An Explorative Qualitative Study", *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 27/1 (2022), 362-384.

of constructing one's identity. This process is of central importance during developmental periods such as the transition from childhood to adulthood.⁵⁶ According to transition theory, individuals' transitions between developmental periods can lead to feelings of uncertainty, disconnection, and meaninglessness.⁵⁷ Research conducted with undergraduate students has revealed that people are psychologically vulnerable during this period and need to find meaning in life to avoid feeling meaningless.⁵⁸ One value that can give individuals a sense of meaning, belonging and self-esteem in early adulthood is religious belief. Research on this topic shows that religious beliefs can have a positive effect on the psychological well-being of young adults. For example: Research on adolescents has revealed a link between religious beliefs and spiritual practices, and a sense of life meaning and self-esteem.⁵⁹ The research findings show that religiosity negatively predicts existential loneliness (these results confirm hypothesis 1). These results are consistent with the theoretical proposition that religion can protect individuals from existential loneliness by providing them with a sense of meaning and purpose in life.⁶⁰ This interaction suggests that religion has a protective effect. In this study, the prediction of religiosity in relation to existential loneliness is consistent with studies indicating that religiosity enhances psychological well-being⁶¹ and alleviates anxiety about death, an existential concern.⁶² Another study conducted in Hong Kong found that internal religiosity is associated with the search for meaning in life, but that this relationship varies among individuals. These findings indicate that religiosity does not enhance self-esteem in the same way for every individual and that its effect may vary depending on gender, personality traits, or other psychosocial factors. Therefore, the findings of this study do not align with the results of the current research.⁶³

The data also revealed that religiousness negatively predicts dysfunctional attitudes (these results confirm H2). This indirectly aligns with studies indicating that religious and spiritual orientations are effective factors in coping with negative situations in cognitive behavioural therapy.⁶⁴ Similarly, studies have found that religiosity provides individuals with self-control by enabling them to accurately assess their goals, themselves, and the outside world.⁶⁵ In this regard, the findings of the study are indirectly consistent with the findings that self-regulation abilities such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and adaptation can positively shape people's lives by reducing internalisation and externalisation problems.⁶⁶

Another finding obtained within the scope of the study is that dysfunctional attitudes positively predict existential loneliness (these results confirm H3). This finding is consistent with the theoretical proposition that dysfunctional attitudes, which are closely related to maladaptive cognitive schemas, weaken self-worth and may play an important role in the aetiology of an individual's negative emotional states.⁶⁷ In this context, studies showing that dysfunctional attitudes are closely related to depression⁶⁸ can be indirectly linked to this finding. Furthermore, it reveals that dysfunctional attitudes mediate the relationship between religiosity and existential loneliness (this finding confirms H4). In other words, individuals' dysfunctional attitudes invalidate or weaken the positive effect of religiosity on existential loneliness. However, religiosity can help individuals reduce existential loneliness by providing them with a sense of purpose, which is defined as 'existential emptiness' and poses a threat to existence.⁶⁹ This finding

⁵⁶ Maria Lundvall etc., "Young Men's Experiences of Living with Existential Concerns: 'Living Close to a Bottomless Darkness'", *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being* 15/1 (2020), 1-10.

⁵⁷ Afaf Ibrahim Meleis, *Transitions Theory: Middle Range and Situation Specific Theories in Nursing Research and Practice* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2009).

⁵⁸ Garnow etc., "Trapped and Lost in Transition - Existential Loneliness during Adolescence Described in Retrospect by Swedish University Students", 1-15.

⁵⁹ Alice Kosarkova etc., "I Am Young, Religious and/or Spiritual-Is It Beneficial to Me? Association of Religiosity, Spirituality and Images of God with Meaning in Life and Self-Esteem", *Religions* 15, (2024), 1-14.

⁶⁰ Frankl, *İnsanın Anlam Arayışı*; Yalom, *Varoluşçu Psikoterapi*; Francesco Brencio, "Sufferance, Freedom and Meaning: Viktor Frankl and Martin Heidegger", *Studia Paedagogica Ignatiana* 18 (2015), 217-246.

⁶¹ Harold Koenig, *Religion and Mental Health: Research and Clinical Applications* (London: Academic Press, 2018); Kenneth I. Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997).

⁶² Hayati Hökelekli, "Ölümle İlgili Tutumlar ve Dinî Davranış", *İslâmî Araştırmalar Dergisi* 5/2 (1991), 83-91.

⁶³ Angela Yuen Chun Li ve Jacky Ka Kei Liu, "Effects of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religiosity on Well-Being through Meaning in Life and Its Gender Difference among Adolescents in Hong Kong: A Mediation Study," *Current Psychology* 42, (2023): 7171-7181, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-02006-w>

⁶⁴ Walker etc., "Addressing Religious and Spiritual Issues in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Children and Adolescents", 174-180.

⁶⁵ Evan C. Carter etc., "The Mediating Role of Monitoring in the Association of Religion With Self-Control", *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 3/6 (2012), 691-697.

⁶⁶ Davina A. Robson etc., "Self-Regulation in Childhood as a Predictor of Future Outcomes: A Meta-Analytic Review.", *Psychological Bulletin* 146/4 (2020), 324-354.

⁶⁷ David A. Clark - Aaron T. Beck, *Scientific Foundations of Cognitive Theory and Therapy of Depression* (New York: John Wiley, 1999); Aaron T. Beck - A. John Rush (ed.), *Cognitive Therapy of Depression* (New York: Guilford Press, 1979).

⁶⁸ Marlies E. Brouwer etc., "Dysfunctional Attitudes or Extreme Response Style as Predictors of Depressive Relapse and Recurrence after Mobile Cognitive Therapy for Recurrent Depression", *Journal of Affective Disorders* 243 (2019), 48-54.

⁶⁹ Frankl, *İnsanın Anlam Arayışı*; Paul Tillich, *Olmak Cesareti*, tras. Nurettin Şazi Kösemihal (İstanbul: Say Yayınları, 2017).

of the study is important for understanding how psychological processes interact with factors such as attitudes and beliefs. Such a change indicates that more advanced analyses and model tests are needed to understand the more complex structures and interactions between variables in the models used in the study. The finding that dysfunctional attitudes can alleviate feelings of existential loneliness by reducing the underlying mechanisms confirms theoretical and practical propositions.⁷⁰

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the relationship between religiosity and existential loneliness, as well as the potential mediating role of dysfunctional attitudes within this relationship. The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between religiosity and existential loneliness, with dysfunctional attitudes emerging as a partial mediator of this relationship. These results suggest that religious values and practices may alleviate feelings of meaninglessness, worthlessness and a lack of belonging - fundamental components of existential loneliness - and strengthen individuals' sense of self-integrity and social belonging. The study makes two important contributions to the field. Firstly, it provides empirical evidence to help understand the mechanisms between religiosity and existential loneliness at a psychological level, which supports the limited number of studies in the psychology of religion literature on the mediating role of dysfunctional attitudes. Secondly, the findings offer concrete suggestions for psychological interventions. For instance, programmes aimed at alleviating existential loneliness in young adults could incorporate cognitive behavioural strategies that focus on raising awareness of and regulating dysfunctional thought patterns, while also promoting religious values and meaningful belief practices. Therefore, combining religious beliefs with cognitive interventions can enhance individuals' ability to cope with existential anxieties.

Limitations

Despite the valuable findings of the study, there are some limitations. Firstly, the sample was limited to young adults aged 18–29, which restricts the generalisability of the results to other age groups. Secondly, data were collected only through self-report scales measuring religiosity, existential loneliness and dysfunctional attitudes. Therefore, social desirability and self-evaluation biases may be possible factors. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of the study prevented the testing of causal relationships between variables. Additionally, while some methodological limitations were acknowledged in the 'Limitations' section, factors such as the limited, university-based sample and the cultural context in which the study was conducted were overlooked. Clarifying these elements would reveal the limits of the generalisability of the findings more clearly. Future research could examine the validity of similar relationships using different sampling methods in broader and more diverse populations. Moreover, longitudinal or experimental designs could be employed to more reliably reveal the causal relationships between religiosity, existential loneliness and dysfunctional attitudes in young adults. These approaches would enhance the internal and external validity of the research findings, contributing more comprehensively to the literature.

⁷⁰ Anton Käll etc., "Internet-Based Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Loneliness: A Pilot Randomized Controlled Trial", *Behavior Therapy* 51/1 (2020), 54-68; Karen Rook, "Promoting Social Bonding: Strategies for Enhancing Social Support" *American Psychologist* 39/12 (1984), 1389-1407.

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