

# The Experience of Loneliness with Regard to Gender and Type of Study among University Students

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## ABSTRACT

Loneliness is usually defined as an unpleasant and emotionally disturbing subjective experience that occurs as response to the discrepancy between desired and achieved levels of social contact. The experience of loneliness is unpleasant and painful experience, followed by feelings of rejection from the people that we care, with simultaneous desire that they accept us and to be part of their lives. The main aim of this study was to examine the differences in loneliness with regard to gender, that is, to determine whether young men and women experience different levels of loneliness and also to determine whether there is a difference in the level of loneliness between students of social sciences and students of technical sciences. The study was conducted on a sample of 200 students (82 males and 118 females) of various departments of the final year of Social Sciences and Technical Sciences at the University of Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study applied the following instruments: The short version of UCLA loneliness scale and examination of gender and studies based on rounding on the questionnaire. The results showed a statistically significant difference in the level of loneliness for men ( $Md=15.00$ ,  $n=82$ ) and women ( $Md=11.05$ ,  $n=118$ ),  $U = 3954$ ,  $z = -2.203$ ,  $p < .05$ , and that students of technical sciences ( $Md=14.05$ ,  $n=100$ ) show greater loneliness compared to students of social sciences ( $Md=11.05$ ,  $n=100$ ),  $U = 4223$ ,  $z = -1.903$ ,  $p \leq .05$ . Based on the results obtained in this research, it can be concluded that male students show a greater tendency towards loneliness compared to female students. Students of technical sciences show greater loneliness compared to students of social sciences.

## 1. Introduction

People are classified as social beings who have a need to belong to a group and have intimate relationships with other people. If these needs are not met, loneliness occurs. It occurs in all people, regardless of age or gender. This feeling of loneliness makes people uncomfortable and makes them feel rejected by other, which is actually a very painful experience.

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Many agree that loneliness is a universal human experience that, to a greater or lesser extent, all people experience at some point in their lives. The question arises, however, in which cases will loneliness take on the characteristics of a more permanent psychosocial condition, and when will it be just a passing phase in a person's life. In this sense, several psychosocial characteristics have been identified that correlate with loneliness. Most often, lonely people are described as: introverted, shy, low self-esteem, dissatisfied with life, unhappy, socially anxious, depressed, perfectionist, pessimistic, socially unskilled in establishing and maintaining social relationships, they are more often hostile towards others and more often express anger, closed and self-focused and have reduced opportunities for cooperation with other people (Klarin, 2002). It is considered that communication peculiarities enable a person to shape interaction and experience success in intimate relationships, while deficiencies in this area lead to misunderstandings in the social world and to frequent "interpersonal disasters" (Goleman, 1997).

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1. Aim of Research**

The main goal of this research was to examine the differences in the experience of loneliness with regard to gender, i.e. to determine whether young men and young women experience different levels of loneliness, and to determine whether there is a difference in the level of loneliness between students of social sciences and students of technical sciences.

### **2.2. Description of the Research**

This research was conducted as part of a master's thesis at the University of Tuzla, BiH and presented only part of the overall research work. The examination was conducted in groups, in agreement with professors / assistants, at the beginning of regular lectures at the faculty.

### **2.3. Participants**

The research was conducted on a convenient sample of respondents. Students from different departments of the final years of social and technical sciences at the University of Tuzla participated in the study.

The total number of respondents who participated in the study was 200, of which 82 (41%) were male and 118 (59%) female.

### **2.4. Measuring Loneliness**

The following measuring instruments were used in this study:

#### *A short version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale.*

A short form of the UCLA scale is one-dimensional and proved to be invariant with respect to different characteristics of the respondents (by age, gender, race, education, economic status). The scale was also used on samples of other researchers. The scale contains seven statements that are answered on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 to 5). The total result is formed as a linear combination of results in each individual particle. A higher score indicates higher loneliness. The Cronbach alpha-type reliability coefficients ranged from .83 to .85, which is quite satisfactory given the small number of particles (Lackovic-Grgin et al., 1998). Scores range from 7 to 35.

### 3. Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive parameters for the obtained results on the loneliness scale. The arithmetic mean on the Short Version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale is 14.04, and the standard deviation is 6.23. 31 subjects scored a minimum of 7 points and a maximum score of 35, or more precisely 1 respondent has 35 points.

Table 1.

*Descriptive parameters for the results obtained on the loneliness scale*

	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Total loneliness	200	7.00	35.00	14.04	6.23
Valid N	200				

#### 3.1. Examining Differences on the Loneliness Scale in Relation to Gender

The significance of the differences between male and female subjects was tested with the Mann-Whitney U test.

Table 2.

*Medians and standard deviations for the total score on the loneliness scale for subsamples of men (N=82) and women (N=118); Mann-Whitney U test results*

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Md</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>p</b>
Total loneliness	Male	15.00	6.68		
	Female	11.05	5.76	-2.203	< .028

The Mann-Whitney U test compared the results of the total score on the loneliness scale of men and women. There is a significant difference in the results for men (Md=15.00, n=82) and women (Md=11.05, n=118),  $U = 3954$ ,  $z = -2.203$ ,  $p < .05$ .

The presented results on the Loneliness scale in relation to the gender of the respondents were confirmed by the Mann-Whitney U test, which allows us to confirm the hypothesis H1, which read: "There is a statistically significant difference in the total score on the loneliness scale in relation to the gender of the respondents".

As we could have expected, young men achieve a higher result on the Loneliness scale than girls, as shown by earlier research (Putarek, 2012). Our results can be explained by the construction of the UCLA Loneliness Scale itself. Since young men tend to admit that they are lonely, when using scales that mention the term "loneliness", young men achieved results that indicated less loneliness, than when using scales that do not use the word "loneliness" in the name of the scale, instructions or particles, which is the case in our research.

However, the results in examining gender differences in loneliness are not unambiguous. Thus, some studies speak in favor of greater loneliness in women, while other studies report greater loneliness in men, while there are also studies that report the inconsistency of gender differences when examining the level of loneliness.

#### 3.2. Examining Differences on the Loneliness scale with Regard to the Type of Study Among Students

In order to answer this problem, that is, to examine the differences for the total score on the loneliness scale among students with regard to the science of study, i.e. social or technical sciences, the Mann-Whitney U test was conducted.

Table 3.

*Medians and standard deviations for the total score on the loneliness scale for the social science (N=100) and technical science (N=100) subsamples; Mann-Whitney U test results*

	<b>Science of studying</b>	<b>Md</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>p</b>
Total	social	11.05	4.91		
Loneliness	technical	14.05	7.13	-1.903	≤ .05

The Mann-Whitney U test compared the results of the total score of loneliness among students of social and technical departments. There is a significant difference in the results of technical (Md=14.05, n=100) and social sciences (Md=11.05, n=100),  $U = 4223$ ,  $z = -1.903$ ,  $p \leq .05$ .

The presented results on the scale of loneliness among students in relation to the science of study, i.e. social or technical sciences, were confirmed by the Mann-Whitney U test, which allows us to confirm hypothesis H2, which read: "A statistically significant difference in the level of loneliness is expected between students of social and students of technical sciences".

The obtained results indicate that the expectations set in this research are met, that there is a statistically significant difference in the level of loneliness between students of social studies and students of technical departments of studies. These results could be explained by the fact that students of social sciences show greater socialization, are more sociable and thus are exposed to less loneliness, in contrast to students of technical sciences.

#### 4. Discussion

The Mann-Whitney U test compared the results of the total score on the loneliness scale of men and women. There is a significant difference in the results for men (Md=15.00, n=82) and women (Md=11.05, n=118),  $U = 3954$ ,  $z = -2.203$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Based on the results obtained in this research, it can be concluded that male students show a greater tendency towards loneliness compared to female students. The results are in line with the expectations given the used UCLA loneliness scale, in which men mostly show a higher incidence of loneliness compared to women.

The results of studies of loneliness in which gender differences were examined are not unambiguous. Borys and Perlman (Lacković-Grgin et al., 1998) report that girls are lonelier, while other authors speak of greater loneliness in men, i.e. young men (Tucak-Junaković & Adorić, 2009). There are different explanations of the obtained results and their disagreements. At the same time, it is not entirely clear whether gender differences, if found, are real or the result of methodological reasons. Those who found that women are lonelier explained this by the greater orientation of women in interpersonal relationships and their greater expectations from those relationships, and therefore by the greater difference between desired and achieved, or by the way that women are more introspective and ready to admit that they are lonely. On the other hand, some researchers believe that men will have a harder time admitting that they are lonely in order to protect themselves from possible social humiliation (Lacković-Grgin et al., 1998). As the short form of the UCLA loneliness scale was used in our research, in which the word loneliness is not mentioned once, we believe that the obtained results are free from objections of this kind mentioned by Borys and Perlman (Lacković-Grgin et al., 1998).

The results of research by Medved and Keresteš (Putarek, 2012), which was conducted on young people in early adolescence using the Short Version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale, indicate that young men are more lonely than girls. Since the UCLA loneliness scale was

used in our research, the results are consistent with expectations that young men will be lonelier than girls.

Women tend to report slightly higher loneliness than men, but only when the measurement includes terms such as "lonely" or "loneliness" (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2008).

It can be concluded that the research that was conducted to determine the differences between men and women in loneliness did not provide clear results. While some studies do not find a significant difference in loneliness with regard to the gender of the participants (Kozjak, 2005), others find a difference but it differs in direction. Thus, some studies indicate greater loneliness in men (Kozjak, 2005), and some indicate greater loneliness in women. However, these different results were obtained in studies in which different instruments were used to measure loneliness, which was operationalized as a one-dimensional construct in the aforementioned studies. Since it is more socially acceptable for women to express their difficulties than for men, the negative consequences of admitting loneliness are less for women than for men. In one study, this fact was demonstrated by giving students a description of a lonely person. When the lonely person was a woman, students rated her as more efficient and her behavior as more socially acceptable than in the case of a male lonely person (Kalinić, 2014). As suggested by Lau and Gruen (Kalinić, 2014), the negative connotations and social consequences of loneliness inhibit men from admitting loneliness. One of the possible explanations for the insignificant difference is the methodology related to the way of examining and measuring loneliness. Borys and Perlman (Kalinić, 2014), analyzing the data of various researches, concluded that in the researches in which the UCLA loneliness scale is used, no gender differences are usually obtained. Namely, in research in which participants are asked to determine the extent to which they are lonely, that is, when the instrument's particles contain the word loneliness, women achieve higher values due to the already mentioned reduced willingness of men to admit their loneliness. However, in surveys where loneliness is indirectly inferred, as in the case of the UCLA Loneliness Scale, men achieve results that are similar to women's results.

Furthermore, some research indicates that women and men experience loneliness differently (Kozjak, 2005). Namely, women report greater loneliness when they lack intimate and friendly relationships and trust in interpersonal relationships (emotional loneliness), while men report greater loneliness when they lack a group of friends, i.e. when they are isolated from group interaction (social loneliness). Based on this, in order to reveal the nature of gender differences in loneliness, it would be useful to examine loneliness with multidimensional measures that can capture different types of relationships.

Regarding gender differences, men feel more lonely because they carry more responsibilities and are more influenced by the responsibilities that society imposes on them. Enochs and Roland (Tümkaya et al., 2008) emphasized that men keep their feelings under control, they are not preoccupied with social activities and they do not cry compared to women. Consequently, they have a problem of loneliness and feel more depressed and much more serious.

The Mann-Whitney U test compared the results of the total score of loneliness among students of social and technical departments. There is a significant difference in the results of technical (Md=14.05, n=100) and social sciences students (Md=11.05, n=100),  $U = 4223$ ,  $z = -1.903$ ,  $p \leq .05$ .

The obtained results show that students of technical sciences show greater loneliness compared to students of social sciences.

The obtained results indicate that the expectations set in this research are met, that there is a statistically significant difference in the level of loneliness between students of social studies and students of technical departments of studies. These results could be explained by the fact that students of social sciences show greater socialization, are more sociable and thus are exposed to less loneliness, in contrast to students of technical sciences. However, this should be seen as a general assumption, given that previous researchs did not deal specifically with the issue of the difference in the level of loneliness among students of social and technical sciences. So far, the studies have mostly dealt with the social status of students and the general level of loneliness among students, where it has been shown that students who have changed their environment due to their studies mostly report a higher level of loneliness.

The obtained data are in accordance with Holland's personality-job matching theory (1975), because this theory assumes that people choose occupations with regard to some of their personality traits. This means that more sociable people, who are more inclined to help others, friendly, cooperative and understanding, will choose such an occupation that will coincide with these personality traits (students of social sciences). On the other hand, entrepreneurial personality types (students of technical and humanistic sciences) will choose professions in which there are opportunities to influence others, and in which their self-confidence, ambition, energy and dominance will come to the fore, rather than empathy and helping others in need and various other forms of prosocial behavior.

## 5. Conclusion

Loneliness is a big problem nowadays. This study not only highlines difference in experiencing loneliness with regard to sex but also distinguished that feeling depending on chosen profession. Based on the average score achieved on the UCLA loneliness scale, the existence of gender differences in loneliness was established. Since the UCLA loneliness scale was used in our research, the results are in line with the expectations that young men are lonelier than young women.

The results showed that there is a statistically significant difference in loneliness between students of social sciences and students of technical sciences, in the sense that students of social sciences are less lonely than students of technical sciences.

Similar results can be found in some previous research. What separates and differentiates this research from previous ones is the examination of the presence and level of loneliness during the final year of studies at the university, as well as the inclusion of the direction of study among students. The author of this research refers to the fact that final studies are considered an interesting source for research, given that this period is marked as a transition between the adolescent phase and entry into business life.

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