

# **The Relationship Between Stressful Life Events and Feelings of Hopelessness and Psychological Loneliness Among Al Balqa Applied University Students**

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*Because of the complexity of modern life in all aspects, people can face different stressful life events, which also lead to different physiological disorders. The current study aimed to discover the relationship between stressful life events and feelings of hopelessness, and psychological loneliness. The study sample consisted of (294) students from Al-Balqa Applied University (females, 262; males, 32). The researchers used three tools: the stressful life events scale, the hopelessness scale and the psychological loneliness scale. The study results showed a positive correlation between stressful life events and feelings of hopelessness and psychological loneliness. Accordingly, future suggestions for research, policy and practices are presented.*

*Keywords: Al Balqa Applied University, hopelessness, psychological loneliness, stressful life events*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Some of the bad things that might happen regularly and cause people to stress are stressful life events (March-Llanes et al., 2017). It is common knowledge that experiencing stressful life events can negatively affect a person's mental health (Rawat et al., 2019). The stress-stress interaction theory proposes that daily stresses are the root cause of mental health issues like depression. According to some researchers, life stress has been linked to an increased risk of developing depression (Dentale et al., 2020). University students have a lot on their plates between classes, jobs, relationships, life changes in the family and everything else. This research also suggests that university students are more stressed than ever before. Because of this, we think university students' exposure to life stress may increase their vulnerability to depression (Coiro et al., 2021).

Not only does a lack of meaningful relationships cause emotional distress, but also social isolation contributes to feelings of loneliness. In addition, loneliness can jeopardize adult growth because of all the changes that occur during adolescence and young adulthood (Kirwan et al., 2021). Consequently, many teenagers and young adults may struggle with isolation because of the developmental changes in social autonomy, viewpoint taking and individuality that occur alongside cognitive and physical growth (Buecker et al., 2021; Laursen & Hartl, 2013) such as feeling lonely is both a social and an emotional experience.

Some studies have found that adolescents are likelier to feel lonely than people of other ages (Franssen et al., 2020). Because they are still developing their social and emotional competence, according to Balázová et al. (2017), adolescents may be especially susceptible to experiences of loneliness as they move away from their parents and into relationships that are more intimate with their peers. Therefore, some people may be more vulnerable to loneliness, especially at formative stages like early adolescence

(Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Teens who experience isolation are more likely to struggle in various ways, including health, behavior and school performance (Goosby et al., 2013; Van Dulmen & Goossens, 2013). Adolescent and early adult loneliness are connected with various poor consequences and the possibility of experiencing emotional discomfort (Madsen et al., 2016; Lyyra et al., 2018). To combat isolation effectively, it is crucial to have a deeper comprehension of the problem.

To be lonely is not the same as being socially isolated. A person can spend much time alone without feeling lonely or be surrounded by people and still feel lonely (Cacioppo et al., 2002). The difference between loneliness and social isolation is that; the former is a subjectively unpleasant experience that can arise from a lack of close relationships with others. The latter is connected with failing to interact with others in person or an objective lack of communication. It resides in the fact that the first one is mostly about the second one (Child & Lawton, 2017).

Young people in our society are exposed to many stressful life events in many aspects of life. Academic life, family, economic and social events represent a challenge for young people. Many young individuals may experience dissatisfaction, depression, pessimism, and a lack of meaning in life due to these conditions. On the one hand, young people are exposed to the feeling of psychological loneliness more than others who are of different ages. On the other hand, young people's desire increases at this stage to build new social relationships and exchange feelings with others. The current study aims to determine the association between stressful life events, feelings of helplessness, psychological loneliness, and gender differences in these emotions. The researchers tried to achieve the objective of the study through the following hypothesis:

1. There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the scores of the sample members on the scale of hopelessness and the scale of stressful life events.
2. There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the scores of the sample members on the psychological loneliness scale and the stressful life events scale.
3. There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the scores of the respondents on the psychological loneliness scale and those on the hopelessness scale.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Hemberg et al.'s (2022) study aimed to investigate teenage and young adult perspectives on loneliness. The study's preliminary inquiry was: (1) How do today's youth characterize and feel loneliness? (2) What different forms of isolation do teenagers and young adults report experiencing? The information was examined using content analysis. Negative life experiences, mental or physical sickness, an egocentric culture, cultural norms and social media have all been implicated in the development of loneliness. Research has distinguished between three distinct forms of isolation: social, emotional, and existential. Adults and professionals need to recognize, evaluate and comprehend the symptoms of unpleasant emotions experienced by adolescents and young adults, which may indicate underlying loneliness.

Furthermore, the study by Gronewold et al. (2022) aimed to examine how different types of life stress are related to the development of depressive symptoms. Results showed that out of 4,814 participants, 1,120 had encountered significant life events in the preceding six months. Life events were related to higher CES-D scores than non-events ( $B = 2.6$ , 95% CI = 2.2 to 3.0,  $p .001$ ; Model 2). Women and pessimists were likelier to have these relationships than optimists and men. The average stress rating (Q1; Q3) among those who experienced a significant life event was 45.0. (39.0; 63.0). Higher CES-D scores were associated with stress levels above Q3, with a more significant correlation in pessimists than optimists (2.2, 1.1 to 3.3,  $< .001$ ).

Sierakowska & Doroszkiewicz's (2022) research aimed to pinpoint isolation causes in the post-SARS/H1N1 era. Loneliness was found to have a substantial ( $p 0.05$ ) impact on all quality of life areas examined. However, its effects were felt most keenly in the psychological, generalized self-efficacy, marital and lifestyle categories. There was a statistically significant correlation between increased loneliness and decreased social and psychological well-being, self-efficacy and telecommuting. Increased emotions of isolation have been linked to stress, social isolation, occupational constraints and health. Concerning psychological well-being and telework were correlated with a lower quality of life evaluation ( $p 0.05$ ). As

a result, single persons are much more prone to experience high loneliness than those in committed relationships.

Liu, Ye & Hu (2022) examined the connection between recurring COVID-19 outbreaks and the development of resiliency, thankfulness and depression among college students. The average age of the 953 undergraduates studied was 20.38 (SD = 1.39) years, and the students were from around China. College students were more likely to experience depression after experiencing stressful life events in the current study. In addition, gratitude modulated the relationship between grit and depression; college students who rated themselves as “extremely thankful” had a stronger correlation between tenacity and hopelessness.

Keller et al. (2022) examined the relationship between distress and depression loneliness in a German rehabilitation sample. The results successfully apply ETL to the study of COVID-19’s effect on mental health by expanding the field to include anxiety and loneliness as supporting elements of depressive symptoms. Furthermore, results highlight the significance of considering anxiety and isolation in depression therapy and prevention.

George-Levi et al. (2022) identified barriers against exhaustion and threats to mental health. Having a strong sense of coherence SOC is protective in studies. According to research, those who spend much time alone may be more likely to experience burnout. The investigation tested the hypothesis that social isolation weakens the correlation between SOC and burnout. Researchers found that social support was inversely related to fatigue only among psychologists who reported low or moderate isolation levels but not among those who reported extreme isolation. Emotional factors were shown to be more important than demographic ones in predicting burnout among 104 Israeli school psychologists. By examining the effects of societal beliefs and personal resources, the current study expands our understanding of the elements that raise a person’s likelihood of developing burnout.

Asici & Sari’s (2022) study examined the role of self-esteem as a moderator between age, dysfunctional attitudes (perfectionism and dependency), depression, anxiety and stress among first-year college students. This study aimed to determine the connections between dysfunctional attitudes, mental health disorders, stress and age through a route analytic method. According to the findings, perfectionists alleviated the participants’ feelings of depression and anxiety. However, at the .05 levels of significance, the correlation between perfectionism and anxiety was insignificant. The dependence had a direct and beneficial influence on their stress levels but had no appreciable impact on their depression or anxiety. Depression, anxiety and tension were all exacerbated by low self-esteem and advanced age. Their dependence and need to be perfect both took a toll on their sense of worth. Through the medium of self-esteem, codependency also benefited their melancholy, anxiety and stress levels.

In addition, a study by Sakarneh (2021) aimed to identify the impact of Covid-19 and the lockdown effect on families of students with special education needs. The results revolved around the main themes; behavior problems, psychological distress for the parents, and difficulty delivering rigid content and schedules. The study (Stark et al., 2021) aimed to assess whether and how gendered links exist between stressful life events (SLEs) and adolescents’ psychosocial outcomes in a nationally representative sample of American youth. One hundred eighty-one high school kids, aged thirteen to twenty-one, were chosen from Harrisonburg, Virginia. Using ordinary least squares and logistic regressions, it examined the connections between 12 SLEs and eight psychosocial outcomes. Male and female members of the sample were analyzed alone and then together to determine the strength of the relationships between them. Boys’ resilience decreased (B = -4.646; 95% CI (-8.79, -0.50)), and their externalizing symptoms increased (B = 0.392; 95% CI (-8.79, -0.50)) when they were removed from their families (0.15, 0.63). In addition, males who went through a major family transition reported feeling less connected to their school community (B = 9.272; 95% CI (17.45, 1.09)). For girls, the experience of being forcibly separated from their families was linked with reduced depressive and anxious symptoms (B = -0.961; 95% CI (-1.88, -0.05)). Depression (B = 0.445; 95% CI (0.15, 0.74) and anxiety (B = 0.287; 95% CI (0.05, 0.52) were more prevalent among students who had experienced a life-threatening emergency and the likelihood of experiencing physical harm at the hands of another person was also associated with depressive symptoms (B = 0.224; 95% CI (0.01, 0.44)). Furthermore, a study by Abd Elhalem (2018) explored the relationship between stressful life events and feelings of hopelessness and psychological loneliness among university students. The results

showed a positive relationship between stressful life events and feelings of hopelessness and psychological loneliness.

Loneliness has been recognized ever since the dawn of time as an ordinary human experience. In their study, Mushtaq et al. (2014) claimed that a healthy mind and body cannot exist without satisfying social ties. Isolation is often the result of a lack of meaningful social connections. Isolation is associated with various mental and physical health problems, including depression, alcoholism, child abuse, insomnia, personality disorders and Alzheimer's. Diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure (hypertension), obesity, accelerated ageing, cancer, hearing loss, and general ill health are just a few of the numerous medical issues it causes. If untreated, loneliness can negatively impact both mental and physical health. Early intervention to prevent loneliness is essential for patients' physical and emotional health.

## METHODOLOGY

The current study used the descriptive approach. The current study is a correlational study, which seeks to reveal the network of relationships between variables and psychological phenomena. The sample of the current study consisted of (294) students from Al-Balqa Applied University with (262) females and (32) males.

### The Study Tools

In the current study, the researchers used the following scales developed by Abd Elhalem (2018):

#### *Stressful Life Events Scale*

The current scale consists of (24) items distributed on four dimensions representing common stressful life events. All items are positive, and there are no negative items; the response to the items is arranged in three levels: always, takes 3 degrees, sometimes, takes 2 degrees and rarely takes one degree. High scores express a high sense of stressful life events and vice versa.

**Validity of the Scale.** To check the validity of the scale, comparison validity and internal consistency validity were used. The researchers concluded that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of individuals with low scores and those with high scores on the sub-scales and the total score of the stressful life events scale.

**Reliability of the Scale.** The Cronbach-alpha and split-half methods were used to calculate the reliability coefficients. The result showed that all the values of the alpha coefficients are high, as well as the values of the reliability coefficients using the split-half method, which makes the researchers trust the scale's reliability.

#### *Hopelessness Scale.*

The current scale consists of (24) items divided into four dimensions that represent aspects of feeling hopeless. All items are positive, and there are no negative items. The response to the items is arranged in three levels: always 3 degrees, sometimes 2 degrees and rarely one degree. The high degrees express the high feeling of hopelessness and vice versa.

**Validity of the Scale.** To check the scale's validity, factorial validity, discriminant validity and internal consistency validity were used. The researchers concluded that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of individuals with low scores and those with high scores on the sub-scales and the total score of the hopelessness scale. For the scale's internal consistency, the correlation coefficient was calculated between the individuals' scores on each item and the total score of the dimension to which it belongs. The correlation coefficient values are statistically significant at the level of significance (0.01) and the level of significance (0.05).

**Reliability of the Scale.** To calculate the reliability of the scale, the Cronbach-alpha method and the split-half method were used. The result revealed that all the values of the alpha coefficients are high, as well as the values of the reliability coefficients using the split-half method, which makes the researchers trust the scale's reliability.

### *Psychological Loneliness*

The scale consists of (18) items distributed over three dimensions representing aspects of feeling loneliness. All items are positive, and there are no negative items. The response to the items is arranged in three levels: always 3 degrees, sometimes 2 degrees and rarely one degree. The high degrees express the high feeling of psychological loneliness and vice versa.

**Validity of the Scale.** To check the scale's validity, factorial validity, discriminant validity and internal consistency validity were used. The researchers concluded that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of individuals with low scores and those with high scores on the sub-scales and the total score of the psychological loneliness scale. For internal consistency of the scale, the correlation coefficient was calculated between the individuals' scores on each item and the total score of the dimension to which it belongs. The correlation coefficient values are statistically significant at the level of significance (0.01) and the level of significance (0.05).

**Reliability of the Scale.** To calculate the reliability of the scale, the Cronbach-alpha method and the split-half method were used. It concluded that all the values of the alpha coefficients are high, as well as the values of the reliability coefficients using the split-half method, which makes the researchers trust the scale's reliability.

For data collection, the researchers applied the mentioned scales of the study sample after they agreed to participate in the study in the first semester of the academic year 2022-2023. In addition, the researchers inform the university and the responsible bodies in the university of the study objectives and the targeted sample. Finally, the SPSS program was used to analyze the data.

## **RESULTS**

The results of the first hypothesis: There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the scores of the sample members on the hopelessness scale and stressful life events scale. The scores of the study sample were compared on the hopelessness scale and the stressful life events scale using the Pearson correlation coefficient to test this hypothesis. Correlation values between sample members' scores on the two scales are displayed in Table (1).

**TABLE 1**  
**CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN THE SCORES OF THE SAMPLE MEMBERS**  
**ON THE HOPELESSNESS SCALE AND THEIR SCORES ON THE STRESSFUL**  
**LIFE EVENTS SCALE N = (294)**

Dimensions	Negative View of The Future	Negative View of Oneself	Feeling Defeated	Feeling Motivated	Overall Degree
Academic stressful events	.599**	.630**	.655**	.571**	.689**
Family stressful events	.505**	.541**	.525**	.413**	.560**
Social stressful events	.500**	.555**	.554**	.554**	.605**
Economic stressful events	.511**	.525**	.486**	.356**	.533**
Overall degree	.645**	.693**	.674**	.573**	.725**

(\*) significant at 0.05 level, (\*\*) significant at 0.01 level

The results of the second hypothesis; There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the scores of the sample members on the psychological loneliness scale and the stressful life events scale. This hypothesis was tested by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient between the study sample's ratings of psychological loneliness and the stress they have experienced in the past year. Correlation values between sample members' scores on the two scales are displayed in Table (2).

**TABLE 2**  
**CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN THE SCORES OF THE RESPONDENTS ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LONELINESS SCALE AND THEIR SCORES ON THE STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS SCALE (N = 294)**

Dimensions	Loss of Love	Feeling Isolated	Poor Social Communication	Overall Degree
Academic stressful events	.367**	.393**	.319**	.394**
Family stressful events	.615**	.471**	.576**	.609**
Social stressful events	.669**	.562**	.522**	.643**
Economic stressful events	.461**	.343**	.413**	.443**
Overall degree	.650**	.544**	.564**	.641**

(\*) Significant at 0.05 (\*\*) Significant at the level of 0.01

The results of the third hypothesis; there is a statistically significant positive correlation between the scores of the respondents on the psychological loneliness scale and those on the hopelessness scale. This hypothesis was tested by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient between the individuals' ratings of psychological loneliness and their ratings of hopelessness. Correlation coefficients between sample scores on the two scales are displayed in Table 3.

**TABLE 3**  
**CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN THE SCORES OF THE SAMPLE ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LONELINESS SCALE AND THEIR SCORES ON THE HOPELESSNESS SCALE N = (294)**

Dimensions	Loss of Love	Feeling Isolated	Poor Social Communication	Overall Degree
Negative view of the future	.474**	.395**	.426**	.474**
Negative view of self	.585**	.583**	.580**	.641**
Feeling of defeat	.573**	.568**	.554**	.622**
Feeling motivated	.515**	.504**	.468**	.546**
Overall degree	.600**	.573**	.569**	.639**

(\*) Significant at 0.05 (\*\*) Significant at the level of 0.01

## DISCUSSION

The results of the first and second hypotheses demonstrated a statistically significant positive correlation between the scores of the respondents on the psychological loneliness scale and those on the hopelessness scale and stressful life events. Most previous literature reported a relationship between stressful life events and psychological disorders such as depression, frustration, psychological loneliness, obsessive-compulsive disorder, boredom and sleep disorders. The findings of this study are consistent with those of (Abd Elhalem 2018; Asici & Sari, 2022; Gronewold, 2022; Keller et al., 2022; Stark et al., 2021), which indicate a positive relationship between stressful life events and psychological disorders.

In addition, the results of testing the third hypothesis indicated a statistically significant positive correlation between the scores of the respondents on the psychological loneliness scale and those on the hopelessness scale. Therefore, psychological loneliness evidently leads to hopelessness, as confirmed by literature. These results agreed with those of (Abd Elhalem, 2018; Hemberg et al., 2022; Keller et al., 2022; Mushtaq et al., 2014; Liu, Ye & Hu, 2022; Sierakowska & Doroszkiewicz, 2022), which indicate that there is a positive relationship between psychological loneliness and hopelessness. However, the current study

has some limitations concerning the sample, research method, and tools used. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized without obtaining the same conditions.

## CONCLUSION

The current study found a statistically significant positive correlation between stressful life events and a sense of psychological loneliness and hopelessness. These results are considered a threat to the mental health of young people like university students, which will certainly affect their academic achievement and later career. Based on that, universities need to take action to tackle such effects through building robust counselling programs, which can be prevented and therapized. The responsibility relies on the deanships of students' university affairs to find reasons behind the stressful life events and consequences and help students overcome such problems. In addition, researchers need to prioritize predictive research related to hopelessness and suicidal ideation and behavior.

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