

Research Paper

## A Correlational Study of Social Loneliness, Coping Mechanisms, and Homesickness among College Students

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### ABSTRACT

The study focuses on how college students cope with homesickness and social loneliness and how they use coping mechanisms to address these problems. Social loneliness is defined as a perceived lack of social connections with people, peer groups, environment or surroundings. (APA). Homesickness is defined as the distress or impairment caused by an actual or anticipated separation from home or attachment objects (APA). Changes in social settings, academic demands, and physical separation from family and familiar surroundings are the some causes of these problems. Coping mechanism is defined as a thought process or action that helps someone deal with stressful or unpleasant situations (APA). Coping mechanisms that are essential for managing these emotional situations include creating supportive social networks, engaging in extracurricular activities, and maintaining regular communication with friends, family, and peer groups. Getting professional counselling, developing a sense of community on campus, and engaging in mindfulness exercises are more coping mechanisms. These problems must be acknowledged and addressed in order to promote college students' academic success and emotional wellness.

**Keywords:** *Social Loneliness, Homesickness, Coping Mechanism, College Students, Mental Health*

The transition from school to college is one of the most significant milestone in the lives of students, marking a shift from the familiar terrain of home to a new, independent life. For many students, this period is characterized by the excitement of new academic challenges, new friendships, and openings for particular growth in their life. Still, it also presents a series of emotional challenges, particularly for those who are leaving from home for the first time. Among these difficulties, homesickness and social loneliness are among the most prevalent emotional states that students encounter. These types of situations can be quite distressing and often make it difficult for students to adjust to their new environment, which has an impact on their mental health as well as their academic achievement.

Social loneliness coined by Robert J. Weiss, a social psychologist who distinguished between different forms of loneliness in his 1973 book *Loneliness: The Experience of*

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Received: June 03, 2025; Revision Received: July 06, 2025; Accepted: July 10, 2025

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*Emotional and Social Isolation.* Weiss identified social loneliness as the feeling of lacking a sufficient social network or connections with others, differentiating it from emotional loneliness, which relates to the absence of a close, intimate relationship. The American Psychological Association (APA), defined as a perceived lack of meaningful social connections. This feeling of isolation can be particularly prevalent in a college setting where students are often thrust into large, unfamiliar environments, making it difficult to form close-knit relationships. The social networks that students leave behind at home, including close friends and family, are not easily replaced, leading to a sense of disconnection from others. This lack of social interaction can create a persistent feeling of loneliness, even in the midst of a busy academic and social life. The loneliness may manifest as an emotional void, a sense of not belonging, or an inability to find support from peers and faculty, which can be overwhelming for students struggling to find their place in a new environment.

Homesickness was coined by Johannes Hofer, in Greek “nostos”, meaning “homecoming” and “algos”, meaning “pain”. The emotional distress caused by being away from one’s home or familiar attachments. This condition is often marked by feelings of longing, nostalgia, and an overwhelming desire to return home. It typically arises when students experience the physical separation from family, friends, and familiar surroundings. Homesickness can result in emotional disturbances such as sadness, anxiety, and even physical symptoms like fatigue or trouble sleeping. The initial excitement of being in a new environment may wear off as the challenges of independence become more apparent, and the emotional connection to home intensifies. Homesickness can be particularly difficult to cope with during periods of stress, such as during exams or when adjusting to the academic pressures of college life.

The experience of social loneliness and homesickness can have far-reaching consequences if not addressed. Students who are floundering with these emotional challenges may witness a decline in their internal health, leading to advanced rates of anxiety, depression, and stress. Likewise, these issues can vitiate academic performance, as students may find it delicate to concentrate on their studies or engage in academic conditioning when they're preoccupied with passions of insulation or homesickness. For numerous students, the experience is an important time for particular development, and without the proper managing mechanisms, these emotional struggles can inhibit growth, adaptability, and overall well-being.

Coping mechanisms are essential in helping students manage the emotional challenges of social loneliness and homesickness. A coping mechanism is defined “managing or altering the problem causing the distress” and “regulating emotional responses to the problem,” respectively (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984, p. 150). The strategies students use to cope with these feelings are varied, but research suggests that developing supportive social networks, participating in extracurricular activities, and maintaining regular contact with family and friends can all help mitigate feelings of loneliness and homesickness. Additionally, practices like mindfulness, seeking professional counselling, and engaging in campus activities that foster a sense of community can enhance students' ability to cope with emotional distress and contribute to a more positive college experience.

Grasping how social loneliness, longing for home, and coping methods connect is crucial for backing the mental health and academic achievements of university students. Given the steady rise in university enrolment, it is critical to recognize and address these emotional challenges in a proactive manner, making sure that students have the resources and support they need to thrive in their new setting. This research delves into how students encounter

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social loneliness and homesickness, the coping tactics they use, and how these elements affect their overall welfare and academic performance. By gaining insights into these aspects, universities can create specific support programs to help students smoothly transition through this significant life phase.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Diehl, Jansen, Ishchanova, and Hilger-Kolb (2022) examined the determinants of emotional and social loneliness among university students, using the UCLA Loneliness Scale and the Social Support Questionnaire. The study involved 500 students and found that both emotional and social loneliness were significantly influenced by factors such as social support, social integration, and perceived stress. The study highlighted that students with lower levels of social support and higher perceived stress experienced greater loneliness, which in turn affected their overall well-being and academic performance.

Labrague, De los Santos, and Falguera (2021) explored social and emotional loneliness among college students during the COVID-19 pandemic, investigating the predictive role of coping behaviors, social support, and personal resilience. The study used the UCLA Loneliness Scale, Brief COPE Inventory, and Resilience Scale for Adults, with 450 participants. The findings indicated that social support and personal resilience were significant predictors of lower levels of loneliness, while maladaptive coping behaviors (e.g., avoidance) were associated with higher levels of loneliness. The study emphasized the importance of fostering resilience and social support to reduce loneliness, especially during challenging times like the pandemic.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### ***Objective:***

- To compare college students in terms of social loneliness, homesickness, and coping mechanisms
- To study the relationship between social loneliness, homesickness, and coping mechanisms.

#### ***Hypotheses:***

- **H1:** There would be statistically significant difference between homesickness and social loneliness in allied health care students.
- **H2:** There would be statistically significant difference between homesickness and coping mechanism in allied health care students.

#### ***Tools:***

1. **Coping mechanism:** Brief Cope (Carver, C.S), 1997.
2. **Social loneliness:** Emotional/Social loneliness Scale (Harry Vincenzi and Fran Grabosky), 1987
3. **Homesickness:** Homesickness and Contentment Scale (Hejong Shin and Neil Abell), 1999- revised by Dr. Juliana Jecinth and Kanmani Sree Gowri and renamed it as Homesickness Scale. This revision was done to change few questions on the scale and make it more applicable to the present study. Cronbach's alpha was done to test the reliability of the revised scale and 7.2 score was noted. It showed that the score is reliable and accepted as per the interpretation. Face validity was also done to validate the revised scale.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Descriptive Analysis:

*Table 1: Descriptive group statistics of Allied Health Care and Science Students on Homesickness and Social loneliness*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Homesickness	20.2063	10.30371	63
Social loneliness	42.5556	17.81878	63

Table 1 of descriptive Statistics shows that the mean score for homesickness was 20.21 (SD = 10.30), while the mean score for social loneliness was 42.56 (SD = 17.82) among 63 participants.

*Table 2: Descriptive group statistics of Allied Health Care and Science Students on Homesickness and Coping mechanisms*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Homesickness	20.2063	10.30371	63
Coping mechanism	68.2540	15.17954	63

Table 2 of descriptive Statistics shows that the mean score for homesickness was 20.21 (SD = 10.30) and the mean score for overall coping was 68.25 (SD = 15.18) among 63 participants.

### Inferential Analysis:

*Table 3: Relationship between the Homesickness and Social loneliness among Allied healthcare and Sciences students.*

	Person correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Homesickness	1		63
Social loneliness	0.168	.188	63

Table 3 of person correlation was conducted between the homesickness and social loneliness and the results indicated a weak positive correlation between homesickness and social loneliness. However, it is not statistically significant. Thus, there is no evidence of a significant relationship between homesickness and social loneliness in the sample.

*Table 4: Relationship between the Homesickness and Coping mechanism among Allied healthcare and Sciences students.*

	Person correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Homesickness	1		63
Coping mechanism	0.529**	<.001	63

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Table 4 of person correlation was conducted between the homesickness and coping mechanism and the results indicated a high correlation. There is a significant correlation. This suggests that higher levels of homesickness are associated with higher levels of overall coping in the sample.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The present study was conducted in Bangalore, targeting a sample of 63 students enrolled in various allied health care and science disciplines.

As observed in Table 3, a positive correlation was found between homesickness and social loneliness ( $r = .168$ ), as it is not statistically significant ( $p = .188$ ). In contrast, the findings illustrated in Table 4 highlight a statistically significant and high correlation between homesickness and overall coping mechanisms ( $r = .529$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This indicates that individuals who report higher levels of homesickness also tend to have a strong coping strategies to manage their emotional challenges.

In urban context in which the study participants reside. Bangalore, being a bustling metropolitan city, offers a wide array of opportunities for social interaction and recreational engagement through indoor and outdoor activities. The availability of such platforms likely contributes to enhanced psychological resilience, enabling students to cope effectively with the emotional strain of being away from home. Consequently, their levels of social loneliness appear to remain relatively low despite experiencing homesickness.

In conclusion, although many students do experience homesickness, its effects can be reduced because they have access to helpful coping strategies and chances to stay socially active in a big city. These results show how important it is to encourage healthy ways of coping and to create opportunities for students to connect with others. This can help protect them from feeling emotionally stressed, especially in college settings within large urban areas.

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### **Acknowledgment**

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

**How to cite this article:** Gowri, K.K.S. & Jecinth, R.B.J. (2025). A Correlational Study of Social Loneliness, Coping Mechanisms, and Homesickness among College Students. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(3), 083-087. DIP:18.01.008.20251303, DOI:10.25215/1303.008