

The Self-Esteem and Its Relationship to the College Students' Perceived Loneliness Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Edelaine Lopez*, Micah Villegas, Angeline Suliao, Jhoselle Tus For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

Abstract

Over the past few years, all schools were closed down, and learning modalities were shifted online due to COVID-19. The sudden transition of learning subsequently affects how students interact, resulting in difficulty in accepting themselves, which can be aligned to the discontinuous enhancement of self-esteem. This kind of situation consequently results in students stopping their inner growth which is essential for managing emotions such as loneliness. This study investigates the significant relationship between self-esteem and loneliness perceived by college students. The statistical analysis demonstrates a significant relationship between self-esteem and loneliness (r= .131).

Keywords: Loneliness, College Students, Self-esteem, Philippines, Covid-19 Pandemic

Introduction

Three years ago, all universities were closed down because of the COVID-19. It is an international challenge that has a profound influence on our day-today activities and practice of social distancing, which results in changes in the behavioral pattern (Galea, Merchant & Lurie, 2020; Zheng, 2020). As the Philippines cope with the current crisis, all sectors (private and public) change their working environment to online, including education. They are delivered online to make sure that education will continue and enhance the quarantine situation (Yapo et al., 2021). However, several factors have been recorded because of the pandemic, especially the students' emotional stability. This was supported by some researchers such as Losada-Baltar et al. (2021), who stated that the lockdown situation had increased much psychological distress, especially loneliness.

Furthermore, the series of lockdowns and isolation experienced by the students somewhat affected the students' self-esteem (Tus, 2020). Self-esteem is part of the experiences and is appropriate for life. It talks about the ability to be confident about how the person thinks and know the right to be happy, worthy, and deserving (Branden, 2021). However, the ability to improve self-esteem has been halted because of distance learning. In the paper of Mo et al. (2020), it has been said that online activities had a negative impact on self-esteem and academic performance. Having poor self-esteem is said to contribute to feeling lonely (Najafi, Salehin, & Mohamadyfar, 2016).

On the other hand, Peplau (2022) stated that loneliness

is a widespread emotion that adolescents frequently feel and its typical cause is related to the person's social relations. It has been recorded in the study by Bu, Steptoe, and Fancourt (2020), that loneliness was one of the negative factors that people, especially adolescents (18-30) acquire during the pandemic, which is the age of college students. It is indeed important that researchers focus on understanding the prevalence and predictors of loneliness (Groarke, 2020).

As yet, Kim and Cha (2020) conducted a study, wherein they provide basic information for college students' mental health management programs by addressing the factors which influence their loneliness. The researchers then included the family, social relations, personal, and especially self-esteem as factors affecting loneliness. The result of their investigation found that self-esteem and loneliness correlate. Moreover, a study conducted by Ishaq et al. (2017) that primarily revolved around university students living in hostels explores the relationship between loneliness and self-esteem and then concludes that there would be a negative relationship between the two variables. The result of their study accepted the hypothesis where they revealed the non-significance relationship between loneliness and self-esteem among both sexes. Furthermore, it has been stated in the paper of Kim and Cha (2020) that personal traits such as self-esteem modifies the way students cope with their loneliness because of a lack of social relation, whereas, Ishaq et al., also said that social relations influence individual's loneliness and self-esteem who are living in hostels but the effects of it are the same in both sexes.



Moreover, Labrague, De Los Santos, and Falguera (2021) said that to curtail the transmission of COVID-19, a mandatory lockdown was proposed, resulting in loneliness, which is said to be prevalent among college students. The researchers also added that students reportedly have a higher level of emotional loneliness than social loneliness. Vaterlaus (2022) supported the result of Labrague et al. and stated in their national health survey that college students are mainly categorized as being positive for loneliness.

Finally, this study investigates the relationship between self-esteem and loneliness amidst the online learning modality. This paper intended to provide information for college students to better understand their loneliness and how self-esteem is related to it.

Research question

This study investigates the relationship between selfesteem and loneliness amidst the online learning modality. Specifically, it sought to answer the following question:

1. Is there a significant relationship between selfesteem and loneliness among college students amidst the online learning modality?

Literature Review

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a crucial part of an individual's growth, especially in the field of Social Psychology. It is the totality of an individual's value about themselves negatively (low self-esteem) or positively (high self-esteem). It is a continuous process that can be changed according to the society they live in or through experience (Minev et al., 2018; Rosenberg et al., 1995).

Furthermore, a theory of self-esteem stated that self-esteem is a necessary ingredient and an outcome of self-verification. Self-esteem can increase the individual's worth and efficacy through the verification of role identities. The effect of self-verification in self-esteem buffers the negative emotion, allowing the disruption and change of the structural arrangement because of the continuation of interaction. Thus, self-esteem which is from the influence of self-verification, can maintain and form relationships that verify identities between individuals.

According to McKay and Fanning (2016), self-esteem is an emotional sine qua non(necessary) to measure self-worth that is essential for psychological survival. The authors also included whether self-esteem can promote academic performance (vice versa) in their book. Furthermore, they stated that if individuals want to improve their self-esteem, they should first improve their external circumstances. In support of this statement, Orth and Robins (2014) who conducted a longitudinal study revealed that having high (or low) self-esteem can later influence the low (or high) self-esteem at one stage of an individual. In addition, through the evidence that they have gathered, self-esteem development is indeed significant in society because of its important real-world consequences.

As Lin and Chen (2021), self-esteem was also found to be linked to socioeconomic factors like education and money. Furthermore, people with high self-esteem overestimate their knowledge and competence, limiting their ability to detect the need for behavioral change as well as their willingness to change.

However, Ahmad et al. (2013) stated in their paper that self-esteem is a critical academic construct in the educational process. It is acknowledged as one of the most essential factors influencing student learning outcomes, and students who have high self-esteem perform well academically. It was also found in the study by Fang (2016) that self-esteem is positively significant in the educational aspirations of migrant children regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Loneliness

Loneliness is referred to as a subjective sense of actual and social involvement at desired levels (Brooke & Jackson, 2020; Lim et al., 2020).

According to Cacioppo et al. (2021) and Lim et al., (2016), isolation or being alone can increase loneliness, and some people feel lonely despite having good ties with friends or family. Loneliness has been linked to a variety of health issues, both physical and mental. Longitudinal research has indicated that loneliness predicts future depression, paranoia, and social anxiety; only the latter predicts more loneliness, implying that loneliness is a clear precursor or contributor to mental health illnesses.

According to the latest examination during this prepandemic, a high level of loneliness was found among the elderly and is revealed to have a high risk across the lifespan. It was also added that loneliness in early adulthood has highly increased (Child & Lawton, 2019).



However, the findings of Barreto et al. (2020) found that gender, age, and culture positively predict loneliness and are more prevalent among younger men than younger women. Maes et al., (2019) also found that loneliness does not differ by gender together by their age, especially middle-aged. Additionally, regardless of whether older or young adults, it was recorded that women are more likely to feel lonely and isolated than men.

To support the above article, Labrague et al., (2021) said that loneliness was common to college students during this time of mandatory lockdown in following the protocol to reduce the spread of COVID-19. 56.7 percent of students are reported to feel relatively lonely, while 23.6 percent of students are reported to feel extremely lonely. Emotional loneliness is reported to be more prevalent among students than social loneliness.

Although there is insufficient causal evidence for the effects of loneliness, links to poor health and wellbeing have been found (Fried, 2020). According to the international survey that was conducted by Larry Dossey (2020), 22% in the US and 23% in the UK said that they often feel lonely and almost half of the result says that loneliness has a bad effect on their overall health e.g., personal relationship and physical.

Self-Esteem and Loneliness

The study of Najafi, Salehin, and Mohamadyfar (2016) looked into the effect of shyness, humorous style, and self-esteem on the loneliness that students felt during their school days. The result showed the importance of self-esteem and adaptive use of humorous style in decreasing the students' loneliness and therefore stated that self-esteem and loneliness were found to be positively correlated. Also, self-esteem and shyness, and humor style were conducted using the regression analysis, which resulted in the conclusion that the aforementioned components are the significant predictor of loneliness.

Ishaq et al., (2017) which primarily revolved around university students that are living in hostels explore the relationship between loneliness and self-esteem and then concludes that there would be a negative relationship between the two variables. It has been revealed that loneliness was linked to lower self-esteem among university students living in hostels and is supported by many past discoveries that agree with these findings. The result of their study accepted the hypothesis where they revealed the non-significance relationship between loneliness and self-esteem among

both sexes. Following the result, the role of self-esteem and loneliness can be seen in each other. For instance, people with low self-esteem are commonly criticized and rejected by their peers because of their inability to blend.

However, Ibrahim et al. (2017) conducted research for which loneliness is especially common among college students. It was, in fact, one of the most prevalent complaints made by students to health and counseling institutions. Because of this problem, the aforementioned researchers then investigate the loneliness among college students, especially nursing students. The results of their study indicated that half of the studied sample felt loneliness, whereas, the majority of the studied samples showed high levels of self-esteem. Therefore, loneliness was negatively correlated with self-esteem.

As Thakkar, Haria, and Kumar (2016), adolescence is a period where self-esteem will depend on external factors such as family, peers, and loneliness. The paper stated that people with high self-esteem are more likely to engage in extracurricular activities. Their time and energy are directed into activities, leaving them with less time to be lonely. The study used a total of 80 samples to measure the relationship between self-esteem and loneliness, and observed a negative correlation between the two variables. Additionally, adolescents are more likely to experience loneliness because of their social relationships.

Thus, Vanhalst et al. (2013) stated that having low self-esteem is a sign of current loneliness in adolescence, however, it is still under study why having low self-esteem puts adolescents at risk of experiencing loneliness. It shows in their result that self-esteem and loneliness have a reciprocal effect on each other.

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, the researchers used quantitative research, specifically descriptive-correlational design, to examine and analyze the relationship between self-esteem and loneliness.

Study Participants

The participants of this study were college students ages 18 and above from both public and private universities in the Philippines who were enrolled



during this pandemic. Thus, the following criteria were (1) college students, (2) Filipino, and (3) above 18 years old. The sampling technique employed in this study was a convenient sampling design to investigate the existing relationship between self-esteem and loneliness among college students and used a quantitative research design with 189 respondents.

Study Instruments

The researchers obtained two standardized instruments in collecting the data on the self-esteem and loneliness of college students. The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale by Rosenberg (1965) was the first instrument to be obtained and the second instrument was UCLA Loneliness Scale by Russell, Peplau, and Ferguson (1978).

The first instrument utilized was the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale which is primarily and widely used in evaluating the level of self-esteem of an individual(negative or positive) through item response theory. This instrument used a 10-item scale with a four-point Likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree to determine the college students' self-esteem.

On the other hand, UCLA Loneliness Scale was promptly designed to measure the individual's feelings of social isolation and loneliness. It consists of 20 questions with four-Likert scales from one(1) that indicates "I often feel this way" to four(4) that indicates "I never feel this way" to evaluate the participants' level of loneliness.

Procedure

To acquire the required data that the study needed, the researchers considered many factors in distributing the answer sheets. The data was gathered through online surveys with the use of Google Forms. Additionally, the participants were given informed consent and ample time to respond to the questions. Their participation in the study is entirely voluntary, and they are not required to write their names or other personal information. After the students completed the questionnaires, the data was sorted and factual references were included. The data acquired served as the foundation for formulating factual interpretation and analysis to create the presentation of the findings. As a result, these variables formulated the goal of understanding the relationship between self-esteem and loneliness through a systematic leap of stages in data collection.

Ethical Considerations

Concerning the integrity and rights of participants, the researchers conduct voluntary participation with anonymity, and all participants are free to withdraw or leave the study at any time without any obligation to continue. Also, the survey questionnaire was distributed online through Google form due to the COVID-19 protocol that the school and government implemented. Thus, the questions inserted in the questionnaire were not from the researchers themselves but from previous studies that also studied the same variables that professionals thoroughly comprehend.

Ethical concern is an integral part of every researcher, and thus the study incorporates the assistance of a research professor. The risk of harm to both researchers and those being studied is investigated, and the need for a support structure for both groups is emphasized. Their responses will be treated in strict confidence and will be safeguarded by the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (R.A. 10173). Strictly speaking of the aforementioned factors, the language of the survey form was accessible for both Filipino and English speakers. Thus, ethical regards were applied.

Result

This part will present the study's statistical findings that were gathered through the research question. To compare and determine the mean and the relationship between the variables, the Pearson correlation coefficient was computed using SPSS and therefore concluded.

Relationship between Self-esteem and Loneliness

The main focus of this study is bound only to the relationship between self-esteem and loneliness. As presented in Table 1, the statistical analysis demonstrates a significant relationship between the variables (r=.131).

Table 1
Pearson Correlation of Self-esteem and Loneliness

CORRELATION		
	Self-Esteem	Loneliness
Self-Esteem	-	.131*
Loneliness	.131*	-



Figure 1..

Furthermore, Kyung-Sook and Hye-gyeong (2018) delineate self-esteem as an important psychological mechanism that helps an individual know their worth which results in their ability to cope easily with their environment. The investigators explained in their paper the impact of self-esteem on the loneliness of college learners in which they figured out their significant relationship. Also, it found that self-esteem is highly related to loneliness which various studies have supported. Additionally, students in college who felt lonely frequently which were not addressed mostly indifferent students were identified as constituents that affected their self-esteem.

On the other hand, Du et al. (2019) claim that self-esteem and loneliness have reciprocal effects in their study. Hence, they define self-esteem as the subjective feeling of an individual and reflect the standing of their interpersonal relationship. In contrast, loneliness was found to be a risk factor influencing children's and adolescents' self-esteem. They also stated that having low self-esteem can increase the possibility of loneliness.

Discussion

This study investigates the relationship between self-esteem and loneliness amidst the online learning modality. The findings revealed a significant correlation between self-esteem and loneliness of the students, especially in today's situation where learners are deprived of having social interaction with their peers. Furthermore, their ability to cope was also halted which is aligned with self-esteem. On the other hand, the study also suggests that the increase in feeling loneliness is parallel to having low self-esteem.

Although some of the students most likely prefer this kind of set-up, many of them are still struggling in their studies due to many factors. Along with this, their participation is highly integrated into building the learners' self-esteem, which can result in decreasing the feeling of loneliness.

Conclusion

This COVID-19 pandemic affects universities directly and indirectly globally, which changes the school's modality to online learning, which hinders the students' ability to improve themselves. Pointedly, the

higher the loneliness they experience the lower their self-esteem will be and vice versa. Thus, It relatively affects the students' emotional stability, resulting in the significant relationship between self-esteem and the level of loneliness perceived by the college students in the Philippines, which specifically indicates the rejection of the null hypothesis. The humongous number of respondents ascertained that the modified learning during the pandemic due to COVID-19 showed a shift in their coping and cognitive ability. Thus, the researchers suggest that students must be monitored daily due to struggles in their studies and a variety of factors, particularly in their ability to respond and how they deal with problems. Furthermore, the prevention of students feeling low self-esteem should be addressed and prioritized.

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Affiliations and Corresponding Informations

Corresponding: Edelaine Lopez Email: lopezedelaine@jilcf.edu.ph Phone:



Edelaine Lopez:

Jesus Is Lord Colleges Foundation, Inc.



Micah Villegas:

Jesus Is Lord Colleges Foundation, Inc.



Angeline Suliao:

Jesus Is Lord Colleges Foundation, Inc.



Jhoselle Tus:

Jesus Is Lord Colleges Foundation, Inc.