PREDICTORS OF LONELINESS: MEANING IN LIFE, PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE AND HOPE

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Abstract

Loneliness is a state that individuals find undesirable and unsettling when there is a discrepancy between the desired relationships they wish to have and the relationships they believe they now possess. This study aims to investigate the predictive role of purpose in life, psychological resilience, and hope in relation to loneliness. The study's sample consisted of 386 female university students who participated voluntarily. The study utilized the "UCLA Loneliness Scale," "Persevering Hope Scale," "Brief Resilience Scale," and "Meaning in Life Scale" to assess the relevant topics. We used correlation analysis to examine the link between the ideas, and conducted multiple regression analysis to determine if purpose in life, psychological resilience, and hope could predict loneliness. The findings indicated substantial inverse associations between loneliness and purpose in life, psychological resilience, and hope. Moreover, these independent variables significantly predicted loneliness. We analyzed and examined the collected findings in relation to the pertinent literature. To mitigate the adverse effects of loneliness, it is possible to bolster psychological resilience, conduct research on existential meaning, and implement programs aimed at fostering hope.

Keywords: Loneliness, Meaning in life, Psychological resilience, Hope.

Yalnızlığın Yordayıcıları: Yaşamda Anlam, Psikolojik Sağlamlık ve Umut

Öz

Yalnızlık, bireylerin sahip olmak istedikleri ilişkiler ile şu anda sahip olduklarına inandıkları ilişkiler arasında bir uyumsuzluk bulunması durumunda istenmeyen ve tedirgin edici olarak nitelendirdikleri bir durumdur. Bu çalışmanın amacı yaşam amacı, psikolojik dayanıklılık ve umudun yalnızlık üzerindeki yordamasını araştırmaktır. Çalışmanın örneklemini gönüllü olarak katılan 386 kadın üniversite öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmada ilgili değişkenleri değerlendirmek için "UCLA Yalnızlık Ölçeği", "Azimli Umut Ölçeği", "Kısa Psikolojk Sağlamlık Ölçeği" ve "Yaşamda Anlam Ölçeği" kullanılmıştır. Kavramlar arasındaki bağlantıyı incelemek için korelasyon analizi kullanılmış ve yaşam anlamı, psikolojik dayanıklılık ve umudun yalnızlığı yordayıp yordamadığını belirlemek için çoklu regresyon analizi yapılmıştır. Bulgular, yalnızlık ile yaşam anlamı, psikolojik dayanıklılık ve umut arasında önemli negatif ilişkiler olduğunu göstermiştir. Ayrıca, bu bağımsız değişkenler yalnızlığı önemli ölçüde yordamıştır. Elde edilen bulgular ilgili literatürle ilişkilendirilerek değerlendirilmiştir. Yalnızlığın olumsuz yansımalarını hafifletmek için psikolojik dayanıklılığı güçlendirmek, varoluşsal anlam üzerine araştırmalar yapmak ve umudu teşvik etmeye yönelik programlar uygulamak faydalı olabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yalnızlık, Yaşamda anlam, Psikolojik sağlamlık, Umut.

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1. Introduction

Loneliness is a state that arises when there is a mismatch between the desired relationships of an individual and their existing relationships, causing discomfort to the individual (Peplau & Perlman, 1981). Based on this definition, we may say that loneliness is both an unpleasant emotional experience and a cognitive aspect that involves perceiving unmet social expectations (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). Subjective evaluations, such as satisfaction with relationships or perceived social acceptance (Asher & Paquette, 2003), largely influence the perception of loneliness. Studies on loneliness demonstrate that the scarcity of an individual's social networks or the total number of friends does not determine loneliness (Jones, 1982). Hawkleey and colleagues (2003) found no differences between individuals who perceive themselves as lonely and those who do not in terms of time spent alone, daily activities, or health behaviors. However, they exhibit higher levels of stress and weaker social interactions. Loneliness is a ubiquitous phenomenon that arises from the innate human desire for social connection (Rotenberg, 1999). While it is a common occurrence, it is also crucial for the overall well-being of an individual, both physically and mentally, and can potentially become pathological (Asher & Paquette, 2003). Penninx et al. (1997) determined that individuals who reported lower levels of loneliness and higher levels of perceived control had a reduced risk of mortality, even after accounting for factors such as age, gender, chronic diseases, alcohol consumption, and smoking. Another study corroborating this finding demonstrates that loneliness also amplifies the likelihood of cardiovascular mortality. Individuals who frequently reported feelings of loneliness displayed a considerably greater risk compared to those who reported never experiencing loneliness (Olsen et al., 1991). In their study, Macia et al. (2021) determined that an individual's low assessment of their overall health and the significance they attribute to their life are two crucial characteristics linked to loneliness. Furthermore, they found that low social connectivity and an unhealthy lifestyle are significant predictors of loneliness. Health status and the purpose of life might be regarded as indicators of loneliness.

Feelings of existential insignificance and void are frequently accompanied by feelings of aloneness or apprehension of solitude (Geçtan, 2005). Put simply, the feeling of purposelessness in individuals' lives can be defined by their inability to derive fulfillment from their social interactions. Furthermore, research has indicated that the significance of existence and feelings of isolation are connected to a fear of death, in addition to the apprehension of solitude resulting from a lack of purpose. The study found that both the meaning of life and loneliness influence death anxiety. Specifically, there is a positive correlation between death anxiety and loneliness, as well as a positive correlation between death anxiety and the meaning of life (Çakar, 2020). Various researchers have made diverse assertions regarding the origins of meaning in life, with a particular emphasis on social relationships. They perceive the establishment of a connection with an individual and the presence of love and relationships as significant sources of purpose and significance. A study found that social and emotional loneliness strongly predicted subjective well-being by influencing the sense of meaning and purpose in life (Özdoğan, 2021). Furthermore, a separate study has demonstrated that feelings of loneliness have a detrimental impact on psychological well-being by diminishing mindfulness and the sense of purpose in life (Haghayeghi & Zadeh, 2021). Loneliness can provide insight into an individual's well-being by connecting it to the purpose of life. The concept of meaning in life is perceived as an intricate web of interconnections, comprehensions, and interpretations that facilitate individuals in comprehending their experiences and formulating strategies that steer them towards their desired future. According to Miao et al. (2021), their research demonstrates that hope plays a mediating role between meaning in life and future orientation. This suggests that having a sense of meaning in life can lead individuals to prioritize the future and consequently facilitate the achievement of desired objectives. Du et al. (2017) found that children with strong resilience experience reduced levels of depression and loneliness when they attribute purpose to life, in contrast to children with low resilience.

Loneliness and psychological resilience are connected. Psychological resilience can be defined as the ability to adapt to stressful events, maintain good health despite negative circumstances, perform effectively despite stress and problems, and recover from and bounce back after experiencing stress (Carver, 1998; Smith et al., 2008). Loneliness and psychological resilience have a negative correlation, meaning that when loneliness levels rise, psychological resilience levels decline (Yakıcı & Traş, 2018). Furthermore, longitudinal investigations elucidate the correlation among psychological resilience, social support, and loneliness (Kuo et al., 2021). Gerino et al. (2017) discovered that loneliness was a significant predictor of psychological resilience in the context of mediation. A separate study conducted by Batmaz et al. (2021) revealed that there is an inverse correlation between a meaningful life and feelings of loneliness, whereas there is a positive correlation between a meaningful life and psychological resilience. The study's findings indicate that meaningful existence somewhat mediates the relationship between psychological resilience and loneliness.

Another area of study is the correlation between solitude and optimism. The concept of hope can be described as a cognitive process that encompasses two key aspects: the motivation to pursue a goal and the strategies employed to achieve it (Snyder et al., 2016). Gum et al. (2017) found that hopelessness is a strong predictor of loneliness four years later, based on a longitudinal study. Bareket-Bojmel et al. (2021) found that loneliness partially mediates the relationship between social support and hope in a study conducted in the USA and Israel, with countries included as control factors. Kaynar's (2021) research identifies hope as a predictor of loneliness.

Examining the correlation between hope and psychological resilience is crucial as well. Several studies have explored this topic. To comprehend the presence of hope within an individual, it is imperative to examine the conviction that there are multiple avenues available to resolve the challenges encountered by the individual (Snyder et al., 1996). Because hope instills belief in the availability of solutions and psychological resilience enables individuals to effectively navigate challenges, it is plausible to posit an inherent interconnection between these two notions. Kirmani et al. (2015) found a strong positive correlation between psychological resilience and hope. This means that when hope levels improve, individuals also experience an increase in their resilience levels. Furthermore, Satıcı (2016) established that hope fully mediates the connection between psychological resilience and subjective well-being. All these indicate the imperative of concurrently exploring the concepts of loneliness, meaning in life, psychological resilience, and hope.

Present Study

This study will evaluate how meaning in life, psychological resilience, and hope predict loneliness. A study indicated that hope and loneliness served as parallel mediators between social support and psychological resilience (Akyil, 2025). Various studies in the literature examine the interrelated notions of meaning in life, resilience, hope, and loneliness in pairs (e.g., Hedayati & Khazaei, 2014). Despite the exploration of loneliness with multiple psychological and social concepts, no study has concurrently examined these variables within a single investigation. This study will concurrently analyze the ideas of loneliness, meaning in life, psychological resilience, and hope to address this gap. This research aims to elucidate ways for mitigating loneliness and fostering social connections, as well as to enhance understanding of groups prone to feelings of loneliness. It is anticipated that effective intervention strategies can be devised to alleviate loneliness and enhance hope, psychological resilience, and life's meaning. The study aims to investigate the relationship between meaning in life, psychological resilience, hope, and loneliness. The following theories were examined in this context:

H1: Meaning in life significantly predicts loneliness in a negative way.

H2: Psychological resilience significantly predicts loneliness and negative changes.

H3: Hope predicts loneliness in a negative and significant way.

2. Method

A cross-sectional design was employed to apply multiple regression analysis to the variables of psychological resilience, hope, and meaning in life in order to identify the predictors of loneliness in the present study. A cross-sectional design captures data at a specific point in time. Consequently, cross-sectional studies do not include a time dimension, as all data are collected and primarily pertain to the time of data collection or the environment of that time (Kesmodel, 2018). Multiple regression analysis is a widely used method for evaluating the prediction of the dependent variable by more than one independent variable (Cohen et al., 2003). In this context, the concepts of psychological resilience, hope, and meaning in life are examined as predictors of loneliness.

2.1. Participants and Procedure

For the research, we collected the data online and announced it on social media. While collecting the data, it was emphasized that data would be collected only from students who volunteered, and the participants were asked to read the informed consent in the scale sets in detail. A total of 386 female university students aged between 17 and 23 participated in the study. The study aims to investigate the relationship between meaning in life, psychological resilience, hope, and loneliness. The following theories were examined in this context.

2.2. Measures

UCLA Loneliness Scale: The measure devised by Neto (2014) is a 4-point Likert scale comprising a total of 6 items, with a rating range from 1 (not at all appropriate) to 4 (completely acceptable). It lacks any sub-dimensions. Sarıçam converted it into Turkish in 2023. The confirmatory factor analysis yielded the following fit index values for the 6-item unidimensional model: $\chi 2(24.37)/sd(9)= 2.71$, AGFI=.92, CFI=.96, GFI=.96, IFI=.96, NFI=.95, NNFI=.94, RFI=92, RMSEA= .076, SRMR=.047. Additionally, the item factor loadings varied from .35 to .70. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which measures the internal consistency and dependability, was computed as $\alpha = .77$.

Persevering Hope Scale: Rueger et al. (2023) conducted the development study. Ekşi and Başol conducted the Turkish adaptation in 2023. Its purpose was to assess the levels of hope in individuals. The scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale comprising four components. The fit index values of the scale were GFI=.999, CFI=1.000, TLI=1.007, SRMR=.0054, RMSEA=.000 and χ^2/df=.469, p<.01, and it was found that the scale showed good fit in a single-factor structure. The calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficient yielded a value of .857. The minimum score is 4, and the maximum score is 20. When confronted with challenging circumstances, each score from the scale items suggests that the individual maintains a high degree of optimism.

Brief Psychological Resilience Scale: Smith et al. (2008) established a scale to measure the psychological resilience of people. The scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of 6 items. Doğan (2015) translated it into Turkish. The scale assigns a score of 1 to the'strongly disagree' choice and a score of 5 to he'strongly a agree' option. The goodness of fit indices of the scale were x2/sd (12.86/7) = 1.83, NFI = 0.99, NNFI = 0.99, CFI = 0.99, IFI = 0.99, RFI = 0.97, GFI = 0.99, AGFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.03. Participants achieve a cumulative score of 30 points on the scale. Greater scores indicate greater psychological resilience. The scale is unidimensional. The Turkish adaptation of the

study involved calculating Cronbach's alpha reliability, which yielded a value of.81. The study reevaluated the dependability coefficient and determined it to be .81.

Meaning in Life Scale: The Meaning in Life Scale consists of 10 items, with 5 items each assessing the existence of meaning in life and the pursuit of meaning in life (Steger et al. 2006). The scale items are scored on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (indicating "absolutely not true") to 7 (indicating "absolutely true"). The goodness of fit indices of the scale were $x2/sd = 1.86$, GFI = 0.96, AGFI = 0.93, IFI = 0.98, CFI = 0.98, RMR = 0.052, RMSEA = 0.054. The scale consists of two subscales: one measures the presence of meaning in life, while the other assesses the pursuit of meaning in life. Demirbaş (2010) did a study to adapt the LLS to Turkish culture. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the existence dimension was determined to be .88, while the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the quest subscale was determined to be .93. The study calculated Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of .79 and .70 for the being and wanting dimensions, respectively.

2.3. Data Analysis

We analyzed the information provided by the participants in the research using the SPSS 26 program. The research involved examining the normality analyses of the scales employed and calculating the values of kurtosis and skewness. Next, we examined the reliability coefficients. A correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the associations between the ideas. The study utilized multiple regression analysis to examine if the ideas of meaning in life, psychological resilience, and hope can predict loneliness.

2.4. Ethical Approval

The study protocol has been approved by the Yıldız Technical University Scientific Research and Ethical Review Board (Address: 'etik.yildiz.edu.tr/dogrula 'Report No: 20240903331 Verification Code: aa41b). The study was performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its following updates.

3. Results

First, this section presents the research findings. Firstly, the relationship between the variables (loneliness, meaning in life, psychological resilience, and hope) was examined, and then the role of meaning in life, psychological resilience, and hope in predicting loneliness was investigated. Descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and correlation analysis results of the variables analyzed in the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and reliabilities for the study variables

	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α	1	2	3
1-Meaning in life	43.74	9.54	.379	.707	.77	-		
2-Resilience	17.58	5.21	.037	-.037	.84	.26**	-	
3-Hope	15.76	3.32	-.636	.147	.87	.24**	.30**	-
4-Loneliness	11.16	3.99	.716	-.106	.78	-.33**	-.31**	-.38**

**p<.001

In the normal distribution evaluation, it is stated that the kurtosis and skewness values should be in the range of +1 and -1, and the range of +2 and -2 can also be accepted (George & Mallery, 2019). In our research, kurtosis (-.636 to.716) and skewness (-.106 to.707) vary between.

Considering the relationships between the concepts, significant negative relationships were found between loneliness and meaning in life ($r = -.33$; $p<.01$), loneliness and psychological resilience ($r = -.31$; $p<.01$), and loneliness and hope ($r = -.38$; $p<.01$).

The results of multiple regression analysis, which determine whether loneliness is predicted, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

	B	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**TV**	**VIF**	**R**	**R²**	**F(df)**
Model							.48	.23	489.884 (3)
(Constant)	22.883	1.093		20.927**					
Resilience	-.132	.03	-.172	-3.581**	.866	1.154			
Hope	-.339	.05	-.282	-5.911**	.877	1.141			
Meaning in Life	-.093	.02	-.222	-4.703*	.897	1.114			

*$p<.05$, **$p<.01$

Variance increase factors (VIF values <10) and tolerance values (TV $>.2$) were examined to determine whether the independent variables had multicollinearity problems, and it was determined that the assumption of linearity was present.

As a result of the analysis of loneliness, it is seen that the independent variables in the model explain 23% of the variance in loneliness at a significant level (R =.48, R2 =.23, F = 489.884, $p<.001$). When the order of importance of the independent variables is considered, hope (β = -.28; $p<.01$) at a decreasing level, meaning in life (β = -.22; $p<.05$) at a decreasing level, and psychological resilience (β = -.17; $p<.01$) at a decreasing level are effective on the dependent variable.

4. Discussion

This study was aimed at determining to what extent meaning in life, psychological resilience, and hope levels of university students predict loneliness. The study found that these variables significantly predicted loneliness in a negative way. Individuals who perceive life as meaningful, exhibit resilience during adversities, and maintain an optimistic perspective towards the future may experience reduced feelings of loneliness. The following discussion pertains to these findings within the framework of the pertinent literature.

Firstly, the extent to which meaning in life predicts loneliness was analyzed. The analyses concluded that meaning in life significantly and negatively predicts loneliness. Research on loneliness and meaning in life supports this finding. Loneliness can generally be defined as feeling a lack of closeness to others and feeling pain or sadness by perceiving oneself as isolated (Svendsen, 2017). On the other hand, the meaningfulness of an individual's life can be understood by having a satisfying purpose in life (Steger & Frazier, 2006). Various studies suggest that there is a negative relationship between the meaning of life and loneliness (Abeyta & Juhl, 2023; Yıldırım et al., 2021). Consequently, those experiencing loneliness may lack a sense of purpose in their life. A study indicated that positive orientation partially mediates the association between loneliness and purpose in life (Borawski, 2022). It has been observed that the relationships between loneliness and the meaning of life have also been examined in different studies. Examples of these concepts are life satisfaction and happiness. While the negative correlation of loneliness and life satisfaction was stated among the findings of one study (Swami et al., 2007), it was stated in the findings of another study that the existence of meaning, happiness, and a series of concepts were positively related to life satisfaction (Park et al., 2010).

Loneliness, similar to life satisfaction, is a concept linked to happiness when examining their connection. Satıcı et al. (2016) discovered that subjective happiness acts as a mediator in the relationship between social commitment and loneliness. The current study's findings confirm the notion that meaning in life has a substantial negative correlation with loneliness, as supported by relevant literature contributions. Consequently, those who perceive their lives as devoid of meaning and struggle to find purpose are likely to experience loneliness. The belief that social connections are inadequate may stem from a deficiency of meaning in life.

The study investigated one hypothesis: a strong negative relationship between psychological resilience and loneliness. The research verified this theory. There is empirical evidence that corroborates this assertion. Psychological resilience refers to the ability to maintain a healthy and positive state of functioning throughout time by effectively addressing, adjusting to, and managing severe causes of stress or trauma (Southwick et al., 2014; Windle, 2011). Furthermore, Pakdaman (2016) and Ren and Ji (2019) conducted a separate study that demonstrates the inverse association between psychological resilience and loneliness, particularly through improved communication with family and friends. A recent study by He and Xiang (2022) found a strong inverse correlation between psychological resilience and loneliness. Additionally, the study revealed that this correlation largely explained the link between child maltreatment and non-suicidal self-harm behavior in adolescents. Another study provides evidence that both resilience and mental health play a role in the connection between loneliness and mental and physical well-being (Gerino et al., 2017). Simultaneously, studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between psychological resilience and a decrease in loneliness using this particular model. Considering all these factors, it can be concluded that the root cause of loneliness is an individual's limited psychological resilience, which refers to their incapacity to effectively cope with life's challenges. Individuals may experience heightened loneliness when they struggle to recover from their struggles and exhibit greater psychological fragility. Individuals exhibiting greater psychological resilience may possess better social interactions.

The study also examined the idea that hope has a negative and significant correlation with loneliness, and the results confirmed this relationship. According to Muyan et al. (2016), previous research has shown that hope is strongly associated with reduced feelings of loneliness. Another study has found a negative correlation between perceived loneliness and hope in a group of adolescents (Chung, 2021). Consistent with the results of the present study, social hopelessness is also a strong predictor of loneliness. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that hope has a partial role in mediating the connection between loneliness and suicidal thoughts (Harper et al., 2020). According to Huen et al. (2015), there is a positive correlation between hopelessness and suicide ideation. The findings of a separate investigation indicated a favorable correlation between new suicidal thoughts and melancholy, loneliness, and hopelessness (Pervin & Ferdowshi, 2016). These findings indicate that hope plays a crucial role in human existence and can partially account for feelings of loneliness, another significant aspect of human life. Individuals experiencing hopelessness may perceive their social interactions as insufficient. Individuals may experience less loneliness by adopting a hopeful outlook for the future. In other words, humans experience loneliness when they feel hopeless.

5. Conclusion

The research revealed that the degrees of meaning in life, psychological resilience, and hope among female university students accounted for 23% of the variation in loneliness. Put simply, the factors that strongly predict loneliness are the meaning of life, psychological resilience, and hope. Research has shown that independent variables can predict loneliness. For the initial occasion, we collectively examined the interrelationships among these variables. The presence of individuals who derive meaning from life, enhance their psychological resilience, and possess a strong sense of hope

contributes to the experience of loneliness. In this environment, fostering psychological resilience might help individuals overcome feelings of loneliness and cultivate a sense of hope, leading to a more meaningful existence.

6. Limitations and Future Research

It is advantageous to acknowledge the constraints of the study. The study initially acquired data using measurement instruments that relied on self-reporting. This indicates that the acquired data can solely elucidate the variables that are within the range of the employed measurement equipment. In future research, researchers can employ various methodologies (such as observation, interview, peer assessment, etc.) with self-report-based measurement instruments. Another constraint pertains to the research methodology. Despite the utilization of multiple regression in the investigation, it yields a restricted outcome. Structural equation modeling can be used to analyze the concepts examined in the study. Furthermore, opting for a longitudinal study rather than a cross-sectional investigation will yield more intricate findings. The ideas of the independent variable solely determine the extent to which the variation is accounted for. Future research can explore the various aspects of loneliness.

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