

An exploration of the loneliness experienced by Indonesian students during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

Psychological symptoms, including loneliness, and tiredness of being unable to see friends, relatives, as well as co-workers, indefinitely, are one problem faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study, therefore, aims to evaluate the extent of loneliness felt during this period, particularly by students, using a descriptive quantitative method, based on the AF loneliness Scale (AFLS). The cross-sectional study was conducted between June 11 and July 29, 2020, through an online survey on Survey Monkey platform. A total of 504 Indonesians aged 12 to 27 years, from several provinces and regions in Indonesia, participated in this study. Subsequently, the data were analyzed using JASP (Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program). According to the results, there was a tendency for 49.40% and 33.47% of students to experience symptoms of loneliness in the medium and high categories, respectively. However, there are differences in the symptoms experienced by male and female students. Racial Batak students also experienced more loneliness, compared to other ethnic groups, for instance, Minang, Malay, and Chinese. In addition, students aged between 20 and 23 are more likely to feel loneliness. These findings are useful inputs for certain parties, including school counselors, to discover alternative solutions to help students affected by the COVID-19 pandemic overcome this feeling.

Keywords: Loneliness, ethnic, age, student, intervention counselor.

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Introduction

The entire global community has felt the impact of the Coronavirus, from the moment the pandemic was first announced. This virus originated from the province of Wuhan, China, and has now penetrated Indonesia (Cucinotta and Vanelli, 2020; Nurkholis, 2020; Vieira et al., 2020). According to several sources, the government has not shown much enthusiasm in preventing the disease's entry into the country. Consequently, in Indonesia, all activities outside the home were ceased, and citizens were mandated to undergo isolation, to stop the virus's spread (Feng et al., 2020; Yuliana, 2020)

Therefore, all activities involving crowd gatherings or long-distance travel, for instance, physical school activities, work, and vacations are prohibited during this period (Children, 2020; Hadiwardoyo, 2020; Handarini and Wulandari, 2020; Krisnawati et al., 2020). Only essential outdoor activities, for instance, the purchase of basic daily necessities, are permitted, while any other activities deemed feasible at home are performed at home (Catheline et al., 2020; Potel, 2020). Thus, the learning process used by schools has been changed to online or online media (Handarini and Wulandari, 2020). These guidelines have been enforced to stop the spread of the Covid-19 virus, however, one of the challenges faced during this period is loneliness (Berg-Weger and Morley, 2020; Gubler et al., 2020; Cloonen, et al., 2020;

Cloonen, et al., 2020; Koh and Liew, 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Odekerken-Schröder et al., 2020; Palgi et al., 2020). Numerous individuals miss being able to perform outdoor activities, whether work, school, or vacations, as these, involve interacting with people outside the home.

The feeling of loneliness experienced by individuals due to the pandemic restrictions is an unpleasant emotional response (Berg-Weger and Morley, 2020; Hidayati, 2016). Numerous studies suggested socio-demographic factors, social roles, quantity and quality of social contacts, health, and other dispositions, contribute to individual differences in the symptoms of loneliness (Cacioppo and Hawkey, 2009; Farboodi et al., 2020; Gubler et al., 2020; Macdonald and Hülür, 2020). This feeling is also described as a social pain (Eisenberger, 2012), and motivation from within is required to seek social connections to eliminate the feeling. Several studies have discovered loneliness also occurs due to unwanted intimacy and a lack of connection (Gable and Berkman, 2013; Rokach and Philibert-Lignières, 2015). Loneliness is a state of unhappiness caused by separation from other people, and as a subjective emotion, is sometimes even experienced in the company of people, however, not all isolated people experience this feeling.

Until the 20th century, studies about loneliness were sparse (Berg-Weger and Morley, 2020), however, by the 21st century, the phenomenon was increasingly recognized as a social psychological problem requiring serious handling to be resolved. The issues of loneliness and social isolation are often overlooked by health and social service professionals, but the COVID-19 pandemic has focused increasing attention on social isolation and loneliness for all ages, especially adults, the most vulnerable and at-risk demographic. Several studies have shown loneliness occurs throughout society, including people in joint marriages with other strong relationships, and people with successful careers (Dykstra and Fokkema, 2007; Perlman and Peplau, 1984). Most individuals experience loneliness at some point in life (Franssen et al., 2020; Mund et al., 2020), and others experience the condition very often (Pyle and Evans, 2018). Furthermore, studies have shown about one-third of older adults experience loneliness and/or social isolation, while a subset (5%) experiencing this feeling often or always (AH et al., 2017), have begun to recognize the risks and impacts (Banerjee et al., 2020; Berg-Weger and Morley, 2020; Devita et al., 2020). The COVID-19 increases the psychological challenges faced, especially among students in Indonesia. In addition, data on the impact of loneliness and social isolation show significant and long-term negative outcomes for socially isolated and/or isolated older adults (Berg-Weger and Morley, 2020; Hwang et al., 2020; Cloonen et al., 2020; Koh and Liew, 2020; Palgi et al., 2020), thus, comprehensive services are required to handle these psychological problems. This study, therefore, discusses the initial description of loneliness experienced by students during the COVID-19 pandemic

Method

This study used a quantitative descriptive method, often used to describe a phenomenon, event, or symptom, in a factual, systematic, and accurate manner (Yusuf, 2014). A total of 504 students (134 males and 370 females) participated in this study, 7.14% (n = 36), 15.07% (n = 76), 77.18% (n = 389), and 0.59% (n = 3), having an education level of SMP, SMA, higher education, and others, respectively. The participants resided in Sumatra (n = 419), Java (n = 32), Kalimantan (n = 4), Papua (n = 1), as well as other provinces (n = 48), and belonged to the Batak (n = 48), Javanese (n = 297), Chinese (n = 2), Malay (n = 41), as well as others (n = 43) ethnic groups. Data collection was carried out online through a survey monkey, based on the AF Loneliness Scale (AFLS) with 10 items using the Likert Scale (1= totally disagree, 2= disagree, 3= medium, 4= Agree, 5= strongly agree) (Fikri, 2021) with a 0.9 item reliability validated using the analysis of Rasch application modeling items. This shows the item used is already in a very good category (Sumintono and Widhiarso, 2015). Meanwhile, data analysis was performed through statistical analysis using the JASP application.

Results and Discussions

Table 1 shows the results of the statistical analysis on the loneliness experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1 <Descriptive of the Loneliness Analysis of Indonesian Students>

No.	Classification	Interval	f	%
1.	Very High	>42	16	3,17
2.	High	34--41	170	33,73
3.	Middle	26--33	248	49,21
4.	low	18--25	64	12,70
5.	Very Low	17	6	1,19
Total			504	100

According to the data analysis, 42.91% (n = 248), 33.73% (n = 170) and 3.17% (n = 16) of the participants experienced loneliness in the medium, high and low categories, respectively. In addition, students in Indonesia, especially Sumatran, were more likely to experience this feeling during the pandemic and were bored by home activities. A study by Killgore et al., (2020) reported a significant increase in loneliness scores from April to September 2020, and this rise was significantly higher for people forced to stay at home and was positively correlated with depression as well as suicidal ideation. An increase in this feeling was also reported during the pandemic, especially for people in susceptible age groups, and is a significant mental health problem (Buecker et al., 2020; Groarke et al., 2020; Cloonen et al., 2020; Koh and Liew, 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Palgi et al., 2020; Pervin and Ferdowshi, 2016; Yadegarfar et al., 2014). Table 2 shows the results of a gender-based data analysis of the loneliness experienced by students during this pandemic.

Table 2. Descriptives comparison man and woman Loneliness

Loneliness	Group	Summary Descriptive			
		N	Mean	SD	SE
	Men	134	30.41	6.332	0.547
	Women	370	31.92	5.545	0.288

Based on the results, male and female students had M values of 30.41 and 31.92, respectively, thus, there is no significant difference in level of loneliness felt by men and women. However, females generally tend to experience this feeling more intensely, compared to male counterparts. This is in accordance with the study by Dong and Chen (2017) in China, where older women (28.3%) were discovered to experience higher rates of loneliness, compared to older men (23.3%). However, this is in contrast with the study by Chang (2018), where no significant differences were found in rates of loneliness and negative affective states between African American men and women, but the negative psychological effects tended to be more damaging for African American women. This is in line with the report stating women tend to experience this feeling more intensely, compared to male counterparts. Table 3 shows the results of an ethnicity-based data analysis of the loneliness experienced by students during this pandemic.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics Loneliness Ethnicity

	Loneliness					
	Batak	Jawa	Minang	Tionghoa	Other	Melayu
Valid	49	72	297	2	43	41
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	32.90	31.81	31.32	31.00	30.65	31.71
Std. Deviation	6.574	5.232	5.700	5.657	6.078	6.202
Minimum	18.00	22.00	10.00	27.00	13.00	11.00
Maximum	48.00	42.00	50.00	35.00	42.00	43.00

Based on the results, there is no significant difference in the symptoms of loneliness exhibited by students with Batak, Javanese, Minang, Chinese, and Malay ethnicities. However, Batak students generally tend to experience this feeling more, compared to other ethnicities, especially in situations of

incompatibility in personality and social situations (Hutapea and Suleeman, 2018). A study by Ahlstrand, (2020) highlighted the acute sense of loneliness stems from lifelong social isolation and rejection. This is what Batak students tend to feel, due to certain cultural elements and beliefs. Table 4 shows the results of a data analysis of the loneliness experienced by students in Indonesia during this pandemic.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics loneliness based on age

	Age				
	12 -15 Age	16 - 19 Age	20 - 23Age	24 - 27 Age	More than 27 Years
Valid	46	89	265	37	67
Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	30.35	32.22	32.49	29.92	28.39
Std. Deviation	7.128	5.414	5.512	5.756	5.090
Variance	50.81	29.31	30.39	33.13	25.91
Minimum	11.00	10.00	13.00	18.00	19.00
Maximum	39.00	43.00	50.00	41.00	41.00

According to Table 4, students aged between 20 and 23 are generally more likely to experience loneliness during a pandemic (M = 32.49). This is because these students are at the later stage of adolescence development, and approaching adulthood. During this stage, the student’s behaviour tends to lead to a search for identity, changes in physicality, periods of life problems, and determination of future directions to satisfy the passion for sexuality (Harmaini and Novitriani, 2019). Furthermore, the results show people above 27 years generally experience less loneliness, compared to younger individuals. This is presumably because the developmental stages have been passed, therefore, these individuals have now entered the period of living family life, and no longer tend to experience loneliness, even during the pandemic period. Table 5 shows a Bayesian Binomial Test used to perform hypothesis testing based on demographic data.

Table 5. Bayesian Binomial Test

Bayesian Binomial Test					
	Level	Counts	Total	Proportion	BF
Gender	Men	134	504	0.266	238.107
	Women	370	504	0.734	1.111e -24
Residence	Big City (municipalities)	164	504	0.325	178.788
	Small Town (regency city)	307	504	0.609	5.104e -5
	Metropolitan (Large city / industry)	33	504	0.065	439.149
Ethnicity	Batak	49	504	0.097	407.239
	Java	72	504	0.143	361.395
	Minang	297	504	0.589	0.003
	Tionghoa	2	504	0.004	501.008
	Others	43	504	0.085	419.204
	Melayu	41	504	0.081	423.192

Bayesian Binomial Test

Educational stage	Others	3	504	0.006	499.012
	College	389	504	0.772	7.311e -34
	Senior High School	76	504	0.151	353.426
	Junior High Schol	36	504	0.071	433.165
Age	12 - 15 Age	46	504	0.091	413.221
	16 - 19 Age	89	504	0.177	327.538
	20 - 23Age	265	504	0.526	5.239
	24 - 27 Age	37	504	0.073	431.170
	More than 27 Year	67	504	0.133	371.358

Note. For all tests, the alternative hypothesis specifies that the proportion is greater than 0.5.

Conceptually, the binomial test has only one parameter and an easy-to-understand data distribution, and is, therefore, arguably the simplest statistical test. Based on the results, the proportion is observed for each result of the Bayes Factor (BF). A total of 134 out of the 504 respondents were male, and 0.734 with a Bayes factor of about 1000 supporting the null hypothesis was obtained, meaning the null hypothesis predicts data about a thousand times better, compared to the alternative hypothesis. Furthermore, 48 out of the 504 respondents belonged to the Batak ethnic group, and 0.097 with a bayes factor of about 407, were discovered to support the null hypothesis. A total of 49 out of the 504 respondents were Javanese, and 0.143 with a bayes factor of about 407 supports the null hypothesis. Meanwhile, a total of 2 out of the 504 respondents were Chinese, and 0.004 with a bayes factor of about 501, supported the null hypothesis. In addition, 43 out of the 504 respondents belonged to the Malay ethnic group, and 0.081 with a bayes factor of around 423 supporting the null hypothesis. However, the results of this null hypothesis data prediction for 297 out of the 504 respondents belonging to the Minang ethnic group were rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

The Alternative Hypothesis is the same statement with similar population parameters as the null hypothesis (Lolang, 2014). This contradicts the results based on the comparison of the mean, stating the Batak ethnic group experiences more loneliness, compared to the Minang ethnicity. Furthermore, there is a possibility verifying this hypothesis, seen from Minang ethnic students also experiencing symptoms of loneliness behavior, however, this is not shown generally. Usually, this hypothesis states the population parameter has a unique value from the affidavit mentioned in the null hypothesis. Meanwhile, based on the education level, 389 of the 504 respondents were university students, and 0.772 with a Bayes factor of about 8, rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis. The diversity observed in tertiary institutions shows there are significant differences in loneliness experienced by students at this level. This is influenced by numerous factors, including migrating, smartphone addiction, and intensity of media use (Andromeda and Kristant, 2017; Misyaroh, 2016; Saputri et al., 2012; Ulfiah and Hannah, 2019).

Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to various life challenges, including loneliness among students. According to the results, there was a tendency for 49.40% and 33.47% of students to experience these symptoms in the medium and high categories, respectively. Furthermore, there is a significant difference between the symptoms of loneliness experienced by men (M = 30.41) and women (M = 31.92), with women generally experiencing this feeling in a more intense manner. Also, Batak students are more likely to experience loneliness, compared to the other ethnic groups in this study. Generally, individuals between the ages of 20 and 23 years are more likely to experience loneliness (M = 32.49), indicating students at the late stage of adolescent development and approaching adulthood, experience this feeling more during a

pandemic. This has the capacity to cause new psychological problems in cases where no measures are taken. These findings are, therefore, useful input for certain parties, for instance, school counselors, to find alternative solutions to overcome loneliness experienced by students due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, further studies are encouraged to provide more solutions to alleviate this problem in students in Indonesia.

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