



TECHNIUM
SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

Vol. 8, 2020

**A new decade
for social changes**

www.techniumscience.com

ISSN 2668-7798



9 772668 779000

The Impact of Social Support on Loneliness and Worry Among University Freshmen in Sagaing District, Myanmar

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Abstract. The impact of social support buffers most of the psychological problems such as loneliness and worry in the transition period for university freshmen. This loneliness and worry can lead to many freshmen suffering in less confidence and difficulties in interactions as a university student. The greater perceiving social support can alleviate loneliness and worry. The main aim of this study is to investigate the impact of social support on loneliness and worry among university freshmen. In this study, a quantitative approach was used. The sample was composed of 500 freshmen from four universities, Sagaing Technological University, Sagaing University of Education, Co-operative University (Sagaing) and Sagaing University. Social support perceived by university freshmen was measured by using Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL) including four subscales that are appraisal support, tangible support, self-esteem support and belonging support which consisted of 40 items. The Loneliness of freshmen was examined by using the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (RULS) consisted of 20 items. Freshmen's worry was explored by using the Penn State Worry Questionnaire (PSWQ) which comprised of 16 items. According to descriptive statistics, all universities in the selected district gave the equal social supports to freshmen but freshmen felt that they perceived the appraisal support than other supports. The results of independent sample t-test showed that there were significant differences in social support, loneliness and worry by gender. Furthermore, the result of ANOVA showed that there were significant differences in loneliness and worry by universities. The result of correlation analyses described that there was significant interrelationship among social support, loneliness and worry. The results of this study highlighted that types of social support can impact on loneliness and worry of freshmen effectively. That is the main reason why social support should be provided as one of the effective ways to ease loneliness and worry for freshmen.

Keywords. social support, appraisal support, tangible support, self-esteem support, belonging support, loneliness, worry, freshmen

1. Introduction

Without support from others, anyone cannot get convenience during a difficult time. Especially, the new experiences and strange things can make people take help to overcome them. From birth to death, supports are also needed and social interaction plays in all places such as in schools, in universities, in departments, in hospitals and many public ones. The kind of support found to be beneficial during transition is social support. Individuals may

experience many changes throughout their lives such as school change, home transition, change of career and geographic relocation. The ones who come from high schools to the universities are called freshmen. Most of the freshmen are late adolescents. Many late adolescents try to facilitate their transition period but some cannot be able to adapt the challenges facing their first few weeks of the academic year. According to Peplau (1987), one of the groups who are most likely to suffer from loneliness consisted of college students. In “Loneliness and the College Students” written by Peplau (1987), he mentioned about the condition of freshmen like this, “During freshmen year, old friendships and love affairs tended to wither.” This condition creates to gain loneliness and worries for the freshmen who are difficult to cope with their insufficient experiences. The transition period for university freshmen requires significant adjustments because of the loneliness that will come to them if they face the problems which are related to their conflicts. At that time, unfortunately, they can become friends with loneliness. They feel that they don’t belong in university. Therefore, they worry about their existing behaviours if these habits can begin problems in interacting with others. Belzer et al. (2002) described that when worry changes into extreme and hard to control, it can be very disturbing, self-defeating, and maladaptive. Accordingly, Kertz and Woodruff-Borden (2011) also defined as worry makes the occurrence of a series of bad thoughts which arouses a variety of black results.

University freshmen can firstly worry about the unfamiliar things related to their universities. They are worried about roommates, time management, keeping grades up, the bathrooms, homesickness, making new friends, having money and keeping in touch with friends from home. Besides, they don’t have the one who can be trusted at once in the new environment so they feel lonely. To overcome this loneliness and worry, universities need to pay interventions such as giving social support programs. Many kinds of social support can serve to ease the loneliness and worry of university freshmen. It is also essential to explore and prevent the causes of loneliness and worry of freshmen because the foundation is so important to build the strongest and best enthusiasm to pursue further extended education. Therefore, in Myanmar, when the matriculation students passed their exams successfully, they go to universities and colleges for further studies of their lives or to get the degree for their career. It is also important to implement and build social support intervention programs in all universities all over Myanmar because social support is crucial for all of the stressful situations, advising conditions, the impetus for further successful processes and aids and assistance role a step by step performance. It comes to be an interesting one to study that social support plays in the important role of university freshmen in the first steps of their university life.

1.1.Literature Review

Cohen and McKay (1984) mentioned that one’s interpersonal relationships serve as stress buffers only if resources that give the suitable support from one’s relationship meet with the coping needs derived by the stressor(s). Furthermore, Cohen and Wills (1985) have also proposed that stress-buffering happens only when a match occurs between the requirements caused by the stressful event and the support operation that are perceived to be accessible. Moreover, Cohen and McKay (1984) discussed the types of social support that function as the moderating effect of support on reactions to a stressor. Four types of support are as follows:

- **Appraisal Support-** The effort to reduce stress would be achieved to the extent that needed information is encouraged which causes one to convince that either receiving a result under unchangeable condition or accepting the success to the available chance is nothing important (House & Wells, 1978). Moreover, Social comparison Theory

(SCT) predicted that one will compare with the one who is nearly similar under some situations concerning the comparison information.

- **Self-Esteem Support-** Cobb (1976) has also discussed that support about self-esteem might strengthen the ability of a person to solve the reasons that make difficult, i.e., to go out and master a problem. In this viewpoint, esteem is assumed as either promoting one's feeling of self-efficacy or building the foundation of self-belief to assure the potentiality of one's self.
- **Belonging Support-** Again, Cohen and McKay (1984) stated that the way to support effectively in cases where adverse feelings will go away and feelings of belonging would appropriately introduce interpersonal relationships. Paykel (1974) mentioned that about the well-organized relationship between life up and downs regarding emotional outlets and depression and described that having belongingness elicited by some social support systems may also particularly essential in keeping away from psychological disorders.
- **Tangible Support-** Subsequently, Cohen and McKay (1984) explained that unresponsive aid could likely give the outcomes in disable help rather than the relief of stress effects. It was notable that the role of tangible support may also play in a psychological effort for the ones who need the affections since the material support provision may be made sense by the receiver as proof for the love and/or esteem of the giver.

Bacigalupe and Camara (2014) described that gender differences have been found in how adolescents experience stress. Adolescent girls reported higher levels of stress in relationships with parents, peers, and romantic partners than boys do (De Coster, 2005). Hankin et al. (2007) also found that happenings concerning interpersonal nature (i.e. relationship with peers, intimate partners, or family members) showed depressive symptoms among the girls, whereas boys tend to respond more to performance-related experiences (i.e. sports performance). However, other studies of social support with young adults have shown that women felt greater social support than do men when they live with stressful events although both genders gain the profit from the support they obtain (Mattanah et al., 2010). Derryberry and Thoma (2000) have indicated, "Close friendships do seem to be a developmental advantage for students in college" particularly during the first year. In a similar study among college students, Paloutzian and Ellison (1979) found several coping strategies associated with loneliness including (a) religious responses (e.g., prayer, reading the Bible); (b) searching responses (e.g., going to a dance, driving around); (c) nonsocial diversions (e.g., keeping busy, reading, studying, working); (d) intimacy contact (e.g., talking to close friend about one's feelings; spending time with a close friend just to be together); and (e) passivity (e.g., sleep). Perlman and Goldenberg (1981) surveyed adolescents in Grade 8, Grade 11, and first year of university. The older the student, the less contact with their friends which strongly indicates a loneliness predictor and mother-child relations is not important. Although they expected higher engagements coming relationship at the very beginning, perhaps they keep better from the suffering of loneliness according to some increase in the number of their friends and friendships. For the very first-year students, worry come along with the loneliness during the very first few months of university life. Mathews (1990) proposed that worry serves as a clue which is importantly related to the cognitive function. Fear has been described the escape from the unexpected condition preparing to remind the biological system (Barlow, 1988), thus worry can be especially seen a cognitive system, adapted to predict the possibility of trouble in future. Besides specific psychological conditions, the link between excessive uncontrollable worry and negative consequences among youth gave the result of

lower academic performance, weak social relationships, school absenteeism with high rates (Albano & Hack, 2004), as well as maladaptive problem-solving (Laugesen et al., 2003). Another study found that girls had more worries in some specific cases than boys and also increased more physical symptoms than boys (Kertz & Woodruff, 1998). Other findings suggested that the perceived matter of worry changes according to recent life situations. To summarize, social support functions can buffer many psychological problems that many freshmen would experience effectively. According to previous researches, many freshmen admitted that they were afraid of everything at the first time of their university experience when talking with them.

1.2. The Current Study

University is a place where the high school students want to go and study the subject they are interested in. Most of the freshmen expect the university which will provide freedom and independence. But some of them feel fear of strangers who will meet with them such as the professors and the new friends and they will think about belonging in the university campus. When they reach the universities, they accept both the things they expected or not. At the same time, they come to worry about the future of the difficulties that will come to their tomorrows. And also, in Myanmar, there still needs to explore about the counselling researches concerning which can give relief from the stressful situations for freshmen. By getting enough knowledge on how social support could help freshmen to pursue in their further studies and cope with psychological disturbances, this research will be useful in assisting educators, teachers, counsellors, psychologists and researchers in educational fields. Therefore, the researcher tended to investigate the impact of social support on loneliness and worry among university freshmen in Sagaing district, Myanmar.

RQ 1. Are there any significant differences in social support, loneliness and worry among university freshmen by gender?

RQ 2. Are there any significant differences in social support, loneliness and worry among university freshmen by the university?

RQ 3. Is there any interrelationship among social support, loneliness and worry among university freshmen?

RQ 4. Is there any impact of social support on loneliness and worry among university freshmen?

2. Methodology

2.1. Sampling

All of the participants were the freshmen from four universities: Sagaing Technological University, Sagaing University of Education, Co-operative University (Sagaing) and Sagaing University in Sagaing District. The sample of 100 first-year students from Sagaing Technological University, 150 first-year students from Sagaing University of Education, 150 first-year students from Cooperative University (Sagaing) and 100 first-year students from Sagaing University were collected. This sample was composed of male 220 and female 280. A total of 500 university freshmen participated in this study. Descriptive research design and survey method were used to examine the interrelationship among social support, loneliness and worry of university freshmen.

2.2. Instruments

In this study, there are three research instruments; Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL), Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (RULS) and Penn State Worry Questionnaire (PSWQ) were used to gather necessary data. First of all, the Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL), Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (RULS) and Penn State Worry Questionnaire

(PSWQ) were adapted to the Myanmar version. After testing pilot study, the Cranach's alpha reliability coefficients of the instruments were .868 for Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL), .779 for Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (RULA) and .791 for Penn State Worry Questionnaire (PSWQ) indicating that the instrument can be considered as a reliable tool to be used for the study.

2.3. Data Collection

The university freshmen were randomly selected from four universities in Sagaing District, Myanmar, in December (2016-2017) academic year. Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL), Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (RULS) and Penn State Worry Questionnaire (PSWQ) were given to the freshmen to complete all the items without leaving any item. All of the freshmen were requested to help the researcher and they were admitted that the results would not affect their cases and the researcher would keep their answers secretly. The researcher would use these results for only research purposes so the participants completed the questionnaires trustfully.

2.4. Data Analysis

Firstly, all of the results from the participants' answers were transformed into statistical data and then this data was analysed with the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software version 22. To get the information about mean and standard deviation for types of social support received by freshmen and loneliness and worry of freshmen by universities, descriptive analyses were used. Independent sample t-test was computed to examine whether there was a significant difference or not in gender. One-way ANOVA was applied to know if there would be significant between types of social support, loneliness and worry by the university. If there were a significant difference between them, Post-Hoc test by Tukey HSD was conducted continuously to decide which group had more significant difference than which group. Moreover, the interrelationship among social support, loneliness and worry was analysed by Pearson product-moment correlation. Multiple regression for variables of social support and loneliness were computed to find out how well social support can predict loneliness. Again, simple linear regression was also conducted to examine to what extent that social support can impact worry.

3. Results

According to this table, all of the university freshmen felt that they got more appraisal support than the other social supports from their respective universities.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Social Support of Freshmen

Variables	N	Mean	SD
Appraisal Support	500	32.07	4.989
Tangible Support	500	30.52	5.014
Self-Esteem Support	500	30.61	3.554
Belonging Support	500	31.23	4.737
Total	500	124.44	14.870

Comparison of Freshmen's Various Types of Social Support, Loneliness and Worry by Gender

According to Table 2, there were significant differences in appraisal support, self-esteem support and belonging support in overall social support by gender ($p < 0.01$). Table 2 showed that there was significant difference in overall social support by gender as ($t = -3.125, p < 0.01$). Female freshmen got greater mean scores of social support (mean=126.27) than that of male freshmen (mean=122.10). Moreover, it was found that there was significant difference

between loneliness of male and female as ($t = 3.301, p < 0.01$). It indicated that the male freshmen were to be lonelier freshmen than female. Likewise, the results of Table 2 showed that there was significant difference in worry of freshmen between male and female as ($t = -5.484, p < 0.001$). Female freshmen got the higher mean score (mean = 52.23) than that of male freshmen (mean = 47.73).

Table 2: Results of Independent Sample *t*- test for Freshmen's Social Support, Loneliness and Worry by Gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Appraisal Support	Male	220	31.26	5.036	-1.440	-3.221**	498	.001
	Female	280	32.70	4.867				
Tangible Support	Male	220	30.35	5.167	-.300	-.660	498	.510
	Female	280	30.65	4.895				
Self-Esteem Support	Male	220	29.89	3.689	-1.299	-	498	.000
	Female	280	31.19	3.341				
Belonging Support	Male	220	30.60	5.077	-1.132	-2.624**	498	.009
	Female	280	31.73	4.397				
Overall Support	Male	220	122.10	15.087	-4.171	-3.125**	498	.002
	Female	280	126.27	14.461				
Loneliness	Male	220	40.40	8.814	2.562	3.301**	498	.001
	Female	280	37.84	8.455				
Worry	Male	220	47.73	8.990	-4.501	-5.484***	498	.000
	Female	280	52.23	9.263				

However, there was no significance difference at 0.05 level in social support received from universities; $F(3,496) = .409, p = .747$. So, it can be concluded that the different universities in Sagaing District give the equal social supports to the freshmen. Again, the loneliness mean scores answered by freshmen from each university were different from each other. The Loneliness mean score of freshmen from Sagaing University of Education was the lowest in that of all universities. So, the freshmen from that University were the least in loneliness among the freshmen of four universities. Likewise, the worry mean score of freshmen from that University was the smallest among four universities. Therefore, in order to compare the loneliness and worry of freshmen from four universities, One-Way analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used. The result of ANOVA was presented in Table 3.

Table 3: One-Way ANOVA Result of Freshmen's Loneliness and Worry by University

Variables	University	Sum of Square	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Loneliness	Between Groups	939.017	3	313.006	4.215**	.006
	Within Groups	36829.533	496	74.253		
	Total	37768.550	499			
Worry	Between Groups	853.811	3	284.604	3.262*	.021
	Within	43281.437	496	87.261		

Groups
 Total 44135.248 499

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

The results of Table 3 indicated that the university difference between loneliness of freshmen was significant at 0.01 level; $F(3,496) = 4.215$, $p < 0.01$ and also that of worry of freshmen was significant at 0.05 level; $F(3,496) = 3.262$, $p < 0.05$. It can be said that the loneliness and worry of freshmen was significantly different according to the universities. To compare the loneliness and worry of freshmen from which university that will be greater than others, the post-hoc analysis was conducted. Tukey results can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of Tukey HSD for Freshmen's Loneliness by University

Variables	(I) University	(J) University	Mean Difference (I-J)	<i>p</i>
Loneliness	Sagaing University of Education	Co-operative University (Sagaing)	-3.153**	.009
		Sagaing University	-2.903*	.046
Worry	Sagaing University of Education	Co-operative University (Sagaing)	-3.100*	.022

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

According to Table 4, significant difference for loneliness was found among Sagaing University of Education, Co-operative University (Sagaing) and Sagaing University at ($p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$). It can be said that freshmen from Co-operative University and Sagaing University were lonelier than that of Sagaing University of Education because the mean difference between Co-operative University and Sagaing University of Education was 3.153 and Sagaing University and the latter was 2.903. Multiple comparison of results for worry showed that the mean scores of Sagaing University of Education and Co-operative University (Sagaing) were significantly difference at $p < 0.05$. It can be interpreted that freshmen from Co-operative University (Sagaing) worried more than those from Sagaing University of Education because the mean difference between these two universities was 3.100.

Table 5: The Interrelationship Among Social Support, Loneliness and Worry of University Freshmen

Variables	Social support	Loneliness	Worry
Social Support	1	-.571**	-.196**
Loneliness		1	.202**
Worry			1

** . Correlations is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

According to Table 5, the results described that social support that the freshmen received was negatively correlated with the loneliness of freshmen ($r = -.571$, $p < .001$). Again, the results revealed that the social support that the freshmen received was also negatively

correlated with the worry of freshmen ($r = -.196, p < 0.01$). Besides, the results showed that loneliness of freshmen was positively correlated with worry of freshmen ($r = .202, p < 0.01$). Therefore, multiple regression was calculated again to examine how well social support can predict loneliness. Prediction of four sources to social support that university freshmen received significantly predicted to loneliness $F(4,495) = 68.432, p < .001$. To see vividly, the explanation was presented in the following table 6.

According to Table 6, the multiple correlation coefficient (R) = .597 and adjusted R squared was .351. It can be concluded that 35% of loneliness of freshmen can be predicted from social support variables. It showed that only three of the predictor's variables that are appraisal support, self-esteem support and belonging support significantly combine altogether to predict the loneliness of freshmen. From this calculation of Multiple Regression, the model can be expressed as the following equation;

$$L = 81.406 - 0.353AS - 0.370SES - 0.651BS$$

L = Loneliness

AS = Appraisal Support

SES = Self-Esteem Support

BS = Belonging Support

Table 6: Results of Multiple Regression Analysis for Social Support and Loneliness of University Freshmen

Variables	B	B	t	R	R ²	Adj R ²	F
Constant	81.406		28.131	.597 ^a	.356	.351	68.432***
Predictor variables							
1.Appraisal Support	-.353	-.202***	-4.268				
2.Tangible Support	.018	.010	.213				
3.Self-Esteem Support	-.370	-.151**	-3.322				
4.Belonging Support	-.651	-.354***	-6.754				

** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

a. Dependent Variable: Loneliness

Table 7: Result of Simple Linear Regression for Social Support on Worry of University Freshmen

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	65.677	3.483		18.858	.000
	Social support	-.124	.028	-.196***	-4.462	.000

*** $p < 0.001$

a. Dependent Variable: Worry

From this Table 7, it was found that the predictor social support significantly predicted worry of freshmen. Therefore, the model can be expressed as the following equation.

$$W = 65.677 - .124SS$$

W = Worry

SS = Social Support

It can be interpreted that the more social support was given to the freshmen, the less worry they would have.

4. Discussion

After these studies were summarized firstly, discussion, recommendations, limitations of the study and suggestions for further studies will also be discussed. To answer research questions, female freshmen felt that they have perceived more information and advice, satisfying feeling about themselves and many friends to talk and share their new experiences than male. And there was no significant difference for tangible support of male and female. According to Cohen & Hoberman (1983), this research is consistent with their study which was discovered regarding with college students concerns and it was likely that college students were less concerned with material goods thus are less sensitive to the presence or absence of tangible support. This current research revealed that there were gender differences of loneliness indicating male freshmen were lonelier than female freshmen. It can be said that male freshmen have a tendency to spend more time alone and they tend to develop intimacy more slowly than female freshmen. Loneliness varies according to the location and support of the respective universities. Moreover, female freshmen had more specific worries about roommates, close partnerships, academic success, dependency on friends and family and appearances than male freshmen. It also depends on the universities' social support services for freshmen because a significant difference was found among universities concerning the worry of freshmen. Therefore, it highlighted the more social support the freshmen received, the less loneliness and worry they have according to the recent research's results. It should be noted that the more loneliness the freshmen feel, the more worry they perceive.

Many researchers suggested that social supports are important factors affecting student's behaviour and intentions towards persistence. When the researcher talked with the freshmen about their first year day's experiences, they expressed their feelings with the following answers such as; "I'm scared for the next day because I don't have the friends to attend the class with me", "I'm really afraid of everything", "I miss my mom and my high school friends", "I worry about my academic subjects and my appearances how to prepare to interact with others conveniently",.....

According to these results, male freshmen are needed to encourage the feeling that they perceive enough social support from their universities. The following are the suggestions to build social supports in all universities:

- Assisting students in establishing and sustaining teacher-student relationships and encouraging them to ask for and feel comfortable receiving help from their related universities.
- Helping students create social outlets and activating them to take part in university ceremonies, competitions, organizations, social teams and clubs related to their hobbies to get social supports from the elder senior students and their new teachers.

- Facilitating the university transition programs including informational orientation sessions that focused on the first-year experience, advising sessions and peer-led social support groups.
- Organizing the counselling centres and student service centres with the professional counsellors specialized in guidance and counselling to meet with the first-year students on campus during the initial weeks of school to assist their integration as much as possible.
- Assessing students in an understanding of resources, comfort with classes and development of social circles and connecting students with peers and programs that enhance student's sense of belonging.
- Making supportive financial part-time jobs and scholarships for students from low-income families and outstanding students for their financial need to pursue their following academic years.
- From the present study, freshmen from Sagaing University of Education were the least in loneliness among four universities. Thus, activities from Sagaing University of Education should be learned and support programs from it should be imitated. In this Sagaing University of Education, social activities such as Language Club, Health Care Team, Philanthropic Team, Sport Team, Reading Team, Art Team and Religious Institutions can give many types of effective social supports. Freshmen from Sagaing University of Education gain the needed supports from these social organizations, groups and their hostel life so these activities can buffer the freshmen's loneliness. In addition, freshmen from Sagaing University of Education are less worried than freshmen from other three universities. This university's teaching strategies, classroom management, timetables, restrict disciplines, academic stress and other supportive conditions to the students are different from other universities. Freshmen from other universities should be supported with warm, interactive relationship with the university activities; emotional outlets activities for example group discussion, acceptance for their entering behaviour to their universities. Causes of loneliness and worry should also be studied more broadly besides the reasons of being far from home, moving to a new place, moving too often and travelling often. Coping strategies for loneliness and influences of loneliness and worry should be explored by different approaches for all university students and all high school students. Reactions towards overcoming loneliness should be researched besides giving social supports. More studies are needed to conduct many aspects to reduce worry associated with stressful problems. Above suggestions for further researches should be examined in all education universities, education colleges and all basic education schools with representative participants. To summarize, this research reported that the impact of social support on loneliness and worry among university freshmen in Sagaing District, Myanmar. The further researchers are hoped to explore the other impacts on loneliness and worry not only in university freshmen but also in other year and final year university students in Myanmar more specifically.

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