

Addressing loneliness and associated health risks among university students

A cross-sectional survey study in the Netherlands

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BACKGROUND

Loneliness is a significant risk factor for the development of both physical and psychological issues such as the development of depression and suicidal risk. University students are an upcoming risk group for loneliness in the Netherlands (Student Health Check). However, studies into loneliness in this specific population group is scarce. In order to establish effective interventions targeting loneliness, a better understanding of the mechanisms of loneliness among students is required. As a theoretical base The Loneliness among Students Model (Pijpers, 2017) is used, which is an elaboration of The Loneliness Model of De Jong Gierveld (1987), and adaptation to the university student population.

METHOD

The design of this study was a cross-sectional survey research. An online survey was distributed among university students attending various universities in the Netherlands. 481 students participated in the research. Mean age was 22.49 years (SD=2.87). 72% was female. Logistic regression analysis was performed to determine the association between loneliness (assessed with the Loneliness Scale of De Jong Gierveld, 1987) and several potentially associated factors.

Furthermore, university students were asked what kind of interventions they preferred.

“Loneliness is a situation experienced by the individual as one where there is an unpleasant or inadmissible lack of (quality of) certain relationships” (De Jong Gierveld, 1987)

Results
Logistic regression analysis

Contributing factors	OR	Reducing factors	OR
• Homesickness	1,3	• Students associations	0,6
• Self-image	2,1	• Sports clubs	0,7
• Extraversion	1,5		
• Help seeking behavior	1,2		
• Social anxiety	2,9		
• Psychological health problems	1,8		



DISCUSSION/ CONCLUSION

Loneliness is a complex subjective phenomenon that is hard to measure since it is highly determined by the way an individual evaluates his or her social network. However, this study indicated that homesickness, personality characteristics and health related factors are associated with loneliness. Awareness about these factors can be raised to address loneliness and associated factors, in order to make student life less lonely and decrease risks. Additionally, students can be informed about E-health applications that target loneliness.

Message 1

Nearly one out of four university students in the Netherlands experience severe feelings of loneliness.

Message 2

It is important to raise awareness at university (peers, teachers, counsellors, etc) about the prevalence of loneliness and its associated risks and refer students to E-health applications that target loneliness.

REFERENCES

De Jong Gierveld, J. (1987). Developing and testing a model of loneliness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53, 119-128.

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