Loneliness and well-being in emerging adulthood: An Indonesian context

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Abstract. Subjective well-being is individuals' evaluation of their lives and experiences. Previous studies have shown that loneliness is correlated with subjective well-being. However, much research on loneliness and well being has focused on older adults. Moreover, even though it is studied in emerging adults, research on loneliness and well-being is still mostly found in western countries with individualistic contexts. This study aims to analyze the correlation betweenloneliness and subjective well-being among emerging adults in Indonesia. The participants were 376 emerging adults, and taken using purposive sampling technique. Data were collected using the Positive Affect Negative Affect Scale (PANAS), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). and the UCLA Loneliness Scale Ver. 3. The Pearson product moment technique was used for correlation analysis. The results showed a significant negative correlation between loneliness and subjective well-being ($r = -0.600$, $p = <0.001$), indicating that higher levels of loneliness are associated with lower levels of subjective well-being in emerging adulthood. This finding underscores the importance of addressing loneliness as a key factor in promoting the subjective well-being of emerging adults and suggests a need for intervention that foster social connections and support.

1 Introduction

Diener stated that subjective well-being is how individuals conduct subjective evaluations of their lives [1]. Subjective well being is a broad construct that includes two main aspects, cognitive and affective aspects. The cognitive aspect consists of life satisfaction, while the affective aspect consists of high positive affect and low negative affect [1]. Positive affection includes momentary positive emotions such as enjoyment, and long-term positive moods such as satisfaction. While negative affection includes momentary negative emotions such as sadness, anger, worry, stress, and long-term negative moods such as depression [2]. Subjective well-being is an important psychological variable for individuals, at every age stage, including emerging adulthood.

Emerging adulthood is a transition period from adolescence to early adulthood, the age range at this stage of development is 18-25 years old [3]. It is called a transition period because individuals are no longer classified as adolescents because they have passed puberty, and cannot be classified as adulthood due to the instability of life structures. Emerging adulthood is a stage in which individuals experience many changes in life. According to

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Arnett et al. there are 5 characteristics of emerging adulthood, among them are identity exploration, instability, feeling-in between, self-focus, and possibilities or optimism [4]. The exploration of identity, instability, and feeling-in between can cause individuals to feel various negative affections such as sadness, anger, upset, worry, depression, etc., whereas the high level of negative affection experienced by individuals can be an indicator of impaired subjective well-being [4].

Furthermore, Arnett et al. explain that the exploration of identity, instability, and feeling-in between at this stage can cause several mental health problems, particularly anxiety disorders and depression [3]. The anxiety and depression mentioned earlier are manifestations of long-term negative affectation which is an aspect of subjective well-being [2]. In Indonesia, mental health problems among youth are increasing. Data from the 2023 Indonesian Health Survey (Survei Kesehatan Indonesia) shows that the prevalence of depression in Indonesia in 2023 reached 1.4%, and the group of young people with an age range of 15-24 years is ranked the highest, at 2% [5]. Long-term negative affection is an aspect of subjective well being, meaning that a number of people who are reported to be depressed are an indicator of a disturbance of their subjective well-being which is characterized by a high level of negative affections.

In addition, based on data from the World Happiness Report, Indonesia ranks 84th out of 137 countries [6]. Among the countries in Southeast Asia, Indonesia ranks 4th from the lowest rank in happiness. This data shows low positive affect which is also an indicator of the disruption of subjective well-being in Indonesia. In terms of subjective well-being, a multidimensional analysis also found that subjective well-being in Indonesia has consistently been associated with high household income, good housing conditions, employment, health status, environmental quality, work-life balance, social connectedness, personal security, trust with neighbors, and sociable and friendly personalities [7].

Researchers conducted a preliminary study, namely direct interviews with 10 emerging adults at a Yogyakarta campus, and asked several questions related to their well-being. Based on a preliminary survey, it is known that 6 out of 10 people feel negative affections more often than positive affections in the past one month. The negative affections most felt by subjects were fear, restlessness, nervousness, worry, and guilt. Some of the causes of negative affection mentioned by the subject are academic problems, namely lecture assignments and thesis, problems with relationships with the social environment, overthinking, and worries about things that have not yet happened. When asked about life satisfaction, 4 people answered "not satisfied", 3 people answered "quite satisfied", 1 person answered "satisfied", and 2 people answered "very satisfied". 9 out of 10 people say they would like to change things in life if given the opportunity to repeat life. This data shows a low subjective well-being in the subjects shown from the majority of subjects who more often feel negative affection in the past month that is felt due to the problems that occur, and the low life satisfaction that the subjects have. These data are evidence of the existence of subjective well-being problems in Indonesia, especially in emerging adulthood.

Many factors influence well-being in emerging adults, including social connectedness. Support and social connectedness are things that affect subjective well-being, both of which must be fulfilled to achieve subjective well-being. The lack of social support and connectedness manifests loneliness, according to the definition of loneliness, which is the perceived difficulty due to the mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that individuals want and what is actually obtained [8]. Thus, it can be said that loneliness also affects subjective well-being, if the level of loneliness is high, then the level of subjective well-being in individuals tends to be low.

A meta-analysis of 114 studies has shown that loneliness is a powerful factor influencing individual well-being, including in emerging adults. Loneliness has a moderate to significant impact on all health outcomes, with the greatest impact on mental health and overall well-

being [9]. This is in line with several previous studies that have stated that loneliness is negatively related to subjective well-being. Research by Saygın et al. which examined loneliness and interpersonal problem solving as predictors of subjective well-being, showed that loneliness is negatively related to subjective well-being [10]. Research by Sasmita and Yulianti who studied the same topic in the elderly also proved that loneliness and subjective well-being are negatively related [11]. These findings suggest that loneliness remains an important psychological risk factor across different populations. This is the reason why subjective well-being needs to be studied, especially in the context of emerging adulthood. Most previous studies have examined the relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being among elderly populations [11],[15]. However, limited attention has been given to emerging adults, particularly in collectivistic cultural contexts such as Indonesia. This study contributes to the literature by focusing on Indonesian emerging adults (aged 18–25), a group undergoing major life transitions, and by providing preliminary evidence that loneliness significantly undermines their subjective well-being. Thus, the present study extends previous findings and highlights the importance of addressing loneliness not only among older adults but also in younger populations. Based on this evidence, the present study aims to examine the relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being among emerging adults in Indonesia.

2 Method

This study uses a quantitative research method with a correlational design. The independent variable of this study is loneliness and the dependent variable is subjective well-being.

2.1 Participants

Participants in this study were emerging adults, individuals within age range of 18-25 years [3], both male and female. There are no other special criteria apart from these two main criteria. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling. Respondents who met the criteria completed a questionnaire distributed online. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire based on their own situation and according to the provided instruction. There were 376 respondents who participated in the study, with the following respondent descriptions:

Table 1. Subject's socio-demographic profile (N=376)

Variable	n	Percentage
Age		
18	51	13,6%
19	62	16,5%
20	54	14,4%
21	62	16,5%
22	70	18,6%
23	58	15,4%
24	14	3,7%
25	5	1,3%
Gender		
Male	84	22,3%
Female	292	77,7%
Job		
Government employee	2	0,50%
Housewife	1	0,3%
Not working yet	2	0,5%

Private sector employee	17	4,5%
College student	339	90,1%
Freelance	4	1,1%
Highschool student	7	1,9%
Nurse	1	0,3%
Pharmaceutical Technical Personnel	1	0,3%
Entrepreneur	2	0,5%
Last Education		
Junior high school/equivalent	1	0,3%
Senior high school/equivalent	282	75%
Diploma	6	1,6%
Bachelor/Applied Bachelor	85	22,6%
Magister	2	0,5%
Province		
Bali	3	0,80%
Banten	17	4,52%
Bengkulu	3	0,80%
DI Yogyakarta	76	20,21%
DKI Jakarta	17	4,52%
Gorontalo	3	0,80%
Jawa Barat	59	15,69%
Jawa Tengah	70	18,62%
Jawa Timur	50	13,30%
Kalimantan Barat	3	0,80%
Kalimantan Selatan	5	1,33%
Kalimantan Tengah	1	0,27%
Kalimantan Timur	7	1,86%
Kalimantan Utara	1	0,27%
Kepulauan Riau	3	0,80%
Lampung	8	2,13%
Maluku Utara	1	0,27%
NTB	5	1,33%
Papua Barat	1	0,27%
Riau	11	2,93%
Sulawesi Selatan	4	1,06%
Sulawesi Tengah	2	0,53%
Sulawesi Tenggara	2	0,53%
Sulawesi Utara	1	0,27%
Sumatera Barat	1	0,27%
Sumatera Selatan	9	2,39%
Sumatera Tengah	6	1,60%
Sumatera Utara	7	1,86%

2.2 Research Instruments

The Subjective well-being was measured using a measurement developed by Watson et al., named Positive Affect Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) [12]. The authors conducted instrument try-out first to see the reliability of the measuring instrument with the number of respondents obtained were 72 people. There is an item that has been invalid, which is item 12, because the item rest correlation value obtained was <0.3. This instrument obtained a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.810 for positive affect, while for negative affect obtained a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.875. The way to score this measurement tool is to subtract the number of total positive affections scores by the total negative affections score (PA-NA), to find out the subjective well-being score, the PA-NA score is summed up by the total

Satisfaction with Life Scale score (PA-NA+SWL). Subjective well-being variable is also measured using a scale measuring tool developed by Diener et al., namely the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) [13]. This scale consists of 5 items, measuring one of the subjective aspects of well-being, namely life satisfaction. This scale obtained a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.819.

Loneliness was measured using the UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3 [14] which will be translated by authors into Indonesian. The authors conducted a test of the measuring instrument to see the reliability with the number of respondents as many as 52 people. There are 3 items that are lost, namely items 1, 8, and 9, because the item rest correlation value obtained was <0.3. This scale obtained a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.881, so this measuring tool can be said to be reliable to use.

2.3 Data Analysis Techniques

Once collected, the data were analyzed using Jamovi for Windows software. Descriptive analysis was carried out to see the description of the subject and research data. Before testing the hypothesis, an assumption test will be carried out first to ensure that the assumption is met, with the normality test and the linearity test. The hypothesis test was carried out using a correlation test using the Pearson Product Moment technique to analyze the correlation between independent and dependent variables.

3 Result

Based on table 1, it can be seen that subjective well-being obtained a mean of 22.8 and a standard deviation of 13.9. While the loneliness variable obtained a mean of 39.9 and a standard deviation of 9.47. The following are the results of a descriptive analysis of the subjective variables of well-being and loneliness:

Table 2. Descriptibe analysis result of subjective well-being and loneliness (N=376)

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Subjective Well-Being	376	-15	63	22.8	13.9
Loneliness	376	19	66	39.9	9.47

The normality test was carried out to determine whether the distribution of research data was distributed normally or not. The normality test was carried out using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov. The distribution of data is said to be normal if a significance value (p-value) is obtained above 0.05 (p>0.05). The results of the normality test using Kolmogorov-Smirnov showed that the subjective well-being variable obtained a p-value of 0.418 (p>0.05), while the loneliness variable obtained a p-value of 0.224 (p>0.05). The results of the normality test of research data are as follows:

Table 3. Normality test of subjective well-being and loneliness

Variable	*p*	Note
Subjective Well-Being	0.418	Usual
Loneliness	0.224	Usual

The linearity test is carried out to find out the linearity of correlation between variables. The relationship between variables is said to be linear if a p-value is below 0.05 (p<0.05). The results of the linearity test showed that subjective well-being had a linear relationship with loneliness because it obtained a p-value of <0.001 (p<0.05). The results of the linearity test of research data are as follows:

Table 4. Linearity test of subjective well-being and loneliness

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	F	*P*	Note
Subjective Well-Being	Loneliness	210	<0.001	Linear

Hypothesis tests are carried out to prove whether or not the hypothesis proposed in the study is accepted. This study aims to determine the relationship between subjective well-being and loneliness, so the hypothesis test is carried out using a correlation test. Because the assumption test is met, the correlation test technique used is Pearson Product Moment through the Jamovi for Windows application. The hypothesis is accepted if the p-value is below 0.05 ($p<0.05$). The following are the result of the hypothesis test that have been carried out :

Table 5. Hypothesis test of subjective well-being and loneliness

Variable	r	*P*	Note
Loneliness and Subjective Well-Being	-0.600	<0.001	Negative Correlation

The results of the correlation test showed that the r value obtained was -0.600 and the p value was <0.001 ($p<0.05$). The results obtained showed a significant negative relationship between subjective well-being and loneliness in emerging adulthood, meaning that the higher the level of loneliness of emerging adults, the lower the level of subjective well-being possessed, and conversely, the lower the level of loneliness, the higher the level of subjective well-being that emerging adults have. This also proves that the research hypothesis is acceptable.

4 Discussion

This study aims to determine the relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being among emerging adulthood. The hypothesis proposed by the authors is that there is a negative correlation between loneliness and subjective well-being among emerging adulthood. To find out the relationship between the two variables, the authors used a correlation test with the Pearson Product Moment. The results of correlation tests that have been conducted show that loneliness has a significant negative relationship with subjective well-being in emerging adulthood. This means that the higher the loneliness felt, the lower the level of subjective well-being that emerging adults have. On the other hand, the lower the loneliness experienced, the higher the subjective well-being that emerging adults have. Thus, it can be concluded that the proposed research hypothesis is acceptable.

The results of this study reinforce previous research showing that there is a strong negative relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being in ethnic Māori and non-Māori older people in New Zealand [15]. This study also supports another study from Sasmita and Yulianti, stating that there is a very significant negative relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being in the elderly in the Khusnul Khotimah Pekanbaru nursing home [11]. Sasmita and Yulianti explained that the high level of subjective well-being possessed by the elderly is due to the low level of loneliness experienced [11]. The results of the study of Saygın et al. showed similar findings that loneliness is a factor that predicts subjective well-being, the lower the level of individual loneliness, the higher the level of subjective well-being and vice versa, the higher the level of individual loneliness, the lower the level of subjective well-being [10].

Authors looked at 5 items from the UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3 that obtained the highest mean to see how loneliness and subjective well-being correlated with each other. The 5 items with the highest mean include item 14 ($\mu=2.84$) "How often do you feel embarrassed?", item 3 ($\mu=2.77$) "How often do you feel alone?", item 15 ($\mu=2.67$) "How

often do you feel like there are people around you but not with you?", item 10 (μ=2.65) "How often do you feel like no one really knows you well?", and item 2 (μ=2.54) "How often do you feel like there is no one you can turn to?". Based on these items, it can be explained that the indicators that play the most role in the relationship of loneliness and subjective well-being are feelings of shame, feeling alone, feeling unaccompanied even though there are people around, feeling that no one really recognizes the subject, and feeling that no one can be reached.

The negative relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being among emerging adults in this study can be explained through several psychological perspectives. According to the belongingness hypothesis, humans have a fundamental need to establish and maintain social bonds, and when this need is unmet, feelings of loneliness emerge, leading to reduced well-being. Similarly, the stress-buffering model suggests that social support serves as a protective factor against stress; thus, the absence of supportive relationships increases psychological strain, which in turn diminishes subjective well being. In the context of emerging adulthood in Indonesia, individuals often face academic challenges, uncertainty in career and personal relationships, and strong social expectations, all of which may amplify loneliness and negatively impact their life satisfaction and affective experiences.

While previous studies have predominantly examined the relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being among elderly populations [11], 15], the present study extends this line of research by focusing on emerging adults in Indonesia. Emerging adulthood (ages 18–25) is a developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, academic and career uncertainty, and heightened social expectations, all of which may intensify experiences of loneliness. Unlike in elderly populations where loneliness is often attributed to loss of social ties, in emerging adulthood loneliness may stem from academic stress, unstable relationships, and the struggle for independence. Furthermore, by situating this study in the Indonesian context, where collectivistic values prevail, the findings contribute cross-cultural evidence to a literature that has largely been based in Western, individualistic societies. Thus, the current study not only reinforces prior evidence of the negative association between loneliness and well-being, but also highlights its relevance in a younger, understudied population and in a cultural context where loneliness is less frequently discussed.

Overall, this study still has many limitations. Loneliness is not a variable that directly influences subjective well-being, so it is possible that there are other variables that mediate the relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being. Future researchers can add other variables such as social support as a mediator between loneliness and subjective well-being. Another limitation in this study is during the data collection process by distributing questionnaires. Researchers were unable to directly observe the questionnaires during the questionnaire filling process because the questionnaires were distributed online via WhatsApp, Instagram, X, and other social media. The comparison of the number of male and female research subjects was also not equal, with women at 77.7% while men were only 22.3%. Furthermore, there is no previous research with a specific subject, namely emerging adulthood, that supports the results of this study. This is due to the limited number of studies on the variables of loneliness and subjective well-being. Despite these limitations, this study has proven a negative relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being in emerging adulthood.

5 Conclusion

This study aims to determine the correlation between loneliness and subjective well-being among emerging adulthood. Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that there

is a significant negative correlation between loneliness and subjective well-being. This means that the higher the level of loneliness in emerging adulthood, the lower the level of subjective well being. Otherwise, the lower the level of loneliness experienced, the higher the subjective well-being that emerging adults have. Thus, the research hypothesis proposed by the authors is acceptable.

6 Implication

The findings of this study indicate that loneliness significantly reduces subjective well-being among emerging adults. Practically, these results suggest the need for preventive and intervention programs in universities and community settings that strengthen social connectedness, such as peer mentoring, group-based counseling, and campus engagement activities, to reduce feelings of loneliness. For policymakers in higher education, this study underlines the importance of addressing loneliness as a risk factor for psychological well-being among young people. Theoretically, this study extends previous evidence by demonstrating that the negative link between loneliness and subjective well-being, previously examined more often in elderly populations, also applies to emerging adults in the Indonesian context. Future research may expand this study by employing longitudinal or mixed-method designs to capture the dynamic nature of loneliness and well-being, or by exploring potential mediating and moderating variables such as social support, coping strategies, religiosity, or self-esteem. In the Indonesian collectivistic context, where social belonging and family ties strongly shape well-being, interventions should prioritize community-based approaches that foster genuine connections. Given the high academic pressures faced by emerging adults, universities need to integrate stress management and peer-support programs. These culturally embedded efforts are crucial to effectively reduce loneliness and enhance subjective well-being among young people.

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