

Loneliness in overseas students: reviewed from father nurturance

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ABSTRACT

The uneven condition of education in Indonesia has led to the phenomenon of overseas students. This phenomenon is an effort made by prospective students to obtain higher quality education or more according to their interests. Students who migrate certainly face bigger challenges, one of which is loneliness. Many studies reveal that the negative impact of feelings of loneliness experienced by a person, so it requires further study. The main objective of this study is to see how father nurturance influences loneliness among overseas students. This study used a quantitative approach with a total of 107 respondents. From this study, it was found that the role of the father has a significant influence on feelings of loneliness experienced by overseas students.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is a significant effort aimed at improving the quality of human resources [1]. According to data from Central Bureau of Statistics/*Badan Pusat Statistik* (BPS) [2], there are 8.96 million students in Indonesia, reflecting a 4.1% increase compared to 2020. This suggests that the rise in the number of students in Indonesia is positive. However, a situation persists where the quality of universities or colleges is not evenly distributed across different locations [3]. This can be observed from the data provided by Indonesian Ministry of Education (Kemendikbud) [4], where the top 10 university rankings are still dominated by universities located on the island of Java. The reputation of these universities compels students to move from their hometowns. The unequal quality of education is the reason why individuals leave their place of origin to study in areas that have better quality education [5].

On the other hand, students are regularly faced with a number of challenges and responsibilities, especially during their first year of college. The adjustment process they must undergo occasionally presents obstacles in decision-making and exploring the new environment [6]. In addition to adapting to the new environment themselves, overseas students often encounter situations where they need to leave their family and friends in their hometown. This means that moving to another city or country exposes them to a wider social milieu, as well as habits and cultures different from their place of origin [7]. The unfamiliar social and cultural environment they occasionally have to adapt to can lead to difficulties for regional students in forming social relationships. Furthermore, it hinders them from seeking social support, especially during the phase when they are adjusting to their current social and environmental conditions. Consequently, this can contribute to feelings of loneliness among overseas students [8].

Loneliness refers to a psychological feeling that is uncomfortable because there is a gap between a social-related desire and the reality of social relationships [9]. In the long run, loneliness has a negative impact on college students, such as poor student academic performance [10], decreased well-being [11], unpleasant emotions and depression [12], leading to suicidal behaviour [13], anti-social behavior, hatred, and sleep disorders [14]. Fagan *et al.* [15] in his research found that of the 28.975 students who participated in his survey, 31% of respondents felt lonely. Peltzer & Pengpid [16] discovered that in Indonesia, of the 31.447 respondents there are 10,6% felt lonely.

Basically, loneliness is a situation in which a person experiences an inconsistency between a desired interpersonal relationship with the interpersonal relationship they presently have [17]. Though loneliness is one of the most unpleasant emotional sensations, it also incorporates cognitive characteristics. This is in line with what Motta [18] described, where loneliness demands a person's 'perception' of their social ties that do not fulfill expectations. That is, loneliness signals that a person's interpersonal interactions do not match their demands and eventually become the predominant symptom that the individual has issues in social relationships. According to Allen *et al.* [19], humans are primarily driven by the need to belong to a social group or community. Human cognitive function, emotional reactions, and interpersonal conduct are so tightly correlated with how well these demands are met. Instead of actual social exclusion, loneliness is the same as perceived social isolation [20]. It's because a pretty lonely existence can be led without feeling lonely. On the other hand, despite having many social connections, one can still feel alone. As a result, depression that stems from the idea that one's social needs are not being met in terms of the amount and quality of their social contacts can also be regarded as loneliness [21].

In the meantime, some recent study has shown that families are crucial in helping someone cope with loneliness. Although family activities do not directly impact loneliness, they do have an indirect impact on a person's self-evaluation patterns [22]. According to Mahmud *et al.* [23], self-evaluation might include self-esteem, self-efficacy, and a locus of control. According to certain studies, children's early experiences with self-evaluation and self-development extend throughout adulthood [24]. That is, a person who has strong familial ties will have a better self-concept and will therefore feel more provided when confronted with circumstances that could result in loneliness [25]. Previous studies have attempted to examine the impact of family function-related factors on loneliness, such as family cohesion [22], family atmosphere [26], and parent-child relationships [27], but it hasn't been specifically determined how the father's role affects adolescent solitude. This has become crucial since mothers continue to dominate research on child care, despite the fact that father's engagement and presence will also have a positive and unique impact on adolescents [28], [29].

Three aspects of a father's involvement in parenting such as i) interaction, which refers to the father's direct interaction with his child through parenting or joint activities; ii) availability, which refers to the father's willingness to be present and to interact with the child; and iii) responsibility, which more closely relates to the father's responsibility to see that the child is cared for [30], [31], on the other hand, examined father involvement in nurturing from a different perspective, that is, from a child's perspective. The core idea of [31] is to understand the child's behavior in the future as a perception of his or her parents in the past. A teen or adult's current behaviors will also change if they perceive their father as active and present in their lives. In addition, some of the factors supporting this idea are as follows: i) the father's engagement in nurturing is a highly diversified structure because there are so many areas of the child that can be touched; ii) the child's perception of the father's involvement, not the amount of time the father spends with the child, is what matters most to them. iii) The long-term effects of father involvement in childcare, and iv) the long-term impacts are best seen by examining the perceptions of a child who is a teenager or adult associated with the father's involvement in their early life.

According to Walsh *et al.* [32], father nurturing is one of the family patterns that can build a picture of adolescents that is related to them. When confronted with a crisis circumstance, an adolescent's satisfaction will be impacted by the presence of a father in their lives [33]. According to a study by Zhong [34], Active and nurturing engagement between fathers and their infants fosters the development of a positive 'internal working model' in children. This engagement instills an 'inner sense of security' that supports their exploration of the world. Consequently, such interactions help establish 'secure attachment relationships,' crucial for the child's socioemotional development. According to several studies [32], [35], a father's involvement in adolescent life is positively correlated with adolescent self-esteem. In particular, it was discovered that a child's loneliness and anxiety would be impacted by a father's rejection of children and adolescents [36]. In addition, it's intriguing that studies have shown that fathers' nurturing involvement has little impact on adolescent loneliness [32]. The study's hypothesis, which is based on aforementioned exposure, is that paternity has an impact on overseas students' feelings of loneliness.

2. METHOD

2.1. Participant

Overseas students from the city, the island, and abroad were among the participants of the study. Purposive sampling procedures are used, in which study participants are matched to a predetermined standard. In this case, the standard is an overseas student. The expected sample size in this research is 105 respondents. This was obtained by Green where the formula for getting the ideal sample size in simple linear regression can use the formula $104 + m$ (predictor variable). In this study there is 1 predictor variable so this study requires a minimum of 105 respondents [37].

The data collection procedure for this study is carried out online through the distribution of surveys using Google Forms. Using Google Forms can ensure respondents fill in all items without missing anything. In the data collection process, several efforts were made to control data entry in order to reduce bias. This questionnaire is completed anonymously so that respondents can complete it comfortably and honestly. When filling in demographic data, there are questions related to the respondent's city of origin and questions related to where they studied. These two questions can be used as a control to ensure that respondents are indeed overseas students. The researcher also carried out data cleaning by eliminating respondents whose answers were not serious, which is usually indicated by answers that all tend to be the same.

2.2. Data analysis

In order to analyze the data, this study used a quantitative methodology that involved linear regression analysis. The researchers employed JASP software, namely version 0.17.1.0, to make data processing easier. The application of this software enabled an efficient and accurate analysis of the collected data.

2.3. Instrument

The study employs two psychological scales: the nurturant fathering scale (NFS) to measure the father's involvement in the nurturing process, and the Revised University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) loneliness scale to assess loneliness. The NFS was adapted from the scale of the same name by Finley & Schwartz [31] and consists of 8 items merged into a single dimension (unidimensional) without any negative items. This scale offers five answer choices, and an example statement is, 'To what extent do you believe your father enjoys his role as a parent?' Moving on to the R-UCLA loneliness scale [38], it comprises 20 items merged into a single dimension (unidimensional), with 10 negative items. This scale provides four answer choices, ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (often). An example statement from this scale is 'I consider myself a sociable person'.

Validity tests were also conducted for both scales using validity evidence based on internal structure, namely confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Based on CFA, there were no changes in the number of items in the NFS because the factor loadings of each item ranged from .729 to .902. This means that each statement can adequately represent the father's nurturance variable. As for the R-UCLA loneliness scale, changes occurred after factor analysis where four items had to be dropped due to factor loadings <0.3 . This resulted in the intended 20-item R-UCLA loneliness scale being reduced to only 16 items. After performing the factor analysis, a reliability test was also conducted using Cronbach's alpha to support the validity source based on internal structure, with NFS demonstrating excellent reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .947 and item-total correlations ranging from .717 to .870. On the other hand, the R-UCLA loneliness scale shows good reliability as indicated by a Cronbach's alpha of .875, with item-total correlations ranging from .326 to .651.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Participant's information

Out of the total 107 respondents involved in this study, 43.93% are male and 56.08% are female. In terms of age, 69.16% of the respondents are in the age range of 18-21 years. Furthermore, there are 29.91% of respondents in the age range of 22-25 years, and 0.94% in the age range of 26-29 years. Then, when observed to what extent the respondents have migrated, there are 44.86% of respondents who have migrated out of the city. Next, there are 46.73% of respondents who have migrated to a different island, and 8.4% of respondents have migrated to a foreign country. Looking at the duration of how long the respondents have been living away from home, from the total of 107 respondents, there are 34.58% who have been living away for approximately one year. Next, there are 15.89% of respondents who have been living away for approximately two years. There are also 18.69% of respondents who have been living away for approximately three years, and 30.84% have been living away for more than four years. Furthermore, there are 53.27% of respondents who choose to live alone during their time of migration. However, there are also

16.82% of respondents who opt to live with friends or with relatives. Moreover, 13.08% of the respondents choose to migrate and live with their parents.

3.2. The association between father nurturance and loneliness

Linear regression analysis is employed to examine the influence of father involvement in the parenting process on feelings of loneliness. The results of the regression analysis can be observed in Table 1.

Table 1. Regression test of father nurturance on loneliness

	Anova (p)	Adjusted R ²	Standardized Coef.
Nurturant Fathering	<.001	0.152	-0.400

After conducting the analysis, it was found that adolescents' perceptions regarding father involvement in the parenting process have a significant negative influence on the emergence of feelings of loneliness. Father's involvement in parenting contributes to 15.2% of the variance in the occurrence of feelings of loneliness experienced by an individual. This means that the smaller an adolescent's perception of father involvement in the parenting process, the greater the likelihood of experiencing loneliness.

From the presented results, it is found that adolescents' perception of their father's presence in the parenting process influences their feelings of loneliness. Essentially, loneliness is an experience that many individuals undergo. About 80% of individuals under the age of 18 tend to feel lonely, with the level of loneliness gradually decreasing during early adulthood, and then increasing in old age [21], [39]. However, this is also influenced by external factors such as relationships with others, socioeconomic status, job demands, and so forth. Relationships with others, both family and social environment, are the most common predictors of one's likelihood to experience loneliness [40].

According to Bureau *et al.* [41], loneliness itself is a mechanism that occurs when an individual feels insecure, wherein implicitly the individual becomes highly vigilant about social threats from their surroundings. Meanwhile, an individual's perspective of the social environment is influenced by the healthiness of their relationship with their parents [42]. Therefore, a child who lacks support and does not have a warm relationship with their parents, both father and mother, will tend to feel insecure and lack the confidence to interact with others [41]. This means that lonely individuals tend to perceive their social environment as more threatening, be more pessimistic about life events, and tend to have negative social interactions with others [43].

This supports the findings of [44], where children can have a lower risk of experiencing psychological health disorders such as loneliness, depression, and poor self-esteem due to parental support. [41] also found that adolescents who are indicated to feel lonely tend to have less satisfactory interpersonal relationships specifically with their fathers. However, this was not found in interpersonal relationships with other family members. Additionally, father nurturance is also evaluated in connection with the quality of an individual's interactions in early adulthood for forming social relations and finding an ideal partner [45]. This makes an individual feel more confident in their ability to form warm and close relationships with others.

Therefore, the presence of a father in a child's life has a significant impact on the formation of the child's self [22]. Essentially, Qian *et al.* [22] also reveal that the absence of a father in a child's life does not directly impact the child's loneliness, but rather influences the formation of the child's self-evaluation patterns. Several studies indicate that aspects related to self-evaluation continue to develop from childhood to adulthood [24]. This demonstrates that growing up in a functional family, including the presence of a father in one's life, will result in a more positive self-concept [25]. Additionally, a child will also develop adequate self-esteem when a teenager perceives the presence of their father in their life [32], [35]. This means that fathers play an important role in fostering a positive self-concept in individuals. This, of course, will impact the ability of teenagers and adults to manage emotions and negative aspects that may arise within themselves later in life, including feelings of loneliness [34].

The formation and growth of a positive self also have an impact on an individual's awareness of changes occurring in their life, including their response to loneliness. This is in line with Zheng *et al.* [46], who states that feelings of loneliness are relevantly experienced by overseas students due to the changing circumstances and conditions where they have to live far from their place of origin and social environment. The differences in the location of work or education also affect how much support individuals perceive from others. Kristiana *et al.* [47] in their research found that overseas students receive less social support from others compared to non-migrating students. Alongside the lack of social support, negative self-perception and self-concept also make individuals, especially overseas students, find it more difficult to establish relationships with others. In their study, O'Dea and Stern [48] found that students from China and other

countries studying in the USA are more prone to experiencing homesickness, loneliness, and communication issues. This arises due to the lack of social support and low social self-efficacy among overseas students.

Thus, the feeling of loneliness in students tends to be lower if they receive positive social support and have a harmonious relationship with their family. This is because the loneliness experienced by adolescents and young adults is a result of the lack of an attachment figure from the family [49]. A warm and secure parent-child relationship will impact a child's ability to establish comfortable and secure relationships with others, as well as increase confidence in forming more positive relationships within their social environment [50]. This means that attachment to the family and the quality of communication between parents and children will affect a child's social abilities, which in turn will influence the loneliness experienced by adolescents [51]. Lack of interaction and the loss of an attachment figure, especially the father, will lead to a tendency for a child to feel lonely. Meanwhile, fathers play a crucial role in nurturing one's capacity to form warm and intimate relationships with others. On the other hand, if the relationship between a child and their father is not harmonious, the child is more likely to experience loneliness. This indicates that the presence of a father can help reduce psychological disturbances like loneliness [52].

Furthermore, this also indicates that a father's lack of involvement in the parenting process can affect how an individual responds to relationships and copes with loneliness. This is in line with the findings from the research [36] that a father's rejection of a child significantly influences the loneliness experienced by adolescents. On the other hand, what's interesting is that maternal rejection does not have an impact on adolescent loneliness. Wang and Yao [36] reveal that when a father figure is absent in a child's life, the child tends to grow with anxieties and social fears. This ultimately leads an adolescent, who has grown from such circumstances, to experience forms of social isolation. Subsequently, the unpleasant experience of social isolation leads the individual to feelings of loneliness. This is because a distant and conflicted parent-child relationship tends to make a child feel unworthy of having strong social relationships. This also leads individuals to view their surroundings with anxiety and lack of self-confidence [42].

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion that have been presented in the previous section, it can be concluded that the role of father involvement in the parenting process has a significant negative impact on the emergence of feelings of loneliness within an individual. This indicates the importance of having a warm relationship with parents, especially fathers. This is because a positive relationship with the father has an impact on how an individual views themselves and the environment, which can also affect their ability to form social relationships. On the other hand, further research is needed regarding the role of father involvement in the parenting process in relation to other psychological variables. This is due to the limited research that discusses the father's role in the parenting process and its impact on child development. In addition to linking with other psychological variables, future studies can further explore the involvement of fathers in the parenting process with various demographic variables, such as gender and the child's age. This is expected to enrich the information and understanding of the father's role not only within the family but also specifically in the physical and psychological development of the child.

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