

Exploring the Connection Between Peer Support and Emotional Loneliness Among Migrant University Students

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Abstract

Living away from home often presents students with challenges in adapting to a new environment, which can potentially lead to emotional loneliness. This associative quantitative study aims to empirically examine the contribution of peer social support in reducing this condition. Using total sampling, all 101 eighth-semester students in the Guidance and Counseling program at PGRI University of Semarang for the 2025/2026 academic year were included as both the population and the sample. Data were collected using the Peer Social Support Scale ($\alpha = 0.910$) and the Emotional Loneliness Scale ($\alpha = 0.889$), which were then analyzed using Pearson's product-moment correlation test. The results of the analysis showed a strong and significant negative relationship between the two variables ($r = -0.606$; $p < 0.001$). These findings confirm that an increase in peer support is directly proportional to a decrease in emotional loneliness, with the social support variable accounting for 36.7% of the variance in emotional loneliness.

Keywords

Emotional Loneliness; Migrant Students; Peer Social Support



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INTRODUCTION

Students living away from home are individuals who leave their home regions to pursue education in other areas and live apart from their families during their studies. According to Naim (2013), living away from home is a form of voluntary migration undertaken by an individual for a specific purpose—including pursuing an education—and involves the possibility of returning to their home region once that goal is achieved. In the context of higher education, living away from home requires students to adapt to new social, cultural, and academic environments.

College years generally occur during the phase of emerging adulthood. Santrock (2019) explains that emerging adulthood is a developmental period spanning ages 18–25, characterized by identity exploration, increased independence, and various social and emotional changes. During this phase, individuals begin to reduce their dependence on their parents and build broader interpersonal relationships. However, for students living away

from home, this developmental process occurs alongside the demands of adapting to a new environment far from their families and previously established social networks.

One of the psychological consequences that often arises among students living away from home is loneliness. Weiss (Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 2006) distinguishes between social loneliness and emotional loneliness. Emotional loneliness occurs when an individual lacks or has lost relationships that provide deep emotional closeness. An individual may have many friends but still feel lonely if they lack relationships capable of fulfilling their needs for intimacy, attention, and emotional attachment.

Feelings of emotional loneliness among students living away from home can arise due to a decrease in the intensity of interactions with family members, who serve as their primary attachment figures. According to Weiss (Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 2006) the loss of relationships that provide a sense of security and emotional closeness is the primary cause of emotional loneliness. This condition is often experienced by students who are new to the college environment because they must separate from family and close friends who were previously their main sources of support.

In addition to Weiss's perspective, Cacioppo explains loneliness as a biological signal that arises when an individual perceives themselves as socially isolated (Saraswaty & Wulandari, 2025). According to this view, loneliness is not merely the result of a lack of social connections, but is also influenced by how individuals interpret the relationships they have. Individuals who feel unaccepted or lack emotional closeness with their surroundings tend to experience higher levels of loneliness even though, objectively speaking, they are surrounded by many people.

To reduce the risk of emotional loneliness, students living away from home need social support from their surroundings. Sarafino & Smith (2014) define social support as the attention, comfort, appreciation, or assistance an individual receives from others, which makes the individual feel loved, valued, and part of a social network. Social support serves an important function as a psychological resource that helps individuals cope with life's various pressures.

Taylor (2011) explains that social support is not only the actual assistance an individual receives but also includes the perception that such assistance is available when needed. The perception that there are people ready to help has been shown to improve psychological well-being and reduce the negative effects of stress. Therefore, individuals who feel they have social support tend to be in a better emotional state than those who feel unsupported by their environment.

In the lives of students living away from home, the closest and most accessible source of social support is their peers. Oakley (2018) states that peer social support has unique characteristics because it is provided by individuals who are at relatively similar stages of development and in similar life situations. These shared experiences allow for the formation of more equal relationships based on mutual understanding and empathy toward the various difficulties faced.

According to House's theory (Sarafino & Smith, 2014)), social support consists of four main forms: emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support. Emotional support is provided through attention, empathy, and concern. Instrumental support takes the form of tangible or practical assistance. Informational support takes the form of advice, guidance, or relevant information. Meanwhile, appraisal support is provided through positive feedback that helps individuals understand and evaluate themselves more objectively.

Theoretically, social support from peers can reduce emotional loneliness through the buffering effect mechanism. House (Sarafino & Smith, 2014) explains that social support acts as a buffer against the psychological stress experienced by individuals. When students living away from home receive adequate emotional support from their peers, their needs for closeness, acceptance, and a sense of belonging can be met, thereby reducing the likelihood of emotional loneliness.

Previous research findings support this assumption. Pradnyani et al. (2024) found a significant negative relationship between peer social support and loneliness among out-of-town students at Udayana University. Similar results were also found by Choirunisak & Rohmatun (2024), who showed that the higher the perceived social support, the lower the level of loneliness experienced by students. Furthermore, Nandana et al. (2023) reported that social support is positively correlated with the psychological well-being of out-of-town students.

Based on this theoretical review and these empirical findings, this study aims to examine the relationship between peer social support and emotional loneliness among out-of-town students in the Guidance and Counseling Program at PGRI University of Semarang. This research is important because it can provide a scientific contribution to understanding the factors that play a role in the psychological well-being of out-of-town students and serve as a foundation for the development of guidance and counseling services in higher education institutions.

METHODS

A quantitative approach with a correlational design was chosen for this study to examine the relationship between peer social support and emotional loneliness among students living away from home. The reason for using this correlational design was to allow the researcher to objectively identify both the direction and strength of the relationship between variables without manipulating the research conditions (Creswell, 2014).

The population consisted of all eighth-semester migrant students enrolled in the Guidance and Counselling Study Program at PGRI University Semarang during the 2025/2026 academic year, totalling 101 students. Considering the relatively small population size, total sampling was applied, allowing all members of the population to participate in the study (Arikunto, 2016). Therefore, the final sample comprised 101 migrant students.

Data were collected using psychological scales. According to Azwar (2022), psychological scales are instruments designed to measure latent psychological attributes through individuals'

responses to a set of statements. Peer social support was measured using a scale developed based on House's theory of social support (Sarafino & Smith, 2014) covering four dimensions: emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support.

Emotional loneliness was measured using an adapted version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3 developed by Russell and validated for Indonesian university students by Nurdiani (2013). The instrument consists of ten valid items that measure loneliness as a unidimensional construct.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficients obtained through the instrument's reliability test prior to data collection were 0.910 for the Peer Social Support Scale and 0.889 for the Emotional Loneliness Scale. According to Azwar's (2022) standardization, these results demonstrate that the instruments possess high internal consistency. Meanwhile, to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between peer social support and emotional loneliness among students living away from home, the data analysis technique applied was the Pearson product-moment correlation test, conducted using SPSS software at a significance level of 0.05.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis in this study was designed to examine the relationship between peer social support and levels of emotional loneliness among out-of-town students in the Guidance and Counseling Program at PGRI University of Semarang. The statistical approaches used included descriptive and inferential analyses. Descriptive techniques were used to present an overview and the characteristics of the data obtained, while inferential techniques were used to test the research hypotheses. As a preliminary step before hypothesis testing, prerequisite tests—including normality and linearity tests—were conducted first. The details of the data analysis results are presented in the following section.

Descriptive Statistics

An overview of the research data was obtained through the application of descriptive statistics, which specifically present information regarding the minimum value, maximum value, mean, and standard deviation for each variable under study.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistic

Variabel	Min	Maks	Mean	Std. Deviasi
Peer Support (X)	55,00	143,00	101,13	14,991
Emotional Loneliness (Y)	9,00	36,00	20,59	5,517

The respondents' data profiles regarding the level of peer social support and emotional loneliness are clearly summarized in the statistical results in Table 1. For the peer social support variable, the mean score was 101.13 with a standard deviation of 14.99. On the other hand, the emotional loneliness variable showed a mean of 20.59 with a standard deviation of 5.51.

Normality Test

Using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, a normality test was conducted to determine whether the data in this study followed a normal distribution. As one of the prerequisite tests for the analysis, the criterion for drawing statistical conclusions in this test used a significance level (α) of 0.05.

Table 2. Normality Test Result (Kolmogorov-Smirnov)

Keterangan	Nilai	Keterangan
N (Jumlah Responden)	101	-
Test Statistic	0,062	-
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0,200	Normal ($p > 0,05$)
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)	0,434	Normal ($p > 0,05$)

The conclusion that the data in this study are normally distributed is based on the significance values for each variable in Table 2, which are greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). Based on the results of these prerequisite tests, the next step in data analysis—using Pearson’s product-moment correlation—can now be carried out because one of the main requirements has been met.

Linearity Test

To test whether the variables of peer social support and emotional loneliness have a linear relationship, a linearity test must be conducted first.

Table 3. Normality Test Result (Kolmogorov-Smirnov)

Hubungan Variabel	F Linearity	Sig. Linearity	F Dev. Linearity	Sig. Dev Linearity	Keterangan
X → Y	53,301	< 0,001	0,845	0,719	Linear

Based on the linearity test results shown in Table 3, the F value for Linearity was 53.301 with a significance level of less than 0.001. Meanwhile, the F value for Deviation from Linearity was 0.845 with a significance coefficient of 0.719. Given that the probability for Deviation from Linearity is above the 0.05 threshold ($0.719 > 0.05$), it is concluded that the relationship between peer social support and emotional loneliness is linear. These results confirm that the assumption of linearity in this study has been met, allowing the data analysis to proceed to the stage of Pearson’s product-moment correlation analysis.

Hypothesis Testing

To determine whether there is a relationship between peer social support and emotional loneliness among college students living away from home, the researchers tested their hypothesis. The data analysis technique used for this purpose was Pearson’s product-moment correlation.

Table 4. Hypothesis test results (product-moment correlation)

Variabel	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Keterangan
Peer Social Support and Emotional Loneliness	-0,606	< 0,001	Ha received

Based on the results of the Pearson product-moment correlation test, a correlation coefficient (r) of -0.606 was found, with a significance level (p) of less than 0.001. Given that this significance level is below the 0.05 threshold, the decision was made to accept H_a and reject H_0 . These findings demonstrate a strong and significant negative relationship between peer social support and emotional loneliness. Thus, it can be concluded that an increase in peer social support is directly proportional to a decrease in the level of emotional loneliness experienced by individuals.

The findings of this study indicate that social support from peers plays a crucial role in helping students living away from home cope with various challenges while living far from their families. Students who receive attention, assistance, and acceptance from their peers tend to have better emotional well-being and are better able to adapt to their new environment. The social support they receive provides a sense of security, comfort, and appreciation, thereby reducing feelings of loneliness resulting from separation from their families.

These findings align with House's theory (Sarafino & Smith, 2014), which explains that social support consists of emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support. Emotional support helps individuals feel loved and cared for; instrumental support helps resolve practical problems; informational support provides guidance and advice; and appraisal support helps individuals develop a positive self-image. These four forms of support play a role in enhancing individuals' ability to cope with psychological stress and reduce loneliness.

The findings of this study also support Weiss's theory (Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 2006), which states that emotional loneliness arises when individuals lack relationships that provide deep emotional closeness. College students living far from their families are at risk of losing their primary source of emotional support. However, positive relationships with peers can help fulfill their needs for affection and emotional closeness, thereby reducing feelings of loneliness.

Furthermore, the results of this study align with Cacioppo's perspective, which explains that loneliness is a subjective experience that arises when individuals feel that their social relationships do not meet their expectations (Saraswaty & Wulandari, 2025). Therefore, the quality of students' social relationships is a crucial factor in determining the level of emotional loneliness they experience.

The finding that social support from peers can reduce feelings of loneliness among students living away from home is supported by empirical evidence Pradnyani et al. (2024). Furthermore, the positive contribution of this peer network to the mental health of students

living away from home is also validated by the research of Choirunisak & Rohmatun (2024). This relationship is further emphasized by Nandana et al. (2023), who found that the availability of abundant social support is a crucial factor in reducing loneliness while enhancing an individual's psychological well-being.

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that peer social support is a key factor in reducing emotional loneliness among students living away from home. Therefore, universities need to develop various programs that can enhance positive interactions among students, such as mentoring activities, peer groups, student organizations, and counselling services focused on strengthening social support.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate a significant negative correlation between peer social support and levels of emotional loneliness among out-of-town students in the Guidance and Counselling Program at PGRI University of Semarang. These results indicate that the level of social support students receive from their peers is directly related to a reduction in the emotional loneliness they experience. Conversely, a lack of support from this peer group has the potential to trigger an escalation of feelings of emotional loneliness among these out-of-town students.

These findings highlight the importance of peers as a source of emotional support for students living far from home. Therefore, students who have difficulty making friends or socializing are advised to become more actively involved in both academic and non-academic activities to expand their social networks and gain support from their surroundings. By fostering positive social relationships, students' emotional needs can be better met, thereby minimizing feelings of emotional loneliness.

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