



Differences in The Level of Loneliness Experienced by Male and Female University Students During The Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The implementation of the physical distancing policy as an effort to prevent the transmission of the COVID-19 virus seems to have resulted in loneliness problems for students. Many studies have shown that loneliness is bad for health, such as decreased immunity and cognitive function. By knowing groups vulnerable to loneliness, appropriate preventive and curative measures can be taken. Unfortunately, few studies discuss the differences in the level of loneliness in groups of men and women. This study aims to determine whether there are differences in the level of loneliness in male and female university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The approach used is quantitative with a comparative design. The total subjects were 192 University students consisting of 148 women (77%) and 44 men (23%). The participants were obtained using an online questionnaire through the accidental purposive sampling method. The research instrument used is the UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3 Indonesian edition which has an alpha coefficient of 0.92. Data analysis used a different independent sample t-test. The data obtained shows that the average loneliness for men is 38,272 and for women 38,108. Based on the difference test, we obtained the following result $t(190) = 0.127$, $p > 0.05$. So, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in loneliness between male and female university students.

Keywords: *loneliness; covid-19 pandemic; student*

Introduction

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is a pandemic period due to the massive spread of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) worldwide. From March to mid-July 2020, the number of positive cases of COVID-19 in Indonesia has reached 80,094 patients, confirmed cases of death were 3,797, and cases recovered as many as 39,050 patients (Novidianto & Dani, 2020). This figure continued to increase dramatically in the months since, as, on November 11, 2020, the number of COVID-19 cases in Indonesia reached 448,118 cases. On April 17, 2021, it reached 1,599,763 cases (Center for Systems Science and Engineering, 2021).

COVID-19 spreads through droplets (Kohanski, Palmer & Cohen, 2020). Common symptoms include fever, breathing problems, coughing, and sneezing. The lack of an effective vaccine has prompted the government to implement physical distancing policies to reduce the spread of the virus. The implementation of this policy also has an impact on the education sector. One form is the recommendation of educational institutions to implement online learning (Setyorini, 2020). Due to the absence of any physical contact, the implementation of this policy risks causing students to feel isolated and alienated (Loades et al., 2020). This

subjective feeling of isolation is referred to as loneliness.

According to Banerjee and Rai (2020), loneliness can be described as a state without friends or isolation from the social environment. Loneliness is an unpleasant condition of not meeting the need for connectedness, both in quantity and quality (Badcock, Adery, & Park, 2020). Unmet human belongingness needs cause loneliness. Belongingness is a basic human need to have social attachments accompanied by concern for others (Hidayati, 2015).

Various studies have shown the negative impact of loneliness. In relevance to the COVID-19 pandemic, loneliness decreases immunity and increases blood pressure (Momtaz, 2012). Loneliness also results in decreased cognitive function and is a risk factor for mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, chronic stress, insomnia, and dementia (Marmot, 2018; Wilson et al., 2007). If not handled properly, loneliness can encourage people to act maladaptively and even commit suicide (Stickley & Koyanagi, 2016).

One of the groups who are vulnerable to loneliness is students. In Indonesia, around 9.6% of students and college students reported experiencing loneliness during the past year (Peltzer & Pengpid, 2017). Since the Covid-19 pandemic, Sagita and Hermawan (2020) reported an alarming level of loneliness among Indonesian teenagers. There is also a percentage of 43% of adolescents experiencing relatively high loneliness, 10% experiencing loneliness in the high category, and 1.7% experiencing loneliness in the very high category. At the same time, loneliness is negatively correlated with student and student participation in class (Bek, 2017). The higher the loneliness, the fewer students participate so that the class atmosphere becomes passive.

Factors for the emergence of loneliness include difficulties in socializing with college colleagues (Rantepadang &

Gery, 2020) and being away from family in their hometowns (Hidayati, 2015). At the beginning of the pandemic, some students decided to stay overseas for fear of transmitting the virus to their families, especially if their parents were elderly and had a higher vulnerability to infection (Nuzuli, 2020).

Research by Barreto et al. (2020) shows that the prevalence of loneliness is higher in men than women. In line with this, Theeke et al. (2019)'s research shows that men are more likely to experience loneliness than women. This higher tendency of loneliness is due to hypermasculinity stigma, which causes men to be reluctant to reveal emotional things such as loneliness because it is considered taboo. Unfortunately, this impacts the feeling of not having friends to tell about the personal problems he is experiencing (Barreto et al., 2020). In contrast to Barreto et al., other studies such as Rokach's (2018) and Dariyo's (2016) show no significant difference in loneliness in terms of gender.

A meta-analysis conducted by Mahon, Yarcheski, Yarcheski, Cannella, and Hans (2006) of 30 studies on loneliness by gender, found that 19 studies revealed no significant difference in loneliness in terms of gender, nine studies revealed loneliness was higher in men, while two other studies said loneliness was higher in women. These results indicate that there is instability in the study results related to differences in loneliness in terms of gender.

Based on this background, it can be concluded that further research is needed regarding the intensity of student loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of gender. This study aims to determine whether there are differences in the level of loneliness of male and female students. We hypothesized that there is a significant difference in the level of loneliness of male and female students.

Methods

The researcher's approach in this research is a quantitative approach with a comparative research type. According to Robert Donmoyer (in Given, 2008), a quantitative approach is an empirical study approach that aims to collect, display, and analyze data in the form of numbers. At the same time, comparative research is research that aims to compare the state of a variable in two or more different groups.

Participants

The subjects of this study were 192 university students, of which 44 subjects or 23% were male students, and 148 subjects or 77% were female students. This number was obtained through an online questionnaire through the accidental purposive sampling method.

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

The technique used by researchers to collect data in this study is the online questionnaire method. The researcher uses a psychological scale, a device containing items with implied characteristics revealing the variables to be measured, but by including behavioral indicators of the variables to be measured (Azwar, 2019). This study uses the scale of the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Loneliness Scale Version 3 Indonesian edition, which was adapted by Nurdiani (2014). UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3 contains 20 questions to measure

loneliness, with 12 favorable questions and eight unfavorable questions (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008: 6). The response format consists of four answer choices, with each choice having its own score, which is always = 4, sometimes = 3, rarely 2, never = 1.

The UCLA Loneliness Version 3 scale has an alpha coefficient of 0.92 for the student sample (Nurdiani, 2014). While the reliability test using the internal consistency of Cronbach's Alpha conducted by the researchers showed that the UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3 Indonesian edition had a reliability of 0.89. So it can be said that the scale has good reliability and can be used to detect a person's level of loneliness. The information regarding the validity of the scale reported by Nurdiani (2014) shows Chi-square = 98.83 with p-value = 0.08674 and RMSEA = 0.036. These results indicate that the items in the Indonesian edition of the UCLA Loneliness Version 3 scale only measures loneliness.

Data Analysis

In this study, we used an independent sample t-test to determine whether there was a difference in the level of loneliness based on comparing groups of unrelated data, namely male students and female students. (Azwar, 2018: 209).

Findings

The results of the descriptive analysis are as follows:

Table 1.
Loneliness Variable Data Description

	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Male	44	38.272	6.496	29	54
Female	148	38.108	7.816	16	60
Total	192	38.145	7.518	16,00	60,00

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The overall mean for the loneliness data is 38.145, with a median of 38.00 and a standard deviation of 7.518. The maximum value of the data is 60,0, and the lowest value is 16.0.

Table 2.
Normality test

		KS-Z	df	Sig.
Loneliness	Male	0,120	44	0,118
	Female	0,059	148	0,200

The table shows that the two data are normally distributed. Therefore independent sample t-test can be performed. Further, the homogeneity test using Levene's Test for Equality of Variances revealed $F = 1.129$; $p > 0.289$. Therefore, it can be said that the data is homogeneous.

Hypothesis testing with an independent sample t-test was conducted to determine the difference in the level of loneliness in male students with female students. The results of the analysis are as follows:

Table 3.
Independent Samples T-Test

Measure 1	Measure 2	t	df	p	Δ
Loneliness Level of Male Students	Loneliness Level of Female Students	0.127	190	0.899	0.1646

From the table, it is known that the T value is 0.719 with $df = 190$. Due to the value of sig (2-tailed) $p (0.899) > 0.05$. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in loneliness between male and female students.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that there is no significant difference in the level of loneliness between male and female students. This finding contradicts the results of the meta-analysis of Mahon et al. (2016). However, this is similar to the research results conducted by Samsyul, Widyastuti, and Nurdin (2018) and Fikrie and Hermina (2019), which showed no difference in the level of loneliness between male and female students. Loneliness is a subjective experience, so each person's loneliness can be different

regardless of whether he is a man or a woman (Akbag & Imamoglu, 2010).

The absence of differences in loneliness between male and female students can also be caused by male and female students (Dariyo, 2016; Santrock, 2007). This busyness makes all their attention and energy focused on completing academic tasks, so that male and female students do not feel lonely (Dariyo, 2016). However, when they have completed academic assignments, but do not know how to fill them, are unable to manage time, have no friends, and feel that there is no progress in their lives, it is at times like this that loneliness is easy to occur (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2011).

The absence of differences in loneliness between male and female students could also be due to the stigmatization of male subjects (Neto, 2014). Stigmatization in the form of

hypermasculinity stereotypes affects male subjects' responses to the instrument used in this study, where male subjects tend to avoid statements containing explicit elements of loneliness compared to implicit scales (Neto, 2014).

Conclusion

Based on the research that has been done, it can be concluded that there was no significant difference between the loneliness levels of male and female students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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