

Loneliness, Stress, Self-esteem, and Deception among Adolescents

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between loneliness, stress, self-esteem, and deception in junior high school students. A convenience sample of 480 students (225 boys and 255 girls from grade six through nine) from four junior high schools participated in the present study. They completed four questionnaires: the Deception Questionnaire, the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale, the Perceived Stress Scale, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Data were analyzed by using correlations, t-test, and descriptive statistics. The results of the Pearson correlation test showed a significant relationship between loneliness and self-esteem with deception. The relationship between stress with deception was not significant. The results showed a correlation between adolescent loneliness, self-esteem, and deception. To paying attention to loneliness, self-esteem may be essential to identify at-risk students having high deception in school.

INTRODUCTION

Deception implies that an agent acts or speaks so as to induce a false belief in a target or victim (Hyman 1989), while lying is one form of deception, people may - as part of their deception - simply conceal information or divert attention from vital facts in order to avoid discussing what they consider “touchy” subjects. Another form of deception is telling half-truths that are misleading (Vrij et al. 2010; Rokach 2019). Lies are commonly used to ward off embarrassment or guilt, to benefit the liar, or to desperately seek a partner’s approval (Haselton et al. 2005; Rokach 2019). Adolescence is a stage of life in which a higher number of new, complex, unexpected, and sometimes difficult situations arise, not only for those directly involved but also for their families and teachers. An adolescent develops a new perspective on the world and starts to challenge, discuss, argue, and endorse his ideals (Martins and Carvalho 2013). The adolescent will make the management of the utilization of lie at this stage, influenced both by the need to develop its own identity, independent and socially valued relative to a peer group with which one identifies, as by the social, emotional and familiar context that supports it (Urta 2009; Martins and Carvalho, 2013). Nguyen-Thi (2016) considered two cri-

teria of motivation and frequency, deception is viewed as deviating from the standard when it comes from the three causes of obtaining things, obtaining favors, and avoiding duty; and frequently occurs for two months or more. The results show that the percentage of Vietnamese adolescents with lying deviating from the standard is from 14.4 percent to 15.8 percent (Nguyen-Thi 2016).

Deception and lying can also spoil a kind and loving relationship and result in intense loneliness (Rokach and Philibert-Lignières 2015). According to Peltzer and Pengpid (2017), 8.6 percent of the Vietnamese adolescents reported mostly or always being lonely, and 23.8 percent reported sometimes being alone in the past 12 months. Scientific studies have highlighted a close association between stress and deception (Harnsberger et al. 2009). Stress constitutes another domain where appropriate behavior can be detected. The effects of stress, mainly but also lying to some extent, have been established (Harnsberger et al. 2009). Psychologists say people deceive themselves in an unconscious effort to boost self-esteem. The key reason for lying is to aid self-deception, which, in turn, is carried out to maintain self-esteem. (Martin 2004; Snyder 1986).

Although adolescent deception is not a new topic, there are still a limited number of studies done in Vietnam, especially for Vietnamese junior high school students. In order to fill the gap, this research conducted to empirically explore high school junior high school students’ perception of loneliness, stress, self-esteem, and deception.

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Aims and Objective

This research aims to examine the relationship between loneliness, stress, self-esteem, and deception among Vietnamese adolescents. Because of the primary objective of the research, the following problem has been set:

- Is there a statistically significant relationship between the relationship between loneliness, stress, self-esteem, and deception among Vietnamese adolescents?
- Under the aim and the problem of the research, the following null hypothesis was tested:
- There is no significant difference between the relationship between loneliness, stress, self-esteem, and deception among Vietnamese adolescents.

The research starts with reviewing the empirical literature of loneliness, stress, self-esteem, and deception among Vietnamese adolescents. A research methodology is introduced in the second section, followed by results and discussion. The last part is the conclusion.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Participants

Through a sample selection process involving randomization, the sample was made with a proportion of students by sex, class standing, and school. The survey instrument was distributed to 539 Vietnamese students of four junior high schools located in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, of which 480 surveys were returned, for an 89.05 percent return rate, which exceeds the thirty percent response rate most researchers require for analysis (Dillman 2000). The sample of this study was drawn from 480 respondents who completed the survey instrument. There were more girls (53.1%) than boys (46.9%) among the 480 Vietnamese junior high school students who were surveyed. One hundred twenty of these students were in grade 6, 120 were in grade 7, 120 were in grade 8 and 120 were in grade 9. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants.

Measure

Questionnaires were designed to survey junior high school students from grade 6 through

Table 1: An overview of survey participants

		<i>n</i>	%
<i>Gender</i>	Boy	225	46.9
	Girl	255	53.1
<i>School</i>	Kim Đông Junior high school	120	25
	Quang Trung Junior high school	120	25
	Phan Chu Trinh Junior high school	120	25
	Phan Bội Châu Junior high school	120	25
<i>Class</i>	Class 6	120	25
	Class 7	120	25
	Class 8	120	25
	Class 9	120	25
<i>Conduct</i>	Very good	345	71.9
	Good	101	21
	Average	34	7.1
	Weak	0	0

n: Number of participants; %: Percentage

grade 9 in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. First, social-demographic items were introduced in the questionnaire. Then, a self-report questionnaire was administered to 480 Vietnamese junior high school students. Questionnaires measured the variables: the Deception Questionnaire, the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale, the Perceived Stress Scale, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Specifically, Deception Questionnaire was assessed by 30 items, the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale by 20 items, the Perceived Stress Scale was assessed by ten items, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was assessed by 30 items. The responses of the participants were provided at different levels based on a Likert scale (Croasmun and Ostrom 2011).

Analyses

All participants were provided informed consent after receiving an explanation of the purpose of the research. The ethics committee approved the research of the Ho Chi Minh City University of Education. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15 was used for data analyses. The coding procedure was performed as follow: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree. To transform the discrete values into ranks, distance value was calculated as (Maximum –

Minimum)/n = (5-1)/5 = 0.8 (Jaafar et al. 2017). Therefore, the meanings of the rankings are judged as below:

- + 1.00 – 1.80 = Very low
- + 1.81 – 2.60 = Below Average
- + 2.61 – 3.40 = Average
- + 3.41 – 4.20 = Above Average
- + 4.21 – 5.00 = Very High

First, descriptive statistics were calculated as a preliminary analysis. Second, a Pearson correlation conducted to evaluate correlations between the relationship between loneliness, stress, self-esteem, and deception among Vietnamese adolescents. The researchers used a statistical threshold of $p < .05$ for statistical significance.

RESULTS

According to the norms from the questionnaire, the participants scored in percentage on the scale. These tables below show the percentage of respondents showing the relationship between loneliness, stress, self-esteem, and deception among Vietnamese adolescents.

Table 2 shows the survey revealed only 3.8 percent of the students having a low level of loneliness, and none of them reported engaging in deception. About sixty four percent of students

having an average level of loneliness, and 4.4 percent of them reported engaging in deception. About 22.7 percent of students as having an above-average level of loneliness, and 2.3 percent of them reported engaging in deception. Therefore, the proportion of students with deception was relatively low in the first three levels, which is entirely opposite to the fact that 9.2 percent out of 9.6 percent of students with a very high level of loneliness had reported engaging in deception.

Table 3 shows the survey revealed that 3.3 percent of the students having a low level of stress, and only 0.3 percent of them reported engaging in deception. About thirty percent of students having an average level of stress, and 3.3 percent of them reported engaging in deception. About 51.5 percent of students as having an above-average level of stress, and 4.8 percent of them reported engaging in deception. Therefore, the proportion of students with deception was relatively low in the first three levels, which is completely opposite to the fact that 7.1 percent out of fifteen percent of students with a very high level of stress had reported engaging in deception.

Table 4 shows the survey revealed that nine percent of the students having a low level of self-

Table 2: Relationship between the levels of loneliness and deception

<i>Loneliness</i>	<i>Students without deviant behavior</i>		<i>Students with deviant behavior</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Below average	18	3.8	0	0	18	3.8
Average	286	59.6	21	4.4	307	64
Above average	98	20.4	11	2.3	109	22.7
Very high	2	0.4	44	9.2	46	9.6

n: Number of participants; %: Percentage

Table 3: Relationship between the levels of stress and deception

<i>Stress</i>	<i>Students without deviant behavior</i>		<i>Students with deviant behavior</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Below average	13	2.7	3	0.3	16	3.3
Average	128	26.7	16	3.3	144	30
Above average	224	46.7	23	4.8	247	51.5
Very high	38	7.9	34	7.1	72	15

n: Number of participants; %: Percentage

Table 4: Relationship between the levels of stress and deception

<i>Self-esteem</i>	<i>Students without deviant behavior</i>		<i>Students with deviant behavior</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Below average	23	4.8	20	4.2	43	9
Average	209	43.5	47	9.8	256	53.3
Above average	166	34.5	9	1.9	175	36.4
Very high	6	1.3	0	0	6	1.3

n: Number of participants; %: Percentage

esteem, and 4.2 percent of them reported engaging in deception. About 53.3 percent of students having an average level of self-esteem, and 9.8 percent of them reported engaging in deception. About 36.4 percent of students as having an above-average level of self-esteem, and 1.9 percent of them reported engaging in deception. Therefore, the proportion of students with deception was relatively low in the first three levels, which is entirely opposite to the fact that none of 1.3 percent of students with a very high level of self-esteem had reported engaging in deception.

Table 5: Correlations among the study variables

	<i>Deception</i>	<i>Self-esteem</i>	<i>Loneliness</i>	<i>Stress</i>
Deception	1	-.24*	.34**	.19
Self-esteem		1	-.09*	.52
Loneliness			1	.43**
Stress				1

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 5 shows the correlations between loneliness, stress, self-esteem, and Vietnamese junior high school students' deception. Pearson correlation coefficients demonstrated a significant positive correlation ($r=.34, p<.01$) between the deception and loneliness, and low and negative correlation ($r=-.24, p<.05$) was observed between the deception and self-esteem. The correlation coefficient also was not significant between deception and stress ($r=.19, p>.05$) (Krehbiel 2004).

DISCUSSION

This research examined the correlations between the relationship between loneliness, stress,

self-esteem, and deception in Vietnamese junior high school students. The main findings indicate that there was a positive and low relationship between the deception and loneliness among students. It is an important finding in the understanding of the deception. This result ties well with previous studies wherein lack of or insufficient social integration or loneliness results in adverse trends, including deception (Engels et al. 2006; Tian et al. 2017). The proof of this result indicates that loneliness and deception are essential concerns among school-going adolescents in Vietnam, and being lonely was related to a likelihood of deception. Deception and lying can spoil a kind, loving relationship, leading to intense loneliness. Adolescents may lie about their loneliness feelings because they don't want their parents to complain about what they see as their problems. Furthermore, when girls lied frequently, they also reported feeling lonelier (Engels et al. 2006). Longitudinal research is needed to examine these speculations about the triggers in the relationship between lying and change.

This study also demonstrated a negative, low strength association between deception and self-esteem among Vietnamese adolescents, which means that the deception might decrease self-esteem. In line with the previous study, Engels et al. (2006) showed that when adolescents lied frequently, they reported lower levels of self-esteem. However, this finding is inconsistent with the suggestion by Johnson (1995) that deception has been found to be moderately positively correlated with self-esteem. The lying adolescent can create a climate in which his or her parents feel lonely and abandoned. Separating from the family can also lead to low self-esteem levels. Additionally, the researchers found inconsistent associations

between deception and stress. By comparing the result from Engels et al. (2006), they have demonstrated that adolescents who lied a lot, boys as well as girls, they reported higher rates of depressive mood and stress.

This study has several limitations. The main limitation arises from the sampling process used. The sample was drawn from only Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The random selection of participants alleviates this concern to a significant degree but does not entirely remedy that shortcoming. The second limitation is related to the sample and the self-reported measurements. The students have been asked in this study to discuss their lying behavior. It can be argued that the dishonest actions of not all students can be appropriately identified, and thus overestimated or underestimated. For future research, this weakness could be offset by assessing lying not only from young people but also from their parents or teachers. This might bias the findings as well, and was cross-sectional research, which does not allow. Future research would be able to draw such conclusions when using a longitudinal design.

CONCLUSION

The study's findings can be understood as examining the link between loneliness, stress, self-esteem, and disillusionment among Vietnamese adolescents. In the research on the relationship between deception and loneliness, stress self-esteem, and adolescents, the instruments produced indicate preliminary evidence. To the best knowledge of the researchers', this is the first research to investigate relationships among Vietnamese adolescents between loneliness, stress, self-esteem. Apart from the minimal research in this area in Vietnam, Vietnamese teachers must get a better understanding of their students through the results of this research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study recommend the relationship between loneliness and self-esteem with deception among adolescents so that to paying attention to loneliness, self-esteem may be essential to identify at-risk students having high deception in school.

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