PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN PREDICTING LONELINESS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS[1]

Yrd. Doç. Dr. A. Rezan ÇEÇEN
Çukurova Üniversitesi
Eğitim Fakültesi
Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışma A.D.
arcecen@cu.edu.tr

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Fulya CENKSEVEN
Çukurova Üniversitesi
Eğitim Fakültesi
Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışma A.D.
fulyac@cu.edu.tr

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine how university students' loneliness are predicted by their level of psychological well-being (self acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery and autonomy). To collect data UCLA-R Loneliness (Russell, Peplau & Cutrona, 1980) and Psychological Well-Being Scales (Ryff,1989a) were used. The sample was consisted of 268 university students from Cukurova University, Adana, Turkey. For the analysis of the data multiple regression analysis was used. Pearson Product Momentum Correlation matrix results revealed that all psychological well-being dimensions were significantly correlated to "UCLA Loneliness Scale" scores and Stepwise Regression analysis results explained 49% of total variance. The results has shown the best predictor of loneliness was positive relations with others The results were discussed in the light of the related literature.
Key Words: Loneliness, Psychological well-being, University Students

ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNDE YALNIZLIĞIN YORDAYICISI OLARAK PSİKOLOJİK İYİ OLMA

Özet

Bu araştırmanın amacı üniversite öğrencilerinin psikolojik iyi olmaları ile ilgili boyutların (kendini kabul, kişisel büyüme, yaşam amacı, diğerleriyle olumlu ilişkiler, çevresel kontrol ve otonomi) onların yalnızlık düzeylerini ne oranda yordadığını belirleyebilmektir. Araştırmada veri toplama araçları olarak UCLA Yalnızlık Ölçeği (Russell, Peplau & Cutrona, 1980) ve Psikolojik İyi Olma Ölçeği(Ryff,1989a) kullanılmıştır. Örneklem 268 üniversite öğrencisinden oluşmuştur. Pearson Product Momentum Korelasyon katsayıları yalnızlık düzeyleri ile psikolojik iyi olma boyutlarının anlamlı ilişkiler gösterdiğini ve Stepwise Regresyon Analizi ise toplam varyansın %49'unu yordadığı görülmüştür. Araştırma sonuçları psikolojik iyi olmanın boyutlarından biri olan diğerleriyle olumlu ilişkilerin yalnızlığı en fazla yordadığını göstermiştir. Sonuçlar ilgili literatür ışığında tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Yalnızlık, Psikolojik İyi Olma, Üniversite Öğrencileri

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Introduction

Loneliness is a universal experience among humans, and as a unique subjective experience one's personality, history, and background variables affect it (Neto & Barros, 2003). Loneliness is typically defined as "the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships is deficient in some important way, either qualitatively or quantitatively" (Perlman & Peplau, 1981, p. 31). Such a deficit occurs when a person's interpersonal needs cannot be satisfied within his or her social network (Neto & Barros, 2003). Social scientist have increasingly emphasized that loneliness is a subjective experience and is not synonymous with objective social isolation. " People can be alone without being lonely, or lonely in a crowd" (Peplau & Perlman, 1982, p.3). Thus, it is an index of dissatisfaction with one's relationships and is not synonymous with solitude or any particular form of relational status such as married vs. single (Neto & Barros, 2003).

In the literature loneliness is associated with low self-esteem (Çeçen, 2007; Olmstead, Guy, O'Malley, & Bentler, 1991), poor social skills (Demir, 1990; Deniz, Hamarta & Arı, 2005; DiTommaso, Brannen-McNulty, Ross & Burgess, 2003), depression (Anderson & Harvey, 1988), alcoholism (Sadava & Pak, 1994), obesity (Schumaker, Krejci, & Small, 1985), and suicide (Weber, Mathe, & Nolsen, 1997). In addition previous researchers have suggested that loneliness is associated with different affective states and well-being (Bowling, Edelmann, Leaver, & Hoekel, 1989; Neto, 1992; Russell et al., 1980) and Ernst & Cacioppo (1998), McWhirter (1990) stated that loneliness is a painful experience which consequences that are detrimental to one's emotional, physical, and spiritual well being.

Ryff (1995) defined psychological well-being as "the striving for perfection that represents the realization of one's true potential" (p. 100). Psychological well-being is a multi-dimensional construction which is made up of life attitudes (Ryff,1989a). This model includes Jung's (1993) formulation of individuation, Roger's (1961) view of the fully functioning person, Allport's (1961) conception of maturity, Maslow's (1968) conception of self-actualization, Buhler's (1935) basic life tendencies and Jahoda's (1958) positive criteria of mental health (cited in Ryff, 1989a). Ryff's model comprises six psychological dimensions: (1) self-acceptance: holding positive attitudes about oneself despite the awareness of one's limitations "In many ways, I feel disappointed about my achievements in life", (2) positive relations with others: warm, satisfying, and trusting interpersonal ties, capable of strong empathy, affection, and intimacy "I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others", (3) autonomy: a sense of self-determination, independence, regulation of behavior, and the ability to resist social pressures "I have confidence in my opinions, even if thay are contrary to the general concensus", (4) environmental mastery: one's ability to choose or create their environment in respect of their personal needs and preferences, and effective use of surrounding opportunities "I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life", (5) purpose in life: finding meaning in one's efforts and challenges, a sense of directedness "Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them", (6) personal growth: developing one's potential by growing and expanding as a

person, and being open to new experiences "I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yorself and the world" (Ryff, 1989a, 1989b; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Keyes, Shmotkin & Ryff, 2002).

As can be seen above, in the theoretical frame, loneliness is related to critical, important variables that might be seen as risk factors in people's lives (Çeçen, 2007). When we thought about conseling process, it can be seen that counseling major goal is to reduce psychological distress and increase psychological well-being or health in people life (Kinnier, 1997).Thus, it is very important to understand which variables contribute to loneliness. In addition when investigated Turkish literature, there is no study related to Ryff's multidimensional psychological well-being and loneliness. In the light of the litaratüre the purpose of this study was to determine how university students' loneliness are predicted by their level of psychological well being (self acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery and autonomy).

METHOD

Participants

The study was conducted with 266 undergraduate students, 166 of whom were female (62.4 %) and 100 of whom male (37.6 %). The ages of the participants range from 18 to 30 (M=21.23, SD=1.94).

Measures

Personal Demographic Information Questionnaire: This questionnaire designed to describe the university students' demographic information, such as gender

UCLA-R Loneliness Scale: The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale is the most frequently used scale to assess loneliness and research has documented its reliability and validity (Russell, 1982). This is a 20-item unidimensional measure of global loneliness (Russell, Peplau & Cutrona, 1980). The items are scored on a 4-point Likert-type scale, anchored by 1=Never and 4= Always, and the scores can range from 20 (low level of loneliness) to 80 (high level of loneliness). High internal consistency has been reported with a coefficiant alpha .94 The scale was standardized for the Turkish sample by Demir (1989). The standardized UCLA lonelines scale was found to have a high internal consistency (coefficiant alpha .96) and high test-retest reliability .94. In the present study the UCLA Loneliness Scale coefficient was .88.

Psychological Well-Being Scales: Ryff's (1989a) scale of PWB contains six dimensions: self acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, and autonomy. Each subscale of the PWB scale has 14 items measuring dimension. Individuals rate themselves on a Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). Getting higher scores from the scale point out

that people have high psychological well being. Internal consistencies (for the original form) subscales of well-being range from .83 and .91. It was adapted into Turkish by Cenkseven (2004). Internal consistencies for the subscales of well-being (for adapted form) range from .74 and .83. The alpha coefficent for the total scale was .93.

Analysis

The data collected for the research was analyzed with the help of SPSS (Statistical Program for Social Siences). The data was coded and transmitted into the statistical program. Prior to analysis all data were examined through skewness and kurtosis and thirteen students questionnaire were eliminated from analysis. Outliers were detected by mahalanobis distance [X^2 (7) = 24.32; p<.001] and two students questionnaires were deleted. Histogram and normality assumptions were examined and found to be satisfactory. For the analysis of the data Pearson Product Momentum Correlation matrix was used. Multicollinearity and singularity also were detected through SMC and VIF, no multicollinearity and singularity have been found. Stepwise Regression technique was applied to data to determine which variables contributed prediction of loneliness.

RESULTS

Pearson Product-Moment Correlations were computed for the scores on the Revised UCLA Lonelines Scale (M=32.77, SD=8.63) and those on each of six psychological well-being scales: Positive relations with others (M=69.15, SD=9.17), purpose in life (M=67.36, SD=8.97), self acceptance (M=63.85, SD=9.33), personal growth (M=69.97, SD=7.62), environmental mastery (M=64.14, SD=9.39) and autonomy (M=62.80, SD=8.50). Table 1 displays the correlations among the subscales of psychological well-being and the loneliness.

Table 1
Correlations between loneliness, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life and self acceptance

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Loneliness	-						
2. Positive Relations with Others	-.68*	-					
3. Autonomy	-.24*	.33*	-				
4. Environmental Mastery	-.43*	.53*	.51*	-			
5. Personal Growth	-.34*	.39*	.40*	.56*	-		
6. Purpose in Life	-.42*	.45*	.40*	.68*	.60*	-	
7. Self Acceptance	-.49*	.55*	.53*	.73*	.50*	.68*	-

*p<.001

The findings indicated that there were moderate and relatively strong negative significant correlations between loneliness and positive relations with others ($r = -.68$, $p < .0001$) and, moderate negative correlations between loneliness and self acceptance ($r = -.49$, $p<.0001$), environmental mastery ($r = -.43$, $p<.0001$), purpose in life ($r = -.42$, $p<.0001$), personal growth ($r = -.34$, $p< .0001$) and relatively low significant correlation autonomy ($r = -.24$, $p< .0001$). Stepwise regression analysis was performed in order to find out the most predictive psychological well-being dimensions for loneliness. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Stepwise Regression Analysis Results in Predicting Loneliness

	R	R^2	St. Error	β	R^2 Change	F	F Change	S_{ri}
Positive Relations with Others	.676	.456	6.37	-.608	.456	221.65*	221.64	.67
Purpose in Life	.689	.475	6.28	-.151	.018	118.76*	9.08	.42

* $p<.0001$

The stepwise regression analysis results indicated that positive relations with others and purpose in life scales scores contributed meaningfully and self acceptance, personal growth, environmental mastery and autonomy scores did not contributed meaningfully to loneliness. The results revealed that positive relations with others was the best predictor of loneliness and it's scores account for 47% total variance $F_{(1, 265)} = 221.65$; $p<.0001$. The second predictor was purpose in life and it's scores account for 1% total variance. Both account for 48% of the total variance $F_{(2,265)} = 118.76$ $p<.0001$.

DISCUSSION

The result of this study has shown that positive relations with other which is dimension of psychological well-being was the best predictor of loneliness. The relations between loneliness and positive relations with others (dimension of psychological well-being) can be thaught natural. Theoretically, positive relations with others is defined as warm, trusting, interpersonal relations and strong feelings of empathy and affection (Ryff, 1989a, 1989b, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1996). Social interaction can be seen as a way for individuals to gain a sense of psychological well-being (Cooper, Okamura & McNeil, 1995). According to Cooper et. al. (1995) relations with friends and family are important determinants for psychological well-being related to dimension of positive relations with others. In the literature loneliness has been

linked to poorer social skills (Demir, 1990; Deniz, Hamarta & Arı, 2005; DiTommaso, Brannen-McNulty, Ross & Burgess, 2003) and introversion (Kamath & Kanekar, 1993; Saklofske & Yackulic, 1989) and less social support (Arkar & Sarı, 2004, Çeçen, in press, Odacı, 2004). It can be seen positive relations with others as psychological well-being dimension clearly high relationship with loneliness.

The second predictor of loneliness was purpose in life dimension of psychological well-being. Ryff (1989a) suggested that having " a clear comprehension of life's purpose, a sense of directedness and intentionality" are important parts of the " feeling that there is purpose and meaning to life" (p.1071). The individuals who determine their life purposes can be thought harmony with her/his self. The individuals who is not satisfy with her or himself can experience a lot of psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, hopelessness and loneliness. In the literature it was reported that there is negative correlation between purpose in life and depression and, positive correlation with self esteem (Ryff, 1989a; Cenkseven, 2004). It can also be said the individuals who have high loneliness levels are not satisfy with her/himself, because of having lots of psychological problems for example; anxiety, depression, low self esteem. In this context it can be thaught that the individuals who did not determine their purposes in life now and in the past have high loneliness levels. The results related to life satisfaction and loneliness supports this study results. In the related literature there is also negative relation between satisfaction with life and loneliness (Schumaker, Shea, Monfries ve Marnat, 1992).

Although autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, and self acceptance were not contributed significantly to predict loneliness, all these independent variables have significantly moderate and relatively low negative correlations with the measure of loneliness. Thus, when considered theoritical frame there are negative relationships between all psychological well-being dimensions and loneliness. Actually it can not be explained why the other variables couldn't contribute significantly the prediction of loneliness. It is important to investigate for future research.

It should be noted that this study has some limitations. This study has been conducted on undergraduate students, thus these results limited on this sample. The same study can be applied on different samples (for example; young adolescents, older adults) to examine if same patterns will occur. Psychological well-being and loneliness need to be further studied to determine different influencing variables such as subjective well-being.

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