

LONELINESS COPING STRATEGIES TRAINING FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract

This community service activity was carried out with the aim of providing students with an understanding of coping strategies to overcome the loneliness problems they faced. A total of 12 first-year students were given training and through *the Focus Group Discussion* activity, they were asked to discuss their feelings of loneliness and the right coping strategies to overcome it. The results of this training show changes in students' attitudes and behaviors, students view the loneliness problems they face more positively and they are able to choose the right coping strategy.

Keywords : Loneliness, coping strategy, first-year students

A. INTRODUCTION

Leaving home for college is a transition that is often characterized by an increased risk of loneliness, which is a psychological state that predicts poor mental health. Loneliness is increasingly a major concern among students in the West and not to mention students in Indonesia (Yurni, 2015). A study published by *the US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health* found that loneliness is as deadly as smoking 15 cigarettes per day. Loneliness affects detrimental mental health (Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2010), low self-esteem (Yurni, 2015), linked to depression (Choi, & Valenstein, 2013), and desire to quit college (Boddy, 2020).

Loneliness among students can occur at all levels of education, namely undergraduate or postgraduate, first-year or final-year students. Cutrona (1982) found that 75% of freshmen reported feeling lonely during their first 2 weeks of college. YouGov (2016) stated in its research that 34% of respondents aged 18-24 feel lonely enough or very often or even continuously. Variables such as age, gender and type of residence (e.g. living alone, living with peers; parents; or partner) were not significantly associated with loneliness (YouGov, 2016), on the contrary, longing, negative self-image, extraversion, help-seeking behaviors, psychological problems and alcohol abuse were significant contributors to loneliness experiences, while being a member of student associations (Yurni, 2015) and joining a sports club reduces the likelihood of loneliness (Pijpers, 2017).

Loneliness is a common emotion, yet it is a complex and unique experience for each individual (Priyatna, Education, and Hope 2022). The disease does not

have a single cause in common, so prevention and treatment for this damaging state of mind are very different (Skinner et al., 2003). College students who are trying to make friends at school need a different strategy to solve their problems compared to elderly people who have lost their spouses in the past. To understand loneliness, it's important to take a closer look at what we mean by the term "loneliness" as well as the various causes, health consequences, symptoms, and potential treatments for loneliness (Hidayat et al., 2022). A person who experiences loneliness does not find anyone with him and thus increases the risk of developing biological dysfunction, psychological distress, and also behavioral problems (Khasanatil and Ts 2024).

Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood (2003) developed a comprehensive coping strategy. This strategy consists of 12 types of coping, each including a specific coping strategy. This service activity only focuses on four coping strategies with consideration to be more focused. The researcher intends to carry out similar activities in the future to gradually train other types of coping strategies. The following is an explanation of the four coping strategies used in this service activity.

Seeking Support

Overcoming loneliness through seeking support is a common strategy. Contact search and comfort are the most frequently conducted behavioral goals of seeking support, while instrumental assistance searches appear less frequently. The search for support is mostly directed to the closest people such as family members, friends from home, spouses, or friends in a new environment that the participants feel close to. Sometimes, mental health professionals, distant friends, acquaintances, or peers are also involved.

Having social contacts is invaluable in times of loneliness. Students strive to reach others either physically, if possible, or through various forms of communication technologies (e.g. phone calls, texts, Skype, Facebook, Viber, etc.) When they are geographically distant from the social bonds they want to achieve. Having friendships with others, talking to them, or sharing fun activities helps students overcome feelings of loneliness.

Social Isolation

While the search for support is repeatedly deployed to help teens manage feelings of loneliness, families are the opposite of coping – the social isolation caused by teens themselves (Natalia Biring and Hendro Wibowo 2024). Hiding feelings of loneliness and related negative emotions as well as avoiding others are the most common behaviors to cope with through social isolation, followed by some more common examples of social (and emotional) withdrawal.

Hiding negative feelings of loneliness from others is often reported by adolescents, hindering and complicating in some cases the acceptance, or search for, social support (Ummah and Murdiana 2024). Hiding loneliness and feelings of sadness is thought to protect participants from being seen negatively by others (Marisa and Afriyeni 2019). For example, one of the participants expressed the idea that negative emotions are not socially acceptable making their communication with others, sometimes even with close friends, a problem. Others are reluctant to express their loneliness in anticipation that people will blame them for feeling lonely and not managing it. Additionally, during the early stages of friendship formation, sharing loneliness is believed to reveal personal weaknesses or failures in others.

Self Reliance

Coping independence describes a transition to self and personal resources. Coping independence, reflected in emotions and behavioral regulation, emotional approaches and emotional expression. Emotion regulation is sought through the attempt to analyze and logically understand the reasons for feelings of loneliness in order to attach a plausible narrative to the experience. Idea self-encouragement and self-comfort, such as the thought that difficult feelings will eventually pass, or that the person is not alone but has important people in his life, who aim to regulate emotions.

Accommodation

Engaging in activities that distract from feelings of loneliness to more constructive and enjoyable preoccupation – i.e., distraction – was mentioned by the majority of participants. A range of activities – such as academic work and daily

responsibilities, exercise, physical exercise, watching movies, playing games, painting, drawing, reading, learning new skills, listening to music, going for a walk, and self-care activities – help participants keep themselves busy and 'distract' from loneliness but also gain pleasure, release stress, and achieve a sense of accomplishment. Meeting friends and spending time with others can also sometimes be a distraction from loneliness. Some students try to plan and schedule distracting activities in advance because this creates a positive sense of anticipation that makes feelings of loneliness more manageable at this time. Another student explained how he proactively prepared a list of movies that he could access whenever he felt lonely.

Table. 1 Output Achievement Target Plan

No	External Type	Achievement Indicators
1	Students' mental health becomes positive	Behaviour
2	Students' feelings of loneliness decreased	Behaviour

B. METHODS

Efforts to provide solutions to the problem of student loneliness are carried out by the following methods:

- a. Directed discussion: to provide students with an understanding of the orientation of the solution to be provided
- b. Training: training activities develop coping strategy skills.
- c. Organization: community service activities are an effort to increase students' understanding of the importance of coping strategies.
- d. Duration : 1 month (Socialization and Mentoring)

Activity Plan

The activity plan of this program can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Activity Plan

Yes	Activities	Target	Benchmark
1.	Coordination with the activity committee	Obtaining agreements and activity design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity proposals • Activity design • Cover Letter from the University
2.	Fixation of matter and Presenters	The existence of types of materials and presenters The Fixed	Training materials Training Presenter
3.	Publication of activities	PublishedActivities Broadly	Media publication of activities
4.	Socialization activities	Implementation of socialization activities	Socialization via Online Zoom <i>The meeting was held according to the target</i>
5.	Mentoring activities	Implementation of mentoring activities	Online assistance via <i>zoom meeting/whatsapp</i> is carried out according to the target

C. RESULTS

The training activity on loneliness *coping* strategies for FKIP students majoring in English education at Batanghari University was held on June 27, 2023 with 12 participants.

This training was held in the following order, (1). The presenter delivered material on loneliness and how to overcome it for approximately 30 minutes; (2). A 15-minute discussion to determine which group of strategies participants use when they feel lonely; (3) FGD (*focus group discussion*) was held for 30 minutes, participants who had been grouped into

The coping strategy group they chose discussed the loneliness problems they had felt, and the coping strategies they had undertaken.

The FGD activities carried out are still guided by researchers. Participants are guided and directed if there is still confusion and doubt about the feelings and experiences of loneliness they are feeling. During the FGD, each participant actively conveyed their experiences and strategies that they had taken when experiencing loneliness.

From the results of the FGD, it can be found that the factors that cause participants to experience emotional loneliness are loss of contact with the closest people, past burdens that cannot be expressed with others, and feeling like a source of problems. The coping strategy they take when experiencing emotional loneliness is to keep their distance from the source of loneliness by watching television, sleeping, trying to control themselves by patiently accepting the situation and making positive affirmations.

Participants who experienced social loneliness were due to circumstances that were often ignored by the surrounding environment, had no friends, had difficulty adapting to a new environment and felt less cared for. The coping strategy they do is to try to find the help of classmates. They try to build positive relationships with classmates, because they hope that their frequent time together will make them closer and reduce feelings of loneliness.

After conducting the FGD, all participants seemed relieved and felt able to release the burden that had been on their minds. By expressing and acknowledging their feelings in the group, they feel not alone. The effect of this training is seen as participants become more open to each other and become more familiar

Activity Documentation



Fig.1 Presenter delivered material on coping strategies for feelings of loneliness



Fig.2 Participants are divided into groups to record the results of their FGD



Fig.3 Participants present the results of their group discussions in front of other participants

D. CONCLUSION

First-year students who participated in the training activities were known to experience social loneliness and emotional loneliness. Students identified for themselves the type of loneliness they felt after they received the training materials provided and filled out the questionnaire form. Students who experience social loneliness take coping strategies for accommodation by engaging in social activities. Students who experience emotional loneliness choose coping *strategies for self-resilience*. The actions they often take include Try to make positive affirmations every day.

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