

The Relationship Between Loneliness and Depression Among Men and Women

Erick Ruelas

Department of Social Work

Capstone Research Advisor: Brittany Eghaneyan

Abstract

- There is a global concern about loneliness and depression and their effects on general well-being.
- Both have been linked to causing adverse health outcomes.
- The existing literature does not have a clear stance on whether the relationship between these variables is affected by gender.
- This study was a secondary analysis of data gathered from the MIDUS Refresher 1: Biomarker Project.
- This study indicates a strong and positive relationship between loneliness and depression among males and females, with a slightly higher correlation among these variables among males than females.

Introduction

- Approximately 322 million people around the world are affected by depression.
- At least one in twenty individuals will describe feeling symptoms of depression.
- One study found approximately four times the reports of mental health symptoms such as anxiety and depression in 2020 compared to the previous year.
- This study aims to understand the relationship between feelings of loneliness and symptoms of depression.

Research Questions

- What is the relationship between feelings of loneliness and symptoms of depression?
- How does the relationship between feelings of loneliness and symptoms of depression differ between men and women?

Hypotheses

- Experiencing high levels of depression is correlated with elevated feelings of loneliness.
- The relationship between loneliness and depression will be stronger in men than women.

Literature Review

- Previous studies have found that there is a positive relationship between loneliness and depression.
- A higher score in loneliness can result in higher reports of depression symptoms.
- Loneliness is defined as the difference between the social interactions a person wishes to have compared to the connections they have.
- Loneliness and depression are both associated with emotions, and both are also global issues. Both can negatively affect one's quality of life and life expectancy.
- Research on how loneliness differences are influenced by gender is contradicting.

Research Design

- This study is a secondary analysis of the MIDUS Refresher 1: Biomarker Project (2012-2016).
- The purpose of the Refresher Biomarker Project was to investigate the relationship between the economic recession and several factors related to well-being and social life.
- Data was collected on factors during midlife in the adult lifespan, such as physical well-being and psychological and social aspects.

Procedure

- Participants for the Biomarker Project had previously participated in the MIDUS Refresher study.
- Participants were asked to stay at least 24 hours at one of the sites collecting data.
- Medical history, a physical exam, and a self-administered questionnaire were distributed during their stay.

Participants

- Participants in the MIDUS Refresher Biomarker study are an 863 participant subsample of the Refresher study's original 3,577 participants.

Measures

- **Independent Variables** - Loneliness and Gender
- The UCLA Loneliness Scale

- **Dependent Variable** - Depression

- Center for Epidemiologic Studies – Depression (CES-D)

Spearman's Rho

- A series of Spearman's rho correlations were calculated to understand the relationship between loneliness and depression using the full sample, males only and females only.
- The results indicated a statistically significant and positive relationship between feelings of loneliness and depression. The strength of the correlation in all samples was moderate. Higher levels of loneliness were associated with higher levels of depression. This correlation was slightly stronger among males than females.

Multiple Regressions

- A series of multiple regression analyses were conducted to understand the relationship between loneliness and depression while also considering the effects of other variables such as age, marital status, and gender.
- The regression model was significant. Participants' perceived loneliness significantly and positively predicted perceived depression among males and females. Respondent's age significantly and negatively predicted depression, while respondent's sex significantly predicted perceived depression, with females having higher perceived depression than males.

Methods

Sample Characteristics (N=863)

Characteristic	f	%
Gender		
Male	413	47.9
Female	450	52.1
Age in years	M = 50.84	SD = 13.41
Racial origin		
White		
Black and/or African American	600	81.0
Native American Alaska/Aleutian	56	7.6
Islander/Eskimo	16	2.2
Asian	12	1.6
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2	0.3
Other (Specify)	55	7.4
Pre-tax income last calendar year	M = 566638.16	SD = 48840.76
Current Employment – Working		
YES	402	58.1
NO	290	41.9
Refresher Biomarker (P4) marital status		
Married	501	58.1
Separated	20	2.3
Divorced	134	15.5
Widowed	40	4.6
Never married	156	18.1
Living with someone in committed relationship	12	1.4

Results

Correlations Analyses of Depression and Loneliness

Independent and Dependent Variables	<i>r_s</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Depression and Loneliness (full sample)	0.55	859	<0.001
Depression and Loneliness (males)	0.57	410	<0.001
Depression and Loneliness (females)	0.55	447	<0.001

Results of Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Depression (N=860)

Variable	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
(constant)	-1.51	1.43	-	-1.05	0.29
Loneliness	0.99	0.49	0.56	20.09	<0.001
Age	-0.71	0.16	-0.12	-4.40	<0.001
Marital Status	-0.84	0.46	-0.52	-1.85	0.065
Female	1.54	0.44	0.98	3.48	<0.001
F (4,856)	122.73				
R ²	0.36				

Discussion / Implications

- The findings of this study illustrate the need for programs and interventions that will allow for these mental health concerns to be addressed.
- More resources should be available to help alleviate the symptoms of depression.
- Although current research understands the relationship between loneliness and depression, more research is needed on the factors that influence this relationship.
- More importantly, future research should examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on this relationship.

Strengths and Limitations

- One of the strengths of this study is that it gathered data from a large number of participants. This allows for the possibility of making inferences about the general population.
- An additional strength is that the measures used for this study to measure depression and loneliness are valid and have been used in several previous studies.
- One of the limitations of this study is that it is a secondary analysis. Currently, this study is limited in its ability to seek other characteristics that could have possibly explained the relationship between loneliness and depression.

References

- Brody, D. J., Pratt, L. A., & Hughes, J. P. (2018). Prevalence of depression among adults aged 20 and over: United States, 2013-2016. *NCHS Data Brief*. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db303.htm>
- Chang, E. C. (2018). Relationship between loneliness and symptoms of anxiety and depression in African American men and women: Evidence for gender as a moderator. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 120, 138-143. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2017.08.035>
- Compton, M. T., & Shim, R. S. (2015). The social determinants of mental health. *Focus*, 13(4), 419-425. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.focus.20150017>

Conclusion

- This study was designed to understand the relationship between loneliness and depression among men and women.
- There is a strong relationship between depression and loneliness among men and women.
- More information is needed to understand the variables that influence this relationship to implement policies and interventions to address these concerns.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank my family, peers, and professors for their support throughout my journey in higher education.