

Social Support and Loneliness Among Students Living Away from Home

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Abstract

Transitioning to university life and moving away from home presents significant psychological challenges for migrant students, often triggering emotional vulnerability and loneliness due to a gap between desired and actual social relationships. This study investigates the influence of social support on loneliness among students living away from home. Grounded in Weiss's interactional theory of loneliness, it is hypothesized that social support has a significant negative effect on loneliness, meaning that higher perceived social support leads to lower levels of loneliness. Using a quantitative associative and correlational design, data were collected from 136 migrant students in the 2022 cohort, selected through purposive sampling. Instruments included the Social Support Scale and the Loneliness Scale, adapted from established theoretical frameworks. Simple linear regression analysis revealed a strong correlation ($R = 0.580$) and confirmed that social support significantly predicts loneliness ($F = 68.261$, $p < 0.05$), explaining 33.6% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.336$). These findings highlight that robust social support systems encompassing emotional, instrumental, and informational dimensions act as vital psychological buffers, mitigating feelings of social and emotional isolation among migrant students.

Keywords: Loneliness, Social Support, Students Living Away From Home

INTRODUCTION

Moving from adolescence to emerging adulthood is a key stage in personal growth, especially for university students who move away from their hometowns to study at college (Hawkley et al., 2022). Moving to a new place can make it hard for migrant students to adjust to different environments, social situations, and cultures (Ummah & Murdiana, 2024), which makes their college experience quite different from that of students who live nearby. Leaving behind the familiar setting of one's hometown often breaks strong emotional connections and regular interactions with people, causing someone to feel a deep sense of emptiness in their social and emotional life (Barreto et al., 2021). When scholars move to a new city they don't know, they lose their usual support system (Atiawardani et al., 2025). This makes them more likely to feel very stressed, tired from studying, and have a hard time adjusting to their new environment (Barseli et al., 2017).

When people move to a new place, they often face many psychological problems, and one of the biggest and most serious issues is feeling lonely (Istanto & Engry, 2019). This problem is widespread and important, so it needs to be studied carefully by experts. Conceptualized by Robert S. Weiss, loneliness is a clear emotional feeling that comes from a lack in a person's social connections, and it goes much deeper than just being alone physically (Weiss, 1973). Weiss's fundamental framework explains how relational deficits occur by identifying specific areas of missing connections. These include feeling emotionally connected, being part of a group, knowing one's value, having a dependable friend, receiving advice, and having opportunities to care for others. University students who are away from home and dealing with tough academic pressures

may face growing problems in their relationships (Ummah & Murdiana, 2024). These issues can significantly affect their emotions, cognitive functioning, and overall mental health.

Modern studies in psychology are increasingly demonstrating that social and environmental factors surrounding students directly influence their mental health. These studies explain how the transition to university creates conditions where traditional support systems struggle to provide adequate assistance (Bohman et al., 2024). Recent empirical evidence supports Weiss's theoretical framework by showing that a person's mental health is strongly connected to the environment around them, particularly through positive school environments, supportive relationships with peers, and accessible mental health services. Although considerable research exists on general student stress and homesickness, there remains insufficient understanding of the specific social and emotional challenges that migrant students experience.

Empirical research that isolates how comprehensive social support systems predict and buffer loneliness in specific regional contexts is still limited. Much of the existing literature treats adjustment as a general process, overlooking the particular vulnerabilities linked to regional migration. Additionally, social support is often handled as a single, unified construct instead of being separated into its functional components: emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support, and examined for how each interacts with Weiss's model of relational deficits. Finally, there is a marked shortage of localized studies on how migration-related stressors shape perceived social networks in Indonesian higher education settings.

Addressing these theoretical and empirical gaps is essential because strong social support functions as a primary psychological safeguard against both the emergence and the severity of loneliness among migrant students (Hidayatussani et al., 2021). Instead of treating adaptation solely as an individual coping mechanism, the availability of dependable social support networks directly offsets the relational shortcomings described by Robert S. Weiss (Weiss, 1973). By systematically examining these processes within the specific setting of Universitas PGRI Semarang, this study advances counseling scholarship by refining how loneliness theory is applied to migrating populations.

Research on emotional and social adjustment demonstrates that interpersonal relationships serve as a crucial mechanism through which migrant students navigate their transition to university. Emotional support characterized by expressions of care, understanding, and validation from peers and mentors provides comfort and reduces anxiety during the challenging early period of relocation (Halim & Dariyo, 2017). Instrumental support, such as practical assistance with academic tasks and logistical challenges of living independently in a new city, directly enables students to manage their daily responsibilities more effectively. Informational and appraisal support, which include advice giving and affirmation of one's capabilities, strengthen students' confidence and self-efficacy when facing unfamiliar social and academic environments (Primashandy & Surjaningrum, 2021; Istanto & Engry, 2019). Together, these multifaceted dimensions of social support create a protective buffer against psychological distress.

When the specific support dimensions described above are inadequate or absent, the cumulative psychological burden on migrant students increases substantially, placing them at heightened risk for chronic loneliness and emotional suffering (Hawkey et al., 2022). The divergence between the quality of relationships students desire and those they actually establish in their new context creates a persistent source of psychological strain. Understanding how different forms of social support directly mitigate loneliness therefore provides critical insights for developing effective counseling and support interventions.

This investigation holds significant implications for the development of mental health systems and student support structures in colleges and universities. Rather than implementing reactive counseling that responds only after crises emerge, institutions can leverage evidence on social support mechanisms to establish proactive, preventive programs specifically designed for migrating students. Identifying which dimensions of

social support provide the most protective benefits enables campus counselors and policymakers to design targeted peer-mentoring programs and community initiatives that address the nuanced needs of this vulnerable population (Primashandy & Surjaningrum, 2021)Istanto & Engry, 2019).

Ultimately, this research aims to provide a robust empirical foundation for developing campus-based counseling interventions and preventive mental health frameworks tailored specifically to the vulnerabilities of migrating scholars. By anchoring these insights in Robert S. Weiss's established theoretical framework (Weiss, 1973), the study bridges the gap between macro-level sociological migration stressors and micro-level psychological resilience. Through this comprehensive exploration, the findings endeavor to foster enhanced emotional stability, academic retention, and overall psychological adaptation for students navigating the complex realities of academic migration at Universitas PGRI Semarang.

METHODS

Research Design

This study uses a quantitative approach with an associative design to test and measure the magnitude of influence between variables in a systematic and structured way (Allo & Soetjiningsih, 2025). This method is applied to obtain objective numerical data and to examine psychological phenomena through valid measurement instruments. The approach focuses on assessing how much variation in predictor factors, such as family or social support, can explain or predict changes in the dependent variable, namely the level of loneliness experienced by individuals. Through correlational statistical analysis, the mathematical patterns of relationships between these variables can be empirically proven to strengthen the validity of the findings in the field.

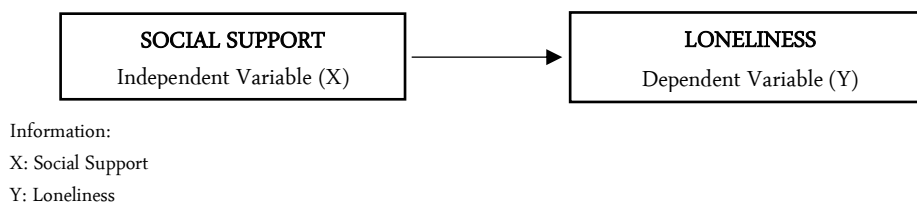
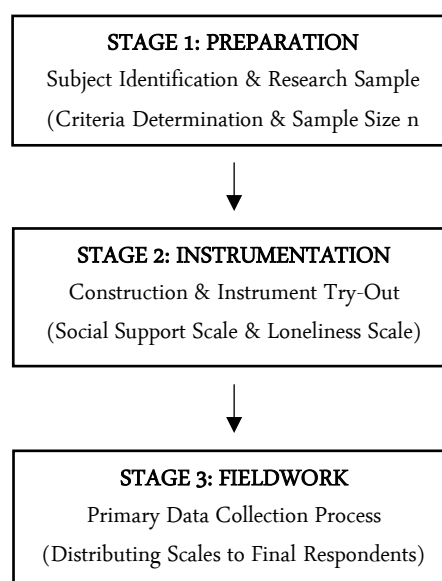


Figure 1. Variable Relationship Diagram



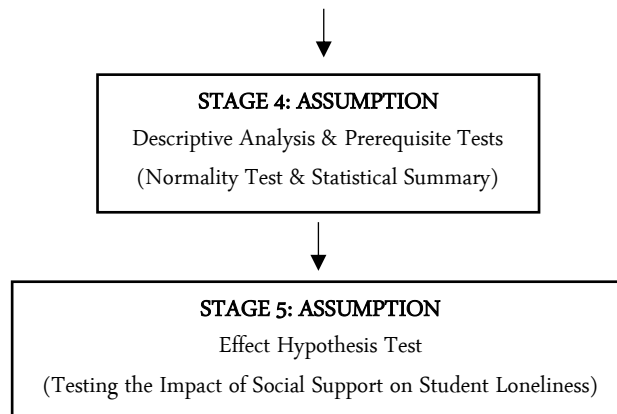


Figure 2. Research Flowchart

Participants and Procedure

The study included all 200 students who enrolled at Universitas PGRI Semarang in 2022, from different academic programs. The sample was chosen through purposive sampling, following clearly set inclusion criteria, which include: A student who is very engaged in studies, part of the 2022 graduating class at Universitas PGRI Semarang, Fromout Side Semarang (internship student), Living in a boarding house, dormitory, or a place you rent on your own during the time you are studying, Ready to take part willingly and finish all the research tools given.

Using purposive sampling, we collected data from 136 participants who met the criteria and fully participated in the data-gathering process. The research implementation process was broken down into several organized steps: The next step was getting the necessary approvals from the university and the relevant department, and creating a detailed plan for the research tools, both in digital and paper form. Try-out Stage: Testing the instrument with people who are not part of the main group to check whether the questions work well and whether the scale yields consistent results. The core data collection phase involved sending questionnaires to 136 carefully selected participants via a well-organized online system, followed by rigorous data checks to ensure data quality. Analysis Stage: Putting together the raw data, checking if the basic assumptions are met, and using computer software to test the hypotheses.

Research Instruments

In this study, data were collected using a modified Likert scale as the primary instrument. The scale had four options to prevent people from choosing neutral or unsure answers: Very Appropriate, Appropriate, Not Appropriate, and Very Not Appropriate. This research tool is split into two main groups of scales:

Social Support Scale: This scale is based on the five main types of social support described by Sarafino and Smith. These types include emotional support, which is about being attentive, understanding, and trustworthy; esteem support, which involves praise and encouragement; instrumental support, which is help with money or physical tasks; informational support, which gives advice, guidance, and feedback; and group or community support, which is feeling part of a social group. Initially, this scale comprised 40 items (a mix of favorable and unfavorable items). After checking the items for validity using the corrected item-total correlation method (with a minimum correlation of 0.30) and assessing reliability with Cronbach's alpha, 34 items were found to be valid and ready to use for data collection in the main study.

Loneliness Scale: This instrument is based on a multidimensional set of indicators that cover social and emotional aspects of alienation, drawing on theories of interpersonal relationship dynamics and individual adjustment in a new environment (Allo & Soetjningsih, 2025). Through rigorous psychometric testing, including item validity and reliability tests, the statements in this scale are carefully selected to ensure the instrument can accurately, consistently, and reliably measure the subjective level of loneliness in research participants (Sahertian et al., 2024).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in steps using statistical software to ensure the results were interpreted correctly. These stages of analysis include:

Descriptive Analysis: This is done to provide a basic overview of the research data's features by examining simple statistics such as the smallest and largest values, the average, and the spread of the numbers for each variable. Before checking the regression hypothesis, some assumption tests were done, including:

1. Residual Normality Test: The One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test is used to check if the residual data from the regression model follows a normal distribution.
2. Linearity Test: This was done by using an ANOVA table for the Deviation from Linearity line to check if the connection between the independent and dependent variables follows a straight-line pattern as required.

The main hypothesis test, a simple linear regression analysis, was used to assess whether social support variables have a significant effect on loneliness (Barreto et al., 2021). This was done using a t-test to determine the direction of the partial regression coefficient and to calculate the coefficient of determination (R^2), which indicates the percentage of the dependent variable explained by the independent variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

A descriptive statistical analysis was done on data from 136 students who live outside of town. This analysis summarized the key statistical measures for the Social Support and Loneliness variables, as shown in the table below.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Research Variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Support	136	65	115	92,22	10,670
Loneliness	136	65	123	90,87	14,728
Valid N (listwise)	136				

Based on the statistical information shown earlier, here are the key points from the findings: The Social Support Variable ranged from a low of 65 to a high of 115. On average, the scores were 92.22, with a standard deviation of 10.670. This average shows that, overall, students studying abroad feel that there is a good amount of social support available in their study and living surroundings.

The loneliness score ranges from a minimum of 65 to a maximum of 123 (Barreto et al., 2021). On average, people score around 90.87, with scores varying by about 14.728 points (Qualter et al., 2021). This score indicates that students' feelings of isolation or loneliness while studying abroad remain within the expected range of stable data, even as they adjust to life on campus.

Before testing the regression hypothesis, the prerequisite analysis tests were first performed, which showed the following results: Residual Normality Test: Testing using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test yielded an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.058. Because this significance value is above the 0.05 level ($p > 0.05$), it can be concluded that the residual data are normally distributed. Linearity Test: Linearity analysis using the ANOVA table in the Deviation from Linearity row yielded a significance value of 0.252. Because the $p\text{-value} > 0.05$, this confirms that the functional relationship between the social support variable and the loneliness variable meets the linear assumption.

After the assumption was met, the main hypothesis was tested using simple linear regression analysis. A summary of the results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) calculations is presented in the following table:

Table 2. Model Summary & ANOVA Evaluation for Simple Linear Regression

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p-value)
Regression	2.272,924	1	2.272,924	68,261	0,000
Residual	4.495,193	135	33,298		
Total	6.768,117	136			

Looking at the ANOVA table above, the F-value is 68.261, and the significance level is 0.000, indicating the result is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). This result shows that the suggested simple linear regression model is important and can be trusted to predict the outcome variable accurately. Testing the partial regression coefficient with a t-test showed a constant of 80.532 and a regression coefficient for the social support variable of -0.384, yielding a calculated t-value of -8.262 with a p-value less than 0.000. The minus sign in the regression coefficient shows that as social support increases, loneliness tends to decrease. To see how much the independent variables affect the dependent variable, here is a summary of the results from the coefficient of determination analysis in the table below.

Table 3. Model Determination Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0,580	0,336	0,331	5,77042

Based on the summary from the determination table above, these interpretations were found. The Correlation Coefficient (R) is 0.580, indicating a strong association between social support and loneliness among students away from home.

The Coefficient of Determination, or R-squared, is 0.336. This means that social support explains 33.6% of the differences in how lonely students living away from home feel. The remaining 66.4% is influenced by factors not covered by this research model, such as how people manage their emotions, cope with stress, believe in their own abilities, and their unique personality traits.

DISCUSSION

The results from the numbers-based study in this research clearly show that having social support is a very important factor in helping international students feel less lonely in the 2022 class at Universitas PGRI Semarang. When looked at through the ideas of early adult development psychology and Robert S. Weiss's theory (Weiss, 1973) shows that students from other countries go through many tough mental and social

adjustments because they lose their close physical connections and direct relationships with their main support groups in their home town, like family and old friends (Ummah & Murdiana, 2024). When students feel a lot of pressure to do well in school, especially in a new environment where they don't know many people, they may not have anyone to rely on or talk to. This lack of close relationships and meaningful conversations makes it harder for them to meet their social needs, which can result in feeling lonely and disconnected from others.

The presence of social support, manifested in the form of emotional attention, recognition, instrumental assistance, and informational guidance (Sarafino & Smith, 2017), functions optimally as a psychological buffer. The functional benefit of this support is able to reduce feelings of isolation by reassuring individuals that they have a reliable interpersonal support network when facing the crisis of the college transition. The negative direction of the regression coefficient clarifies the psychological law that the higher students' perceptions of the availability of social support, the lower their levels of loneliness. Conversely, a deficit in social support, minimal involvement in peer groups, and the absence of empathetic responses from the surrounding environment have been shown to exacerbate the subjects' psychological vulnerability (Hawkley et al., 2022).

The 33.6% contribution shows that although support from outside sources is important for keeping students' mental health stable, there are other things both inside and outside that help build a person's mental strength, like their social skills, ability to adjust to situations, and ways they protect their own mental well-being. This result matches up with a lot of recent studies from the last ten years, which show that how lonely first-year students feel is mostly influenced by the strength of their social support systems in college.

Implication

This research has real-world importance for higher education, especially in creating policies that support student well-being. In real-life situations, these results can help university Guidance and Counseling Services create programs that prevent and address psychological and social issues (Barseli et al., 2017). These programs might involve activities that help students adjust to social situations, creating support groups among peers, and offering group counseling aimed at helping students who live away from home fit in better with society. This can help reduce the risk of mental health problems that might come from feeling lonely, especially early on in their lives.

Limitation

This study was carefully planned and conducted, but there are some methodological issues that should be noted. These issues can help assess and improve future research: The study included only students from the 2022 class who were studying at one university, Universitas PGRI Semarang. So, when applying these results to other international students at different universities or in other contexts, we need to be careful and recognize that there may be limits to how widely we can apply these findings. Limitations of Measurement Tools: Using questionnaires in which people respond on their own can lead to biased results. This happens because people might not tell the truth. Their answers can be affected by how they feel in the moment, their mood, or their desire to act like the kind of person others expect or approve of.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the data and the detailed discussion provided earlier, this study finds that social support has a clear negative impact on the level of loneliness experienced by out-of-school students in the class of 2022 at Universitas PGRI Semarang. This means that when out-of-school students receive more support and feel supported by their family in their hometown and by new friends at school, they tend to feel

less lonely while studying. If there is not enough social support, the likelihood of feeling lonely and cut off from others increases. These findings add further support to the real-world importance of Robert S. Weiss's interactional theory (Weiss, 1973), which helps explain how students adapt psychologically and provides a solid basis for developing proactive guidance and counseling services on campus to support the mental health of students who are not in school.

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