WHY DO EMERGING ADULTS FEEL LONELY? THE ROLE OF PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

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ABSTRACT

Loneliness has become a worldwide phenomenon that needs attention, due to the various negative impacts it caused. This study aims to explain the role of perceived social support in mediating the correlation between psychological capital and social-emotional loneliness. The research was conducted online with 619 participants aged 18-25 years in the development stage of emerging adulthood. The quantitative method with a correlation test was conducted using SPSS 23.00. The results showed that perceived social support partially mediated the relationship between psychological capital and social-emotional loneliness.

Keywords: Psychological capital, loneliness, social and emotional loneliness, perceived social support, emerging adulthood

1. PREFACE

In 2021, a community called Into the Light conducted a survey to look at the psychological condition of the Indonesian people. The results show that almost 5,211 young adult participants aged 18-34 years experienced loneliness (CNN Indonesia, 2021). Loneliness has recently become a phenomenon experienced by many people, especially young people. Based on this information, the author tried to conduct a personal interview. On May 7, 2021, C (name initial), a 23-year-old female student and a worker experienced loneliness because she didn't have anyone to share her problems with. Subject C experienced difficulties in the areas of work and education, does not have a partner, and lives far away from her family as she was moving to the big city for her education. This finding is supported by Sartika (2019), who concluded that many young people are negatively affected by loneliness because they do not know the right way to deal with their condition.

Loneliness is a condition when a person feels dissatisfied with the various relationships that they have (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1997). Weiss (1973) divided loneliness into 2 dimensions, namely: (a) social loneliness, the lack or loss of adequate relationships in a social context; (b) emotional loneliness, the lack or loss of a relationship with a deep emotional attachment (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993). Emotional loneliness was divided into 2 indicators, namely romantic loneliness, which is a lack or loss of deep romantic relationships, and family loneliness, which is a lack or loss of a deep relationship with the family (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993). Loneliness has many negative impacts, such as decreased life satisfaction (Salimi, 2011), suicidal thoughts (Chang et al., 2017), and depression (Soetikno, 2020). The negative impact that occurred shows how important loneliness is to be studied to avoid the negative effects that can be experienced.

Previous studies have explained that loneliness is closely related to perceived social support (Benoit & DiTommaso, 2020), (Y. Ren & Ji, 2019), (Labrague et al., 2021), (Salimi &

Bozorgpour, 2012). Perceived social support is a concept regarding the exchange of resources between two individuals which is perceived to increase the recipient's well-being (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). These resources can come from family, friends, or significant others (Zimet et al., 1988). It can be concluded that when a person gets enough resources from the surrounding environment, they will not feel lonely.

In addition, Y. Ren and Ji (2019) research also explained that perceived social support and loneliness can be mediated by psychological capital. The concept of psychological capital is explained as a psychological resource in a person (Luthans et al., 2007). These resources consist of 4, namely: (a) Self-efficacy, belief in one's ability to complete a task; (b) Optimism, having a positive outlook on current and future conditions; (c) Hope, being motivated and have many ways to achieve a goal; (d) Resiliency, the ability to rise when faced with difficult situations. From the results of previous studies, it showed that the higher the psychological capital, the lower the loneliness they feel (Y. Ren & Ji, 2019). These results explained that when a person has adequate resources within themselves, it can prevent them from feeling lonely.

Interestingly, Y. Ren and Ji (2019) also explained that the correlation strength of perceived social support and loneliness (rs = -0.440; p < 0.01) was much greater when compared to psychological capital and loneliness (rs = -0.303; p < 0.01). From the results of this study, it can be concluded that it would be more appropriate if perceived social support is placed as a mediator considering the strength of the correlation which is closer to loneliness. Apart from that, conceptually, perceived social support and loneliness are very close, because Weiss (1973) explained that individuals experience loneliness due to a lack of fulfilled needs in the various relationships that they have (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993). The results of Y. Ren and Ji (2019) study also could not be generalized widely because the respondents were limited to teenagers. Whereas in this study, the authors are more interested in looking at the age category of emerging adulthood based on the phenomenon of loneliness that exists in Indonesia.

Emerging adulthood is a developmental stage that is in the middle of adolescence and young adulthood, with an age range of 18 to 25 years (Arnett, 2000). Arnett suggested that the process of exploring identity that begins in adolescence continues in the emerging adulthood stage. There are three areas of identity exploration, namely establishing more intimate romantic relationships (love), increasing abilities and knowledge for future work (work), as well as having a more mature view of life (worldviews) (Arnett, 2000).

One way for emerging adults to explore their identity is by becoming a student (Arnett, 2000). Especially in Indonesia, many students move to big cities due to the uneven quality of education (Kompas.com, 2008). Emerging adults who are university students are also more vulnerable to feeling lonely because they are far from their parents (Halim & Dariyo, 2016). Apart from being students, usually many emerging adults also work while continuing their study (Arnett, 2000). The existence of various developmental tasks that need to be completed, starting from forming an identity, having a safe romantic relationship, and obtaining good social relations makes emerging adults experience loneliness, especially when their social relations do not meet the goals they are currently pursuing (Buecker et al., 2021). It can be concluded that the period of emerging adulthood is referred to as a period filled with instability in various aspects of life, therefore loneliness is more prone to be felt (Buecker et al., 2021).

With the phenomenon of loneliness that is prevalent among young people in Indonesia, coupled with the urgency that similar research has not yet been found, emphasizes the importance of this

research being conducted. Therefore, the authors want to see how the relationship between psychological capital and social and emotional loneliness with perceived social support as a mediator in emerging adults in Indonesia.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study conducted non-probability sampling methods, namely convenience sampling and snowball sampling. A total of 682 participants were collected based on the age requirement of 18-25 years with the minimum education was high school graduates. Out of the 682 participants, 63 participants were excluded from the study because they did not comply with the research requirements. Accordingly, 619 participants remained, and their data were processed in this study. The average age of the participants was 20 years.

Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ) developed by Luthans et al. (2007) which consists of 24 item statements using a 6-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree"). The 4 dimensions are self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, each of which consists of 6 statements. The total score indicates a person's overall psychological capital score. The validity of the measuring instrument was proven by the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) method with Chi-square values square (2.9), RMSEA (0.056), GFI (0.92), NFI (0.97), and CFI (0.98). Reliability was well proven by Cronbach's alpha, which is 0.643-0.865.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) is a measurement tool developed by Zimet et al. (1988). The questionnaire has 12 statement items, and each subscale having 4 statement items with 7 Likert scale points (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"). The 3 subscales are friends, family, and significant others. The total score indicates the overall score of a person's perceived social support. The validity of the measuring instrument was proven through the CFA method, obtaining RMSEA (0.054), GFI (0.92), NFI (0.96), and CFI (0.99). The reliability of the measuring instrument was also proven through Cronbach's alpha of 0.890-0.898.

Social and Emotional Loneliness Short Version for Adults (SELSA-S) developed by DiTommaso et al. (2004) which consists of 15 item statements using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"). The 3 dimensions are social, romantic, and family, each of which consists of 5 statements. The total score signifies a person's overall loneliness score. The validity of the measuring instrument was proven by the CFA method and obtained Chi-square values (2.71), RMSEA (0.053), GFI (0.95), NFI (0.97), and CFI (0.98). The reliability was proven by Cronbach's alpha of 0.841-0.876.

All data were analyzed using SPSS 23.0, AMOS 23, and Lisrel for Student. Correlation analysis used the Spearman Rho's correlation.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the demographic data of the participants in this study. A total of 555 participants were women and the remaining 64 were men. 321 of them live in Greater Jakarta, while 298 others live in areas outside Greater Jakarta. From the level of education, 440 were high school graduates, 27 were diploma graduates, 150 were undergraduates, and 2 were masters graduates.

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Table 1

Demographic Data

	N	Percentage
Gender		
Male	64	10.3%
Female	555	89.7%
Domicile		
Greater Jakarta	321	51.9%
Outside of Greater Jakarta	298	48.1%
Education		
High School	440	71.1%
Diploma	27	4.4%
Undergraduate	150	24.2%
Graduate	2	0.3%

Descriptive Statistics of Each Scale's Scores

An analysis was carried out on the description of the data collected from the scores of each measuring instrument. The psychological capital score has an average of 3.88 with each dimension having an average of 3.50 (self-efficacy), 4.24 (hope), 3.67 (resiliency), and 4.12 (optimism). The perceived social support score has an average of 4.33 with each dimension having an average of 5.41 (significant others support), 3.95 (family support), and 4.57 (friends support). Loneliness has an average score of 4.09. Each dimension has an average score of 3.31 (social loneliness), 5.56 (romantic loneliness) and 3.39 (family loneliness). Full data can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Data

Variable	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Psychology Capital	1	6	3.88	0.80
Self-Efficacy	1	6	3.50	1.11
Hope	1	6	4.24	1.12
Resiliency	1	6	3.67	0.81
Optimism	1	6	4.12	0.88
Perceived Social Support	1	7	4.33	1.33
Significant Others Support	1	7	5.41	1.44
Family Support	1	7	3.95	1.66
Friends Support	1	7	4.57	1.62
Social-Emotional Loneliness	1	7	4.09	1.06
Social Loneliness	1	7	3.31	1.53
Romantic Loneliness	1	7	5.56	1.74
Family Loneliness	1	7	3.39	1.49

Correlation between Variables

Table 3 shows the results of the correlation between variables. It is proven that psychological capital has a significant negative correlation with loneliness ($rs = -0.446$; $p < 0.01$). Likewise, perceived social support has a significant negative correlation with loneliness ($rs = -0.758$; $p < 0.01$). Meanwhile, psychological capital has a significant positive correlation with perceived social support ($rs = 0.485$; $p < 0.01$).

Table 3
Correlation between Psychological Capital, Perceived Social Support, and Loneliness

Index	PsyCap	PSS	SELSA
Psychology Capital (PsyCap)	1		
Perceived Social Support (PSS)	0.485**	1	
Social-Emotional Loneliness (SELSA)	-0.446**	-0.758**	1

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the higher the psychological capital a person has, the lower the loneliness they have. According to the explanation based on the theory of conservation of resources, individuals have various kinds of resources that are maintained and used to avoid loss (Hobfoll, 1989). Therefore, psychological capital acts as a resource that exists within a person, and loneliness is then considered a situation when an individual loses these resources (Hobfoll, 1989). In this case, loneliness can be considered as a loss in social relations or deep relationships with family or significant others. Therefore, it can be said that when someone experiences loneliness, they can overcome it by increasing other existing resources.

Psychological capital as a resource can be used as an adaptive way of coping to deal with this lonely situation. For example, individuals can use coping by acceptance and finding the meaning of their problems or use coping by change by changing the conditions that are happening (Rabenu & Yaniv, 2017). Therefore, with high psychological capital, these resources can become an energy within the individual to overcome existing difficulties. In conclusion, if an individual has strong internal resources such as high self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism, then they will have a more positive outlook on the surrounding relationships so that they will be more fulfilled both in terms of the quality and quality of their relationships (Xu et al., 2020). With a sense of contentment, loneliness will not be experienced by someone.

In addition, high perceived social support was found to reduce feelings of loneliness. Of course, this is in line with the theory which explained that the two variables are closely related to one's subjectivity. Someone will experience loneliness if they have a perception that the support they receive does not meet their expectations (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1997). The feeling of loneliness can be overcome when someone feels they have enough.

Another explanation, a strong significant positive correlation between psychological capital and perceived social support can change a person's attitude (Luthans et al., 2004). In this case, when a person has sufficient resources within themselves, they will also view their surroundings more positively including the relationships they have (Xu et al., 2020). In conclusion, a person will have more control over their perceptions and also be optimistic regardless of what they actually receive. This emphasizes that one's view of the relationship is more important than the actual reality.

Mediating Effect of Perceived Social Support
The authors continued the research with the mediation test and saw whether perceived social support can be a mediator between the two variables. Using Sobel's test and calculating the standard error of mean, a Z score is obtained with a value of 12.43. This result is greater than the Z table, which is 1.96 with a significance below 0.05 ($p = 0.000$). This result indicates that perceived social support can mediate psychological capital and loneliness. The mediation model is partial mediation because all variables are significantly related ($p < 0.05$).

Figure 1
Mediation Model
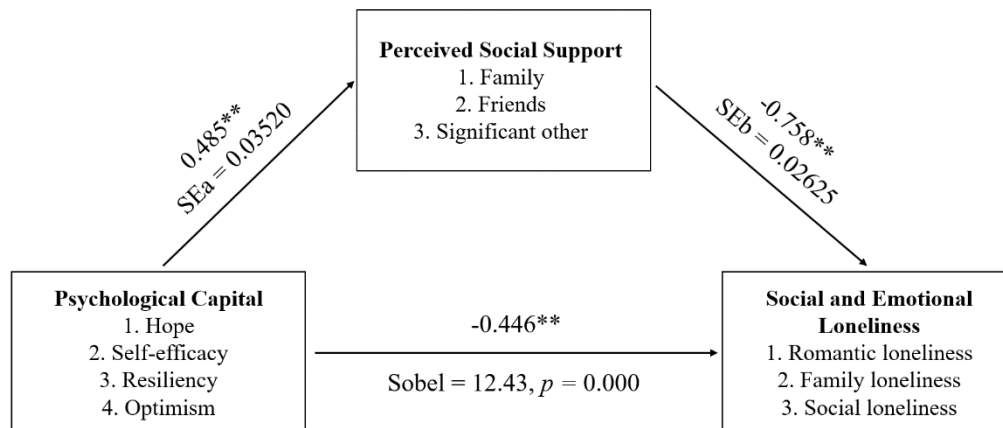
These results can be explained through the theory of conservation of resources that social support is considered as a resource that provides or strengthens other existing resources (Hobfoll, 1989). When a person has strong resources within himself in the form of high self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism, they will have a good view of their surroundings (Xu et al., 2020). When the relationship is seen as good, then a person receives a positive effect from the relationship they have. The existence of resources within and from the environment will compensate for the loneliness that is felt and can be overcome.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusion from the results of this study is that individuals with high psychological capital and high perceived social support will be able to deal better with loneliness. Psychological capital is considered a source of energy internally that comes from individuals, and this strength can then be used to deal with external situations that are not ideal, such as loneliness. Perceived social support is considered as a source of energy externally, and its positive effects can also make individuals able to deal with the loneliness they feel. Both synergize with each other and help deal with the loneliness that a person feels.

The results of this study suggest to increasing the psychological capital possessed by emerging adults so that they can cope adaptively when facing problems. This also proves that a person is capable of doing something in the face of adversity, rather than just relying on external factors. High psychological capitals can be considered a protective factor in many difficult situations. Besides that, with high psychological capital, a person will be able to perceive the environment well, thereby increasing perceived social support as well. Therefore, future research can conduct experiments to increase psychological capital and see its role in dealing with various difficult situations.

This research also has some shortcomings. First, there was an imbalance in the number of male and female participants so that the results tended to come from the women's perspective. Second, the results of the data are not normally distributed so that further analysis cannot be carried out. Future research can try to ensure that the distribution of data is balanced from all aspects. Suggestions for further research are to see whether gender roles play a significant role in the results of future studies, and also see how other variables might be related to loneliness such as coping styles and social provisions.

Acknowledgement

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