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Relationship between Self-Actualization and Loneliness in Young Adults

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Abstract

The present study is aimed to test the relationship between loneliness and self-actualization of young adults. Three different instruments of loneliness investigation for a total 8 scale were completed by a sample of young adults, based on a Moldovan university-student sample of 304 participants aged 20 to 25 years (m=22.59, SD=2.07). The integrated research of phenomenon of loneliness uses the benefits of one-dimensional scales as well as the benefits of the multidimensional scales with the reference to the type of the loneliness. To make an emphasis on the integrated approach of the loneliness in research it was used both, one-dimensional and multidimensional scales. One-dimensional scale UCLA correlates with self-actualization factors: time ration, self-regard, human values, spontaneity, sociability, nature of mankind, flexibility. Subscales of multidimensional Schmidt - Sermat Differential Loneliness Scale correlate with the following self-actualization factors: time ratio, self-regard, spontaneity, nature of mankind, sociability, human values, self-acceptance and human nature. All the scales of the Korchagina's loneliness scale correlates with: time ratio, human nature, cognitive ratio, self-acceptance, self - regard. General indicators of loneliness (UCLA, Schmidt - Sermat Differential Loneliness Scale scale, Korchagina's loneliness scale) are in a straight relation with the general self-actualization indicators. However, a weak self-actualization has a direct influence on the probability of the loneliness symptoms. The present research shows that loneliness in its different contexts of manifestation is in strong relationship with self-actualization factors. The

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present paper suggests developing and implementing a psychosocial intervention program with the aim of self-actualization growing in order to diminish loneliness in young adults.

Keywords: loneliness, self-actualization, young adults, multidimensional approach, integrative approach.

1. Introduction

Loneliness is a universal problem that can affect anyone, regardless of age, ethnicity, and gender.

Cutrona C. reports that three quarters of college students experience loneliness during the first semester, therefore Perplau L., Perlman D. conclude that loneliness is a living fact for millions of Americans [1].

Nemov R.S. found the prevalence of loneliness: Between 2% and 1% of the respondents had been never exposed to loneliness, while about 10-30% experienced it at least once in their life [2, p. 613].

Romania is among the European countries with a large number of inhabitants who often suffer from loneliness – about 14.7% of Romanians of all ages [3]

According to Crumpei-Tanasă I. "loneliness is defined as a subjectively perceived deficit of the quantity and quality of social relations. It is a social pain that signals the importance of social reconnection for survival" [4, p. 78].

Long-term solitary persons enter in a vicious circle of isolation, the consequences are serious, and affect physical and mental health. Loneliness anticipates psychiatric, cardiac, immune, endocrine and cognitive disorders and increases the chance of premature death by about 30% [4].

From the perspective of self-actualization, loneliness has been researched by several researchers. For instance Fromm E. considers that the nature of man is in conflict with isolation and loneliness. The fear of loneliness is the trigger element of the painful experience of this feeling [5].

According to Maslow's theory, ~~the~~ people in the process of self-actualization have the following qualities and attributes: correct perception, spontaneity, detachment (independence), independence, peak experiences, sense of humor and creativity [6, p. 16].

Maslow A. believes that self-actualization is not possible without loneliness. This, however, resembles more solitude rather than loneliness in special literature.

In the opinion of Csikszentmihalyi M. loneliness can be used in one's own advantage in order to develop the latent potential and to succeed in elaborating a creative activity, no matter what happens outside [7, p. 234].

The analysis of the special literature revealed that loneliness needs to be analyzed through the position of the humanist perspective, because it is the only one that explains loneliness through one's needs, offers constructive solutions to the use of loneliness in a person's own advantage and allows to discover one's own potential for self-actualization, which in turn contributes to the well-being of the subject.

Psychological researches allow us to state that more and more young adults pass painfully through the feeling of loneliness that affects their personality development and quality of life. Reviewing the existing theories regarding loneliness, we could provide an operational definition of loneliness: it is an unfavourable ratio between the quantity and quality of interpersonal relationships that already exist and those that are desired by the person.

2. Problem Statement

Loneliness occurs when the number of these interactions is too small or the relationships are not substantial enough according to the expectations. Loneliness so far has been differently approached, which on the one hand is perceived as a painful problem faced by more and more people, reducing the quality of life, and on the other hand, loneliness is seen as a path to self-awareness. Self-actualization according to A. Maslow's theory, on the contrary, assumes an achieved, accomplished, high-quality life [8]. Thus the relationship between the loneliness experience and the self-actualization parameters represent a scientific interest, and this determined us to initiate an investigation in order to emphasize the relationship between loneliness and self-actualization in young adults.

According to different theoretical approaches towards loneliness: cognitive, existential, interactional, phenomenological, private, psychodynamic, sociological and systemic, loneliness is presented through different points of view and it is differently understood as a phenomenon. Lars Christian Sønderby suggests an integrative approach of loneliness that is based on different scales. In his opinion there are two approaches of measuring the loneliness that can be found in literature: the global approach and the multidimensional approach [9].

3. Research Questions/Aims of the research

According to our aim, the objectives of this study are to identify the possible relationship between: self-actualization factors measured by

SAMOAL inventory and the loneliness measured by one-dimensional scale UCLA; the loneliness measured by multidimensional Differential Loneliness Scale Schmidt-Sermat; the loneliness measured by Korchagina's multidimensional loneliness scale.

4. Research Methods

The experiment involved 304 young people aged 20-25, they were residents from different regions of the Republic of Moldova (m = 22.59, SD = 2.07): 152 young men (m = 22.03, SD = 1 07) and 152 young women (m = 23.14, SD = 2.62). The study was carried out on a sample of university students from different departments at the Chisinau State Pedagogical University „Ion Creanga" and Technical University of Moldova. The questionnaire packages were administered in groups of 20 to 30 students at the same time and the participation was voluntary. The subjects were invited to the laboratory of psychology at the Chisinau State Pedagogical University. The notice of participation in the research was posted on the university's social networking site, displayed on the panels in the universities.

All aspects of the participants' right to withdraw were explained and respected. The names of the subjects were codified, assuring that the results would be used only for research purposes, confidentiality being preserved.

The most widely used UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) loneliness scale, comprehends loneliness as a negative emotional reaction towards the referral of a discrepancy between the desired level of social contacts and respectively their achieved level. UCLA loneliness scale is an instrument most commonly used in loneliness approach, being translated into many languages and adapted into an impressive number of countries. The scale presents the third version, created by Russell D. and Cutrona C., in order to avoid any difficulties in comprehension occasionally generated by complicated definitions of the previous two variants of the scale. Thus, UCLA loneliness scale (the 3rd version) can be applied to other individuals than those with a certain degree of intellectual level, whereas the comprehension of the questions is much easier [10, 11].

However, there are different multidimensional scales that investigate the loneliness as a multidimensional phenomenon: Differential Loneliness Scale; The Social and Emotional loneliness Scale for Adults; Loneliness Rating Scale; Wittenberg Emotional Versus Social Loneliness Scale; Loneliness Korchagina's scale. Loneliness is a complex phenomenon very important for an individual and the society, which requires a deep, multilateral research. According to psychological literature, there are

controversial opinions regarding the mechanisms of the loneliness. The integrated research of this phenomenon uses the benefits one-dimensional scales as well as the benefits of the multidimensional scales with the reference to the type of the loneliness. The integrated approach can analyze multifarious factors that come into being when the loneliness is experienced and can provide a holistic explanation of the mechanisms of the loneliness.

In order to emphasise the integrated approach of the loneliness in our research we used both, one-dimensional and multidimensional scales: UCLA one-dimensional scales (the 3rd version), multi-dimensional scales: Differential Loneliness Scale; Korchagina's Loneliness scale.

Schmidt & Sermat Differential Loneliness Scale is a multidimensional instrument which was set to measure the general loneliness within four categories of relationships: friendship subscale, family relationship subscale, romantic-sexual relationship subscale, larger groups relationship subscales.

Factorial analysis of the given test indicated that the significant results are recorded concerning family relationship subscale, romantic-sexual relationship subscale and friendship subscale, which confirms the correctness of the made choice related to these types of relationships. This test has two various versions, one is for young people, the other is for adults, we applied the version of the test for young people and it consisted of 20 items. The formulations of the items are expressed positively and negatively [12].

Korchagina's loneliness scale consists of 30 items and represents a multidimensional instrument to determine the intensity and the type of the loneliness experienced by a person. Applying this instrument we can measure the loneliness according to three scales: diffuse loneliness subscale, alienating loneliness subscale, dissociated loneliness subscale.

According to the model created by Korchagina S., the diffuse loneliness occurs when the individual has prevailing tendencies to identify himself with other people, social groups, ideas etc. The individual, who identifies with the other people, refuses to display his own characteristics, aspirations, interests. This person lives the life from the side of the person he identifies with. This situation may arise from self-discontent and self-dissatisfaction and discontent and dissatisfaction of his personal life. Unacceptance of the real situation stimulates the person to self-perfection or to imitation and copying the person who succeeded in life. The individual's attempt to identify with another person or group of people drives him away so far from his own existence, which inevitably reflected not only the experience of loneliness and the fear of loneliness as well.

The alienating loneliness is associated with the priority of the separation mechanisms within the psychological structure of a personality,

whose extreme form represents the alienation from people, norms, values, any particular group, people in general. In this case, the identification processes are realized within the self, the person is often aware of his own state and understands by what this state is determined. The extreme form of alienation from the people brings with it a painful experience of the loneliness. The alienation brings to the loss of emotional connection with other people, known places, memories, experiences, adorable situations that become alien to the individual and the relations with them become meaningless. The consciousness accumulates more alienated things, the mechanism of alienation becomes deeper and the individual begins to lose touch with the outer world. Being aware of the physical reality of alienated things, the individual does not allow any psychological intimacy with them, always keeping them at an established distance. Depending on the individual characteristics of the alienation loneliness may be manifested by high anxiety, fear, aggression, hostility, scepticism, helplessness, etc.

Both forms of the loneliness may vary from the normal state to the state of the limit depending on the depth and duration of the loneliness.

Dissociated loneliness has the most complicated form of loneliness by origin, manifestation and experience. The genesis is determined by processes of the identification, the alienation and their sudden alteration even towards ones and the same people. From the beginning, the person identifies himself with another person taking over his lifestyle, following precisely, having complete confidence. After a complete identification with the person, there comes a sudden (separation) alienation from him, which reveals the real attitude of the person towards himself: some qualities of the personality are accepted, whereas the other the other qualities are totally rejected. Once the projection of the rejected qualities is reflected in the identifying person, the latter is immediately entirely rejected, there unequivocally occurs an alienation. The feeling of experienced loneliness is acute, painful and realized. This form of loneliness is a part of states of the limit because it has its expressiveness in the norm [13].

SAMOAL (POI/Personal Orientation Inventory elaborated by Shostrom Ev. and adapted by Kalina N. F. and Lazukin A. V.)

SAMOAL test was used in the research to determine the level of the self-actualization. The method was adapted by Kalina N. F. who took into account the specific features of the self-actualization on the former Soviet territory. Significant changes were made on the level of structure (the types of scales and content. The first version was created in 1993-1994, the psychologist Lazukin A. V. participated in the standardization and validation of this version. The test consists of 100 questions, each question offers two alternative answers. Thus, the subject of the research may choose one of the

answers. SAMOAL test is an instrument that can measure the general level of self-actualization and at the same time the indices of some separated aspects of the self-actualization are reflected in 11 scales: time ratio, human values, human nature, cognitive ratio, creativity; autonomy; spontaneity, self-acceptance; self-regard, sociability, flexibility.

The higher the score is on a scale, the more outlined is this factor of self-actualization. The limit values of SAMOAL factors indicate a large influence upon the results of social desirability factor or the intentions of the individuals that were under the investigation, were to appear in a more favorable side. According to Shostrom Ev., most people with the tendency of self-actualization show some results between 50 and 65 points on the basis of general coefficient of self-actualization [14].

5. Findings

For the investigations acquired from the aims and objectives of our research, we selected a range of methods to examine authentic the variables within the research: the independent variables, self-actualization factors, time ratio, human values, human nature, cognitive ratio, creativity, autonomy, spontaneity, self-acceptance, self-regard, sociability, flexibility; The dependent variables: the loneliness according to UCLA, the loneliness represented by its forms: diffuse loneliness subscale, alienating loneliness subscale, dissociated loneliness subscale, Korchagina's scales, the loneliness by Schmidt & Sermat, Differential Loneliness Scale: friendship subscales, family relationship subscale, romantic-sexual relationship subscale, larger group relationship subscales.

Along the first step we tested the internal consistency of instruments. One of the fundamental conditions of an instrument of the psychological evaluation is to be safe and consistent. Being expressed in other words, this means that the items made up (the questions or other tasks) should help to build up the meaning of a mental construct, namely the loneliness. Internal consistency gives us an assurance that the questions of our instrument measure the same psychological "construct".

Pearson correlations among the various scales and subscales and their internal consistencies is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Inter-item correlations among measures of loneliness

Measures	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Alpha
1. UCLA	-0,01	0,548	0,394	0,582	0,675	0,289	0,448	0,575	0,745	0,779
2. diffuse loneliness		-0,497	0,306	0,282	0,05	0,037	0,019	0,001	0,039	0,791
3. alienating loneliness			0,308	0,454	0,478	0,218	0,221	0,432	0,494	0,758
4. dissociated loneliness				0,694	0,345	0,068	0,085	0,352	0,311	0,757
5. Korchagina gen. scale					0,514	0,201	0,17	0,461	0,493	0,736
6. friendship						0,273	0,238	0,601	0,778	0,753
7. family relationships							0,115	0,196	0,494	0,777
8. romantic-sexual relationship								0,215	0,664	0,768
9. larger groups relationships									0,736	0,759
10. Schmidt-Sermat general										0,708

Note: 1- UCLA; 2- (DFL) diffuse loneliness subscale; 3- (AL) alienating loneliness subscale; 4- (DSL) dissociated loneliness subscale; 5- (GS) general scale by Korchagina 6- (FR) friendship; 7- (FAM) family relationships; 8- (RS) romantic-sexual; 9- (LG) larger groups relationships; 10- (SSG) Schmidt-Sermat general. N = 304. Variables *p < .05; **p < .01.

Comparing the coefficients Alpha specific to every item with the coefficient recorded on the scale level the part of which it is, we drew the conclusion that Cronbach a coefficient, according to all scales measured by us, indicates good consistency, taking into consideration that the value of Cronbach alpha cannot be less than 0.70, and all the applied questionnaires didn't have any value less than this coefficient.

Along the second step, in order to examine the possible interactional effects of the relationship between self-actualization factors and the loneliness by UCLA scale was performed by Pearson Correlation. The data analysis has shown a weak downhill (negative) linear relationship between all self-actualization factors and the loneliness.

Table. 2. Correlations between the loneliness by UCLA and the self-actualization factors measured by SAMOAL inventory

Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. UCLA	-,374**	-,207**	-,318**	-,132*	-,119*	-,142*	-,289**	-,172**	-,343**	-,241**	-,207**	-,394**
	,000	,000	,000	,021	,039	,014	,000	,003	,000	,000	,000	,000

Note: 1- UCLA Loneliness scale; 2- time ratio; 3- human values; 4- nature of man; 5- cognitive ratio; 6- creativity; 7- autonomy;8- spontaneity; 9- self acceptance; 10- self-regard; 11- sociability; 12- flexibility; 13- SAMOAL general. N = 304. Variables *p < .05; **p < .01.

Resulting from the fact that UCLA scale correlated all the parameters of self-actualization, we can affirm that all self-actualization factors have direct influence upon the loneliness. Taking into the consideration that UCLA scale measures one-dimensionally only the presence of the loneliness I assumed that there might be an association relationship between the loneliness and the self-actualization, consequently the self-actualization could influence the shape and the intensity of experiencing the feeling of loneliness.

Along the third step, actually in order to convince us we performed the correlation of all subscales of the loneliness by Schmidt & Sermat scale with self-actualization factors.

Table 3 represents the statistically significant correlations between the loneliness subscales by Schmidt - Sermat Differential Loneliness Scale with self-actualization factors measured by SAMOAL inventory.

Table 3. Correlation between different loneliness subscales by Schmidt-Sermat Differential Loneliness Scale with self-actualization factors measured by SAMOAL inventory.

Variables	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. FR	-,345**	-,242**	-,252**	-,169**	-,179**	-,143*	-,275**	-,205**	-,308**	-,248**	-,174**	-,389**
	,000	,000	,000	0,003	0,002	0,013	,000	,000	,000	,000	0,002	,000
2. FAM	-,208**	-,158**	-,170**	-0,12	0,032	0,083	0,033	0,026	0,007	0,011	0,014	,134*

	,000	0,006	0,003	0,081	0,574	0,15	0,565	0,655	0,899	0,855	0,81	0,02
3. RS	-,154**	-,268**	-,115*	0,031	0,092	0,037	0,066	0,104	-,132*	-,124*	0,028	-,223**
	0,007	,000	0,046	0,586	0,109	0,524	0,251	0,071	0,021	0,031	0,626	,000
4. LG	-,330**	-,217**	-,317**	-,153**	0,093	0,092	-,217**	-,120*	-,213**	-,233**	-,218**	-,328**
	,000	,000	,000	0,008	0,105	0,11	,000	0,037	,000	,000	,000	,000
5. SSG	-,375**	-,336**	-,308**	-,160**	-,152**	0,081	-,223**	-,164**	-,257**	-,240**	-,130*	-,407**
	,000	,000	,000	0,005	0,008	0,161	,000	0,004	,000	,000	0,023	,000

Note: 1- (FR) friendship; 2- (FAM) family relationships; 3- (RS) romantic-sexual; 4- (LG) larger groups relationships; 5- (SSG) Schmidt-Sermat general; 6- time ratio; 7- human values; 8- nature of man; 9- cognitive ratio; 10- creativity; 11- autonomy;12- spontaneity; 13- self acceptance; 14- self-regard; 15- sociability; 16- flexibility; 17- SAMOAL general. N = 304. Variables *p < .05; **p < .01.

Following the conferred results we can say that the friendship subscales correlated with all self-actualization factors. This leads us to the idea that the loneliness on the friendship subscale experienced by young people is inversely proportional to the self-actualization. As well the young people with the poorly rendered self-actualization are likely to experience the loneliness in friendly relationships.

Referring to family relationships subscale we can say that in order not to fall into the risk group and not experience the loneliness in family relationships, the individual should be updated to time ratio factors, human values, human nature, i.e. to be oriented towards the present, to desire to find out new things, that is to show interest in new elements within the family and outside it, to be kind and honest with family members. The negative correlation established between these variables confirms that the individuals who experience the loneliness within the family relationship have namely these factors poorly pronounced: time ratio, human values, human nature.

Romantic-sexual relationship subscale revealed the negative correlations with these factors: time ratio, human values, human nature, self-regard and sociability. Namely, the approved behaviour of the young people as a result of poor evidence of these parameters leads the individual to the lack of romantic-sexual relationship.

The correlations obtained between large groups subscale and the factors: time ratio, human values, human nature, cognitive ratio, spontaneity, self-acceptance, self-regard, sociability, and flexibility, reveals a similar situation of the loneliness experienced in friendship subscale, except the factors, creativity and autonomy. Even if such individuals are independent and creative, if they wanted to make new relationships, they would have difficulties in their involvement in a brief or banal conversation.

Along the fourth step, we performed Pearson Correlation between the self-actualization factors and the diffuse loneliness subscale, alienating loneliness subscale, dissociated loneliness subscale and Korchagina's scale.

Table 3. Correlation between different forms of loneliness by Korchagina's loneliness scale and the self-actualization factors

Variables	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. DFL					-,122*	-,119*		-,249*	-,204*		-,182*	
	0,008	0,094	0,053	0,087	0,012	,142*	,141*	0,112	,167*	0,053	0,061	-0,03
	0,883	0,1	0,359	0,13	0,835	0,014	0,014	0,051	0,003	0,359	0,286	0,607
2. AL	-,287*	-,192*	-,231*	-,122*	-,119*	0,049	0,032	0,011	0,029	0,062	0,015	-,188*
	,000	0,001	,000	0,033	0,038	0,397	0,573	0,844	0,629	0,282	0,798	0,001
3. DSL	-,360*	-,011	-,121*	-,199*	0,062	0,106	0,051	-,249*	-,204*	0,028	0,066	-,182*
	,000	0,852	0,036	,000	0,285	0,067	0,381	,000	,000	0,629	0,249	0,001
4. GS	-,373*	-,049	-,173*	-,134*	-,115*	-,205*	-,196*	-,263*	-,299*	-,169*	-,154*	-,284*
	,000	0,391	0,002	0,019	0,045	,000	0,001	,000	,000	0,003	0,007	,000

Note: 1- (DFL) diffuse loneliness subscale; 2- (AL) alienating loneliness subscale; 3- (DSL) dissociated loneliness subscale; 4- (GS) general scale by Korchagina; 5- time ratio; 6- human values; 7- nature of man; 8- cognitive ratio; 9- creativity; 10- autonomy;11- spontaneity; 12- self acceptance; 13- self-regard; 14- sociability; 15- flexibility; 16- SAMOAL general. N = 304. Variables *p < .05; **p < .01.

The study of the correlation between the diffuse loneliness and autonomy, spontaneity, self-regard, allowed the identification of negative correlation (inverse proportionally), weekly statistically significant.

The study of the correlation between the alienating loneliness and time ratio, human values, human nature, cognitive ratio, creativity, outlined

the weak correlations, statistically significantly negative (inverse proportionally).

The study the correlation between the dissociated loneliness and time ratio, human nature, cognitive ratio, self-acceptance, self-regard allowed the identification of some negative correlations (inverse proportionally), weakly statistically significant.

General scale by Korchagina correlated with all self-actualization factors, except time ratio.

If the individual experiences the diffuse loneliness and accepts it or, better said, that in the given situation he takes the models of the others, with all the aspirations and interests, in the detriment of his own, then he cannot have a positive and realized self-concept. In such a case, the diminution of self-regard creates premises for experiencing the diffuse loneliness.

Thus, the higher level of the diffuse loneliness could be found among of the young adults. Thus, when they experience a growing tendency to be identified with other people or social groups, the level of autonomy decreases, this fact in its turn fosters the self-alienation. In this regard, we can acknowledge that the low level of autonomy stimulates the growth of the diffuse loneliness.

6. Discussions

Regarding the dissociated loneliness as the most complicated and painful form of the loneliness, we can say that the self-actualization factors that correlate with this form of loneliness, influences as well the other forms of loneliness. If the case of the dissociated loneliness, the individual that experiences this form of loneliness is firstly oriented towards the past, thus losing touch with the reality (time ratio), moreover he does not have enough confidence in the surrounding him people, to initiate new contacts or new relations, they become introverted, that is why they do not show goodwill (human nature), their visions on the human nature are quite limited, they do not want to find out anything new, they do not get informed, but instead of this they manifest a pronounced criticism (cognitive ratio,) and when they are offered another point of view, they manifest barriers of self-defense, they are not able to understand themselves, to perceive their own emotions, hiding them under the mask of social norms which guide them. An element that characterizes them is the lack of self-esteem (self-acceptance). A very important parameter is the self-actualization and self-regard, which is an indicator of mental health and the integrity of the individual. The low rate of

this parameter may indicate that the individual has some elements of neuroticism, anxiety, lack of self-confidence.

7. Conclusions

The study referring to the relationship between the self-actualization factors and forms of the loneliness experienced by young people revealed that all self-actualization factors have a direct influence on the loneliness some variations being attested, depending on the form of the loneliness. So even if young people are involved in multiple social relationships, they experience painfully the loneliness, regardless any of its form, though week self-actualization has a direct impact on the probability of the appearance of the loneliness. Summing up, these results confirm the importance of the self-actualization factors in loneliness diminution.

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