

Role of Socio-Economic Status and Social Support in Loneliness among College Students

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to examine the role of socio-economic status and social support in loneliness among college students. The sample of the study consisted of 400 college (200 male and 200 female) students drawn from different degree colleges of Varanasi city using random sampling technique. The age of students ranged from 17 to 22 (mean=19.61, SD=1.79) years. Kuppaswamy Socio-Economic Status Scale (1962) revised by Sood and Bindra (2022), PGI Social Support Questionnaire (Nehra, Kulhara and Verma, 1988) and Loneliness Scale (Praveen Kumar Jha, 1997) were used to collect the data. Obtained data were analyzed by using Pearson's product-moment correlation and linear regression analysis. The correlation results showed that loneliness was significantly negatively correlated with socio-economic status ($r = -.116^*$) and social support ($r = -.407^{***}$). Linear regression analysis also showed that socio-economic status and social support emerged as significant predictors of loneliness.

Keywords: *Socio-Economic Status, Social Support and loneliness*

Transitioning from school to college is a very eventful time. At that time, college students need financial support, social support and better health, as this can improve their academic performance, emotional health and well-being. Social support from families, friends and the educational community can directly influence students' experiences during education, having a positive impact on both well-being and academic success (Maymon et al., 2019; Scanlon et al., 2020; Brailovskaia et al., 2018). The need for social support is always felt, whether it is the time of transition from school to university or the time of establishing oneself in the family etc. All these require social support. It is a multidimensional concept that describes the psychological or social support a person gets from his family and friends and also describes a strong relationship between them (Zimet et al., 1988; Laurel et al., 2013; Awang et al., 2014). Social connection occurs when people need it, it never occurs out of necessity, it includes both instrumental and emotional support (Day et al., 2003; Trepte & Sharkov, 2016).

The socio-economic status of people is determined by the level of education, income and occupation. Socio-economic status is usually represented by terms such as low, middle, and

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high. People with low socio-economic status have significantly less access to education, social circles, and health resources compared to those with high socio-economic status (NCI, 2011).

People with low socio-economic status are more likely to suffer from loneliness, and their social relationships are also affected because they have limited social relationships and have to face many types of circular constraints, etc (House et al., 1988; Thoits, 1995).

Several studies have shown that people with higher socio-economic status are more likely to be affected by loneliness (Direkvand & Moghadam et al., 2020). Which can further lead to poverty, poor achievement, poor physical health, and depression (Chaurasia, 2017). It is well known that people experiencing any type of decline in life experience stress and those who are most vulnerable are more likely to suffer from depression and other types of mental illnesses (Morajtabai & Olfsonm, 2009). Loneliness is defined as the emotional and cognitive discomfort experienced by an individual as a result of the thought or perception of being alone (American Psychological Association, 2020). Loneliness is experienced by people of all age groups, but it affects teenagers and young adults the most (Ponzetti, 1990). The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of socio-economic status and social support in loneliness of college students. The current study is an exploratory one and it highlights several important facts that may be beneficial to college students and society, which may help the student to improve their lives.

Research Objectives

- To investigate the relationship between socio-economic status, social support and loneliness among college students.
- To find out the contribution of socio-economic status and social support in loneliness among college students.

Research Hypotheses

1. (a) Socio-economic status and social support will be negatively related to loneliness among college students.
(b) Socio-economic status will be positively related to social support among college students.
2. Socio-economic status and social support would predict the loneliness of college students.

METHODOLOGY

Design

Present study is correlational in nature therefore, to examine the relationship between socio-economic status, social support and loneliness; Pearson's product moment correlations have been computed. To assess the contribution of predictor variables- socio-economic status and social support in explaining the criterion variable loneliness; simple linear regression analysis was performed.

Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 400 (200 male and 200 female) college students drawn from different degree colleges of Varanasi city using random sampling technique. The age of the subjects ranged from 17 to 22 years (Mean=19.61 and SD=1.79).

Measures

- **Socio-Economic Status Scale:**The modified version of socio-economic status scale (Kuppuswami, 1962) was used to collect the data. The modified version of socio-economic status scale was prepared by Sood and Bindra (2022). There were three important variables contributing to the socio-economic status in urban areas i.e., education, income and occupation. The scale has good internal reliability and validity.
- **PGI Social Support Questionnaire:** The PGI Social Support Questionnaire developed by Nehra, Kulhara and Verma (1988) consist of 18 items was used to measure social support of the participants. The questionnaire contains 18 items. The PGI Social Support Questionnaire is a 4-point rating scale ranging from 4 (most agreed), 3 (agreed), 2 (some extent) and 1 (least agreed). Reliability was highly significant and satisfactory ($r=.59$), ($p<.01$).
- **Perceived Loneliness Scale:** Perceived Loneliness Scale developed by Dr. Praveen Kumar Jha (1997) consists of 36 items involving positive statements as well as negative (reverse scored) statements. Five response categories are: fully agree, agree undecided, disagree and fully disagree. The minimum and maximum possible range of scores on this scale is 36 to 180. The test is highly reliable and valid measure to perceived loneliness.

Procedure

For data collection, the participants were informed about the objectives of the study and mandatory information. They were assured through informed consent that their data will be used only for research purposes and will be kept confidential. The participants were given questionnaires. After the participants filled the questionnaire, data were collected from each participant of the study and they were appreciated and thanked for their cooperation in the study. The scoring was done according to the respective manuals.

Statistical Analysis

The Software SPSS 20 was used to analyze data. Correlation analysis was done to examine the relationship between predictors and criterion variables. Furthermore, to assess the contribution of predictor variables, viz., socio-economic status and social support in explaining the variance in the criterion variable loneliness, simple linear regression analysis was applied.

RESULTS

Correlation Analysis

In order to investigate the relationship of loneliness with socio-economic status and social support, correlation analysis was done. Obtained results are displayed in Table 1 and interpreted below.

Table1 Correlation Between Loneliness, Socio-Economic Status and Social Support

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
Loneliness	114.24	15.72	---		
Socio-Economic Status	12.93	5.13	-.116*	---	
Social Support	53.19	5.41	-.407***	.077	---

* $p<.05$, *** $p<.001$

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The results (Table 1) showed that loneliness was significantly negatively correlated with socio-economic status ($r = -.116, p < .05$) and social support ($r = -.407, p < .001$). Hence the overall result shows that an increase in socio-economic status and social support is associated with a decrease in loneliness.

Regression Analysis

In order to examine the contribution of predictor variable- socioeconomic status in loneliness, linear regression analysis was performed. Results are presented in Table-2.

Table 2 Simple Linear Regression Analysis using Socio-Economic Status as Predictor Variable and Loneliness as Criterion Variable

Variable	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	118.85***	2.123		55.98	<0.001
Socio-economic status	.356	.153	-.116	2.33	<0.05
R ²	.013				

Note. Constant=Loneliness, $R^2 = .13$, B=Unstandardized Coefficient, SE=Standard Error, β =Standardized Coefficient, t= t-value, p=Significance Level, N = 400.
* $P < .05$. *** $P < .001$.

Table 2 shows the effect of socio-economic status on loneliness among college students. The R^2 value of .013 showed that the predictor variable explained .013% of the variance in the outcome variable, with $F(1,398) = 5.444, p < 0.05$. The findings showed that socio-economic status negatively predicted loneliness ($\beta = -.116, p < 0.05$).

Linear regression analysis was also done to examine the contribution of social support in loneliness. Obtained results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3 Simple Linear Regression Analysis using Social Support as Predictor Variables and Loneliness as Criterion Variables

Variable	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	177.19***	7.116		24.897	<0.001
Social Support	-1.183***	.113	-.407	8.89	<0.001
R ²	.166				

Note. Constant=Loneliness, $R^2 = .116$, B=Unstandardized Coefficient, SE=Standard Error, β =Standardized Coefficient, t=T-value, p=Significance Level, N = 400.
* $P < .05$. *** $P < .001$.

Linear regression analysis results showed that social support was a highly significant predictor of loneliness, $R^2 = .116, F(1,398) = 79.019, P < 0.000$, which accounted for 12% of the variation in loneliness. Based on the interpretation of the results of the regression analysis, it revealed that social support was a significant predictor of students' loneliness.

DISCUSSION

This study investigates the relationship between college students' socioeconomic status, social support, and loneliness. The results showed that social support and socioeconomic status were significantly and negatively correlated. Hence, hypotheses -1 has been confirmed by the results. The results showed that the loneliness was negatively correlated with socio-economic status and social support. These results are consistent with earlier studies reporting that negative correlation between perceived social support and loneliness (Gurrapu et al., 2024; Priya,2023). According to a different study, loneliness is

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strongly correlated with lack of financial resources, weak mental health, and lack of social support networks (Prasad & Kumari, 2019). Additionally, research revealed that higher socio-economic status was associated with a higher prevalence of loneliness (Direkvand Moghadam et al., 2020). Macdonald et al. (2018) also found that, there was a significant correlation between lower socio-economic status and feelings of loneliness.

Table 2 shows that socio-economic status and social support predicted the loneliness of college students. The findings of the study reveal significant contributions of socio-economic status and social support on the loneliness of college students. The findings of the study clearly agree with those of earlier studies. According to Khess et al., (2020), social support significantly contributed 1.23% of the variance in predicting loneliness among college students ($F(3,96) = 4.492, p = 0.005$). Results of other studies showed that loneliness was a powerful predictor of subjective well-being (Hombrados et al., 2013) and perceived social support (Suri et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between college students' loneliness and their socioeconomic status and social support. The findings revealed that significant negative relationship between socio-economic status and social support with loneliness. Regression analysis further revealed that socio-economic status and social support are significant predictors of loneliness, explaining (.013%) and (12%) of the variance, respectively. The findings of the above correlation and regression analyses suggest that although socio-economic status and social support were negatively correlated with loneliness.

Limitations and future Directions

Present study helps to determine the need for preliminary scanning with simple questionnaires to identify the severity of loneliness prevalent among college students. Educational policy makers and academic and clinical psychologists can both benefit from these findings. Only self-reported measures were used, and the study is geographically limited. More data sources, a larger sample size, wide range of age, diverse demographics, and varying levels of education should all be used in future research to increase the generalizability of the results.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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