

A Research on the Levels of Social Anxiety, Self-Esteem and Loneliness Among University Students: An Application at Northern Cyprus

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ABSTRACT This research aims to analyze whether the levels of loneliness, self-esteem and social anxiety vary according to their genders, study years, age groups, number of friends, the persons that the extra time is spent with and their residing place among the students of Northern Cyprus Near East University. UCLA Loneliness Inventory, Self-Esteem and Self-Assessment in Social Situations Inventory were used as data collection tools. It is concluded from the data gathered that loneliness level are high among older students, students with a few friends, fourth year students and students residing away from their families. On the other hand, self-esteem is high and anxiety levels are low among students living together with their families.

INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem concept, as an important factor for the adolescents to grow up as a healthy person, has become an important research topic in the recent years. Adolescents' communications in a social environment, expressing themselves correctly and properly, healthy communication skills are closely related with their high level of self-esteem. In the period of individual's efforts in obtaining an identity, establishing a personality and acceptance of himself/herself is an important feature of the period. Self-esteem is described as an attitude developed against personality to evaluate own self as estimable, sufficient and successful (Bilgin 2001).

According to Yorukoglu (2000), individuals self assessment is a state of appreciation after approval of the personality concept reached. Self-esteem is being confident without underestimating or exaggerating oneself, finding oneself valuable and worthy of admiration and love. Accepting oneself as is, is an important state of mind that creates confidence. While the concept of self, is an individuals perception style of himself/herself, and expresses how the individual perceives himself/herself in accomplishing the roles in life; self-esteem, comprises the feelings and thoughts about oneself (Inanç 1997).

The concept of self is expressed as the cognitive dimension of personality. It is emphasized that individual not only has certain ideas about who he/she is, but also he/she has certain feel-

ings about that too. Self-esteem, is defined as individual's degree of self appreciation and finding oneself valuable and is accepted being sensitive to changes (Adams 1995; Tufan 1990). While it is accepted as an important dimension and a positive characteristic of personality; it also affects the behaviours of an individual in community, and determines the responses he/she gives to events. As it is defined being the level of perception of oneself being talented, important, successful, valued, positive, worthy of admiration and love; it is a positive state of mind that makes an individual accept himself/herself as is, and builds confidence (Bilgin 2001). It persists during the lifetime of an individual and it is influenced by the changes in the environment, relationships, individual's work and personal life (Satilmis 1998).

Kilicci (1981), Turan (1998) and Yorukoglu (1989), emphasized the same point while defining self-esteem and expressed it as "individual's self appreciation reached after self assessment and individual's finding oneself valued, important and successful." When these definitions and emphasized points gathered, "self-esteem" concept, comprises of individual's self appreciation and confidence emotions. Above all it is important that Rosenberg (1965) and Coopersmith (1967) described high self-esteem as an individual's self appreciation. Affect and self-esteem were strongly socially influenced and such influences were as strong as trait-like individual differences (Lahey and Rhodes 2015).

Problem Statement and Purpose

The reason of addressing the research topic in the context of self-esteem, is because of its impact on the success in school and life in general; as well as its influence on mental health and communication and as a result the raised importance of the concept in recent years. In spite of various studies in literature on the self-esteem (Aricak 1995; Bilgin 2001; Çankaya 1997; Gur 1996), there is not many studies in Northern Cyprus. For this reason, this research is planned to observe the perception of self-esteem of freshman and forth class students with respect to some variables, to fill the gap in literature and to observe the situation of the adolescents. At the end of this study, it is expected that the study results of the relationship of students' self-esteem, social anxiety and loneliness will be contributing to the literature. Questions that will be leading this study are listed below and they are tried to be answered.

1. *Is there a difference in the levels of self-esteem, loneliness and social anxiety of the university students with respect to their demographic factors?*

2. *Is there a relationship among self-esteem, loneliness and social anxiety levels of university students?*

Maslow emphasized self-esteem and referred to multiple needs that can be grouped under 5 categories that are layered from basic to high gradually. According to Maslow, higher level of needs can only emerge after lower level of needs are satisfied. In this theory for an individual to develop self-esteem, he/she needs to satisfy lower three layer categories of needs; needs to be accepted, to be unconditionally loved. In addition self-esteem specified to be a characteristic of a psychologically healthy person. (Aricak 1995) In the literature, while describing features of high and low self-esteem individuals, similar points are emphasized and it is observed that the level of self-esteem influences the success in school and professional life, effectiveness in stress management, respect to social relationships and life satisfaction.

Individuals with low self-esteem feels unsafe, worthless and helpless, decreased success and talents, no expectations and satisfactions in life; high self-esteem individuals evaluates themselves as valuable in the society, satisfied, hopeful, optimist and achievement ratio high persons (Durmus et al. 2001; Inanç 1997; Turan et al. 1998).

According to Heimberg (1995) social anxiety is described as; "Perturbation from being watched when meeting new people, significant and continuous fear from one or more social actions performed. Individual fears from being humiliated or to be ashamed from his own actions and shows anxiety symptoms. Person knows that the fear is exaggerated and meaningless but he/she avoids performing a social action or suffers intensive concerns and difficulty while performing it. Avoidance, distress from a social action performed, deteriorates the individuals regular daily work, functionality in professional or educational life, actions in society or relationships..."

METHODOLOGY

Population/Universe and Sample of Research

The population of this 2013 study was composed of 287 Near East University students and lecturers in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, with the students being mostly first and fourth year students studying Nursing, Mentally Disabled Teaching and Health Services Vocational School. The sample group consisting of 165 students was chosen by a random sampling method.

Data Collection

The survey form used to collect data consisted of 4 sections. In the first, a Personal Information Form reflecting students' demographic attributes was used. In the second, a Turkish adaptation of the UCLA Loneliness Inventory by Russell et al. (1978), translated by Demir (1989), was used to assess the individuals' general loneliness levels. In the third section of the survey, the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (1967), a form consisting of 25 items developed by Coopersmith and adapted into Turkish by Ozogul (1988), was used to assess students' self-esteem levels.

Turan and Tufan (1987) declared that the Turkish adaptation of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory is a valid self-esteem Inventory and can be used in measurements regarding this topic.

Data Analysis

Validity tests conducted by the researcher found the validity coefficients of the UCLA Loneliness Inventory, the Coopersmith Self-Esteem

Inventory and the Self-Evaluation Inventory in Social Context to be 0.63, 0.78 and 0.95 respectively, demonstrating their reliability.

In order to determine the hypothesis test to be used in statistical analyses, the normality test Kolmogrov-Smirnov test, was applied to see whether or not there existed a normal distribution of the data set. The test concluded that the data sets regarding the UCLA Loneliness Inventory and Self Evaluation in Social Context Inventory were normally distributed. However, the hypotheses tested with the parametric hypothesis test proved that the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory data was not normally distributed; therefore, the hypotheses was then tested using non-parametric hypothesis tests. When comparing the students' demographic attributes with their loneliness and social anxiety levels, where the independent variable equalled 2, the t-test was used, whereas with an independent variable higher than 2, Variance Analysis (ANOVA) was used. In the comparison between the students' demographic attributes and their self-esteem, Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal Wallis tests were used depending on the independent variable values. In addition, a Pearson Correlation test was used to determine relationships between scales.

FINDINGS

Of all students who participated, 40 percent were aged 17-19, 31.52 percent were 20-22 and 28.48 percent were over 23. 64.85 percent of the participants were females and the remaining 35.15 percent were males; 72.73 percent were freshmen and 27.27 percent were fourth year students; 42.42 percent of the students resided with close relatives whereas 57.58 percent lived independently; 50 percent maintained an emotional relationship with the opposite sex and 29 percent spent their spare time with their beloved, 12.73 percent with their family and 49 percent with their friends. The percentage of students who remained alone during their spare time is 9 percent.

Observing parental marital status, 89 percent of students' parents were married.

Students who participated in the research scored an average UCLA Loneliness Inventory point of 40.68±7.9, with a minimum of 27 and a maximum of 62. The students' Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory scores were 71.15±16.51 on average, with a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 100 (Table 1). Also, the Self-Assessment in Social Situations Inventory scores of the same students were 97.58±25.52.

According to Table 2, a statistically significant difference in the UCLA Loneliness Inventory scores was found (p<0.05). This difference occurred due to students in the 17-19 and 23 and above age groups. Students who were part of the age group 23 and above scored a higher UCLA Loneliness Inventory point than students who were part of the age group 17-19. Observing the UCLA Loneliness Inventory scores of students' spending their spare time with others, we see those spending their spare time alone scored an average of 49.47±6.85, whereas those who spent their spare time with their loved ones scored 40.50±7.24, those with their families scored 38.71±4.61 and those with their friends scored 39.68±6.50. The difference between the people who students spend their time with and their UCLA Loneliness Inventory scores is found to be statistically significant (p<0.05); students spending their spare time alone tend to be lonelier in general. Also, it is clear that there is a statistically significant difference between the students' social surroundings and their UCLA Loneliness Inventory scores (p<0.05). Students de-

Table 2: Comparing the UCLA self esteem inventory scores marks according to the demographic properties of students

<i>Demographic Characteristics</i>	<i>p</i>
Age	0.04*
Number of people/friends whom a person spends time	0.00*
Class	0.04*
Resideray	0.00*

*p<0.05

Table 1: Descriptive statistics about measures of UCLA, Coopersmith and SDKDE

	<i>n</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Maks.</i>
UCLA Yalnızlık Envanteri	165	40.68	7.09	27	62
Coopersmith	165	71.15	16.51	20	100
SDKDE	165	97.58	25.52	48	162

claring they have 1 or less friends scored higher UCLA Loneliness Inventory points. Furthermore, the students' educational year and their UCLA Loneliness Inventory scores showed a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$). Students in their fourth year scored 42.56 ± 7.36 , which was more than students in their first year. Residence status too effected loneliness levels with a statistically significant difference. Students living apart from their families showed higher loneliness levels to those who lived with their families ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3: Coopersmith Self-Respect Inventory of student according to their residence and SDKDE results

	<i>n</i>	<i>Coopersmith</i>	<i>SDKDE</i>
Students residing with their families	165	74.9	92.7
Students residing not with their families	165	68.4	101.2

When comparing the residence status of the students assessed with their self-respect, Table 3 shows that students residing with their families or relatives scored an average Coopersmith Self-Respect Inventory point of 74.91 ± 12.29 , whereas students living separately scored an average of 68.38 ± 18.61 . Points scored were found to have a statistically significant difference according to residence status ($p < 0.05$) and students residing with their families or close relatives showed higher self-respect levels compared to those residing separately or alone.

Participants also showed a statistically significant difference between residence status and Self Inventory Evaluation in Social Context scores. Students residing with their parents had lower social anxiety levels compared to students living separately. According to other demographic features, there was found to be no statistically significant difference in points scored for the Self Inventory Evaluation in Social Context.

As we can see from Table 4, students' UCLA Loneliness Inventory scores and Coopersmith Self-Respect Inventory scores showed a statistically significant correlation ($p < 0.05$). This correlation is negative and strong; as the students' UCLA Loneliness Inventory scores increase, their Coopersmith Self-Respect Inventory points decrease. In other terms, as loneliness increases, their self-respect decreases. Students as-

essed also showed to have a strong and negative correlation between their 'Self Evaluation Inventory in Social Context' and Coopersmith Self-Respect Inventory scores ($p < 0.05$). As Self Evaluation Inventory in Social Context scores of the students' increase, their Coopersmith Self-Respect Inventory scores decrease. In other terms, as anxiety levels increase, self-respect levels decrease. It is also observed that the students' UCLA Loneliness Inventory scores showed a statistically significant correlation with their Self Inventory Evaluation in Social Context scores ($p < 0.05$). With this correlation being strong and positive, as the students' UCLA Loneliness Inventory scores increase, their Self Evaluation Inventory in Social Context scores also increase.

Table 4: The correlation between UCLA, Coopersmith and SDKDE

		<i>UCLA</i>	<i>Coopersmith</i>	<i>SDKDE</i>
UCLA	r	1		
	p			
Coopersmith	r	-0.46	1	
	p	0.00		
SDKDE	r	0.38	-0.62	1
	p	0.00	0.00	

DISCUSSION

There is a statistically significant relationship between students' residence conditions and their loneliness levels, and students residing without their families are lonelier compared to students residing with their families ($p < 0.05$). Moreover, students that reside with their families or close relatives have higher self-respect compared to students who do not, suggesting students residing with their families are more satisfied, materially and spiritually, and are safer with security, nutrition, shelter or other such worries. These results are supported by the 1996 Güngör research. Students used in Güngör's research showed similar results; high social support perceptions, satisfaction concerning family and friend relationships and low loneliness levels. Amil and Bozgeyikli's (2015) recent study supports similar results as well since the social appearance anxiety and loneliness shows a positive significant correlation between anxiety and loneliness and underlines how friendship anxiety is an important predictor of loneliness.

It is observed that there is a significant statistical difference between participants' residence status and their corresponding Self Inventory Evaluation in Social Context scores. Students residing with their families showed lower social anxiety compared to students living alone. Students residing with their families showed less anxiety levels. This also supports the results on self-respect. In other terms, as loneliness levels increase, self-respect levels decrease. In contrast, as loneliness and anxiety levels decrease, self-respect levels increase.

These results are supported by a 1982 study by Geist, conducted with 143 university students. Social shyness is found to be related with low self-esteem. As self-esteem increases, individuals tend to interact more socially and maintain self-control. Decrease in self-esteem levels bring about shyness and introversion (Satilmi^o 1988). The study conducted by Bilgin in 2001 indicates significant relations between adolescent self-esteem levels and permanent anxiety levels. Similarly, a study conducted by Cankaya in 1977 infers that students with low self-esteem showed more exam anxiety compared to students with high self-esteem. Anxiety is considered to reduce occupational success, social relations and academic success levels (Cankaya 2007). Recent study by Stoliker and Lafreniere on university students (2015) support the findings as well. They asserted that the feelings of loneliness and learning burnout negatively influenced students' overall academic experience and their perceptions of stress. The studies conducted by Turan et al. (1998), Gencoglu et al. (2016) supports other research findings. It can be observed that as self-esteem levels increase, the students' scores on depression levels, permanent anxiety levels and the psychiatric symptoms scale decrease.

CONCLUSION

A study conducted with 165 students chosen by simple random exemplification has led to important conclusions. By observing participants in the research, we see that loneliness amongst students above 23 years of age is higher compared to students aged 17-19. With the increase of age, increases caution and care in behaviour, and more responsibility with it induces preference to be alone. Considering there is a statistically significant difference amongst the values scored on the scale and the people stu-

dents decide to spend their spare time with, this means students spending their spare time alone show higher loneliness levels. Students with 1 or less friends in their social environment scored loneliness inventory points higher than the rest. This circumstance proposes that students with fewer friends have higher loneliness levels. From this, we can therefore conclude that increasing age causes students to act more cautiously and be more careful when choosing trustworthy friends.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To decrease anxiety levels of individuals with high social anxiety levels, it is advised that people constituting their social surroundings like lecturers and parents take care not to use critical language seeking faults and shortfalls. Students must not be labelled or compared with their peers.

Preparing group event and promoting social skills, especially by education based psychological counsellors, could determine students' self-esteem levels and reduce their social anxiety levels to a normal level and this may aid in subduing any of their issues.

New studies need to be conducted to enrich and improve findings. For this reason, concerning students' self-esteem, independent variants such as socio-economic situations, parental relations and friendships could be assessed.

Repeating the same study with a different sample group may produce a more comprehensive input of information concerning self-esteem. Assessing students studying in different faculties and departments will be helpful in further distinguishing any differences. Coordination amongst MEB and universities should be ensured also to allow cooperation with guidance services.

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