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## Homesickness and Friend-sickness as Predictors of Loneliness among Year One Students of Enugu State University of Science and Technology

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### Abstract

*This study explored the roles of homesickness and friend-sickness in determining loneliness among undergraduate students. Two hundred and forty-four (244) participants comprising 140 females and 104 males were part of the study. The participants' age ranged from 18 to 26 years with a mean age of 21.52 years and a standard deviation of 2.01 years. All the participants lived with their parents before they gained admission. The participants were selected among the population of year one students living in the hostels of Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani – Enugu State using convenience sampling technique. Loneliness questionnaire, Homesickness questionnaire and Friendsickness questionnaire developed by Agu (2013) with a reliability coefficient of .54, .52 and .80 were obtained respectively. Cross sectional research design was adopted while Pearson product moment correlation coefficient statistics result yielded revealed a significant positive relationship  $r = .88, P < .01$ , between homesickness and loneliness; a significant positive relationship  $r = .89, P < .01$ , between friendsickness and loneliness among year one students of ESUT. This study has revealed other significant variables in the development of loneliness among adolescents. The result will also educate stakeholders in the education sector to further explore the effect loneliness could have on the overall academic performance of undergraduates.*

**Keywords:** loneliness, aloneness, depression, anxiety, homesickness

### Introduction

Loneliness, defined as “a distressing discrepancy between desired and actual levels of social contact,” (Rubin, 2017p.1853) affects people of all ages. Recent research has recognized loneliness as a public health hazard because of its association with a wide range of conditions, including hypertension, cardiovascular disease, cerebrovascular disease, Alzheimer disease, depression, and insomnia (Ong, Uchino, Wethington, 2016). Securing admission and entering the University is one of the most exciting changes that any young adult will go through. Students are asked to leave their family, friends and home to join a new community with different rules, expectations and opportunities. Transition from high school to higher education is an important period in student's social as well as academic lives from the adjustment point of view (Oswald & Clark, 2003). For some students, this transition is fun and exciting, but for others, it might be scary and often the emotional baggage of friendsickness and homesickness makes the first year of the university harder to get through. Students may have some opportunity they value for growth and change and are faced with various problems including social, personal and academic adjustments. Universities offer a new environment for students to try new identities and social ties, form new activities, interests and social relationship. On the other hand, the process of adjustment to a new environment is considered on important

psycho-social process that may affect in different ways the performance and functioning of an individual. (Ceyhan, 2006; Dyson & Renk, 2006; Jackson, Pratt, Hunsberger & Pancer, 2005; Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger & Alisat, 2004).

Paul and Brier (2001) defined friendsickness as the pressing relational challenge for new a student that is induced by moving away from an established network of friends. It is also the preoccupation with and concern for the loss of pre-college friendships. They miss the comfort of peers who 'get' them without having to struggle to gain acceptance. The impacts of peer relationships are the key to interpersonal adjustment not just in childhood but later in life (Youniss, 1980). The environment in which a child is put in can change or mold his personality. According to Harris (1998), this environment is not the environment parents create for their children in the boundaries of their homes but rather the outside environment that the child shares with his peer. Friendship, is therefore, not only seen as an intimate and twisting relationship with someone, it is now viewed as a relationship that has a major influence on the personal and social development of a person. Also, friendships are now regarded as a part of a person's life that can mold their personality. Without friends, one would never be directly exposed to the many key aspects of growing up in a normal and healthy manner. Most children and adolescents have someone they consider as their best friend. They are most likely the friends who have the most impact on this individuals' link to the outside world. This is the friend whom the child is closest with throughout their pre-adolescent and perhaps adolescent years. Because of the presence of this peer, the child has an easier time during adolescence (which can be a difficult time for many young people) (Youniss, 1980). Since a best friend is so important, why were not more people concerned with the transition of adolescents' best friendships from secondary school to the university?

In their research, Paul and Brier (2001) discovered that friendsickness tended to increase as pre-college concerns increase and also when one had more pre-college friends in their college social network. They concluded that relationships that were formed as a child will never be the same again once friends leave for college. Oswald and Clark (2003) found out that if the student maintains his/her best friendships throughout the course of his/her first year of college, he/she is less likely to suffer social loneliness and more likely to adjust to life in a new environment. In the present study, the researcher tries to determined how friendsickness and homesickness predicts loneliness among first year students.

Homesickness is fairly common among college students, but it is also fairly short lived (Brewin, Furnham & Howes, 1989). Homesickness, simply put, is a pining for one's family or friends when not with them. These feelings of loss are a natural reaction to the absence of our family, friends, and familiar surroundings (Archer, Ireland, Amos, Broad, & Currid, 1998). However, this does not make it an easy process to go through. Students who suffer from homesickness usually have physical symptoms, greater depression and anxiety, and difficulty with memory and concentration (Van Tilburg, Vingerhoets, Van Heck, & Kirschbaum, 1999). Increased social anxiety and less social support are also predictive of greater levels of homesickness (Urani, Miller, Johnson, & Petzel, 2003). These symptoms can be more or less problematic based on the severity of the homesickness, but even for mild cases these symptoms are not things that can be ignored or dismissed. Social problems behaviour problems, coping deficits, academic difficulties, low self-esteem obsessive thoughts and behaviours etc, are some of the effects of homesickness (Rice, 2009).

Homesickness is also most prominent in younger students who are adjusting to college for the first time (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). These symptoms can dramatically interfere with students' adjustment to the new environment and can have negative social and academic consequences. The transition of living at home and living away from home represents a significant transition for first year students. Although some new students have previous experience with travel or other trips away from home without the parents, most of them face the challenges of independently managing their lives, establishing new friends and adjusting to new schedules and succeeding in various academic and artistic pursuits. The university environment also stirs nearly every student's innate desire to belong and to feel socially accepted, when this need is not easily met, intense homesickness can occur (Thurber & Walton, 2007). Homesickness is a normative response to separation from a familiar environment.

Given that all people seek happiness and all people desire to be happy, the feelings of loneliness as registered among adolescents, young adults is really a major problem to the society (Marcoen, Gossens & Caes, 1987; Sippola & Bukowski, 1999). Although there is a general core to loneliness – the evolution of discrepancy between the desired and achieved network of relationships as a negative experience – the forms of loneliness and their antecedents vary enormously according to personal and contextual determinants. Loneliness is the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of friends/social relationships is deficient in some important way either qualitatively or quantitatively (Periman & Peplau, 1981). Loneliness is a subjective and negative experience, the outcome of a cognitive evaluation of the match between quantity and quality of existing relationship and relationship standard. De Jong Gierveld (1987) suggests that loneliness is a discrepancy between the social and interpersonal relationship a student has and the relationship the students wants. It is not about the number of relationships because each person's needs are different. Rather, students feel lonely when their interpersonal needs are not met.

Several types of loneliness can be distinguished. Zimmerman (1986) differentiated between a positive and negative type of loneliness. The positive type of loneliness is related to situations such as the voluntary withdrawal of goals like meditating, reflection, etc. The negative type of loneliness is related to the unpleasant and inadmissible lack of personal relationship and contacts with important others. The present study is interested in the negative type of loneliness. Weiss (1973), also identified two types of loneliness; Emotional and Social loneliness. Emotional loneliness often occurs after the loss of an intimate relationship such as that of a parent and child (Netto & Barros, 2003) or that of a partner or best friend. It seems this type of loneliness will manifest itself as homesickness or friendsickness when students get to college. Social loneliness is often experienced by college age students and is related to the absence of a wider network of friends with common interests. This type of loneliness can also manifest as friendsickness. Some students find it difficult to make friends when adjusting to college life. They go through a period of when they feel detached from the social network of peers (Nettos & Barros, 2003). When students make the transition to college, they lack a friend or companion to share their day to day life with. This lack of intimate relationship/friendship can lead to emotional and social loneliness (Roux & Conner, 2001).

Students who have higher levels of loneliness in transition to university may also experience loss or lack of social relationships, social network and social ties that may affect

directly or indirectly the levels of adjustment of the student, previous studies indicate that loneliness and adjustment correlate with different measures of personal relationships

Uncertainty reduction theory discusses the processes through which individuals go to reduce uncertainty about one another when placed in an unknown or unfamiliar environment (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Homesickness and friendsickness directly relates to this theory in the processes in which individuals face homesickness and friendsickness when placed in an unfamiliar place and how this affects their uncertainty reduction. Particular situations where Uncertainty Reduction Theory, Homesickness and friendsickness can be viewed in atmospheres where the individual is relocated to a new environment with new peers for an abbreviated amount of time or permanently (e.g. summer camps, boarding schools, military, and college campuses).

Social penetration theory (Altman, & Taylor, 1973) discusses self-disclosure and the processes in which individuals disclose personal information about themselves. This is important to homesickness in the aspect that individuals will be more likely to self-disclose when they are in an environment that they are familiar or comfortable with, such as “home”.

On the other hand, existentialist theory (Satre, 1989) sees loneliness as the essence of being human. Each human being comes into the world alone, travels through life as a separate person and ultimately dies alone. Coping and accepting this and learning how to direct our lives with some degree of grace and satisfaction is the human condition. Some philosophers such as Satre believe in epistemic loneliness in which loneliness is a part of the human condition and because of the paradox between the desire of man’s consciousness to have meaning in life conflicting with the isolation and nothing of the universe. Most theorists argue that feeling lonely results from deficiencies in a person’s social relationship either qualitatively or quantitatively (Peplau & Perlman, 1982).

Rezaee, Irvani, Katak, Eskardari and Dadashi (2013) presents an empirical investigation on the effects of timidity and loneliness among female students who attend in one of Islamic Azad University, Shehrezha unit. The proposal study selects 60 students out of 400 female students who were living in the university dormitory. The survey uses Pearson correlation ratio between timidity and loneliness and this survey indicates that the Pearson correlation ratio is expected to  $r = 0.11$  with  $p\text{-value} = 0.33$ . Therefore, they concluded that there is no meaningful relationship between timidity and loneliness when the level of significance is 5%.

In another study; Fontaine, Yang, Burks, Dodge, Price, Pettite and Bate (2009) examined the mediating role of loneliness (assessed by self report at time2, Grade 6) in the relation between early social preference (assessed by peer report at Time 1; Kindergarten through Grade 3) and adolescent anxious/depressed symptoms (assessed by mother, teacher, and self report at Time 3; Grades 7-9). Five hundred and eighty five (585) boys and girls (48% female; 16% African American) from three geographical sites of the child development project were followed from kindergarten through Grade 9. Loneliness partially mediated and uniquely incremented the significant effect of low social preference in childhood on anxious/depressed symptoms in adolescence, controlling for early anxious/depressed symptoms at Time 1. Findings are critical to understanding the psychological function through which early social experiences affect youths’ maladjusted development. Directions for basic and intervention research are discussed and implications for treatment are addressed.

In addition Stednitz and Epkins (2006) examined in 102 mother-daughter dyads whether (a) girls' social skills and loneliness are related to girl's social anxiety, after adjusting for girls' depressive symptoms, and (b) mothers' social functioning (social anxiety social skills and loneliness) is related to girls' social anxiety, after accounting for girls social functioning (social skills and loneliness) and mothers' and girls' depressive symptoms. After accounting for girls' depression, girls' loneliness (social skills) was related to girls' self reported social anxiety and girls' social skills (and not loneliness) was related to mothers' reports of girls' social anxiety. Mothers' social functioning accounted for significant variance in girls social anxiety, beyond that accounted for by girls' social functioning and mothers' and girls' depression. Mothers' loneliness and fear of negative evaluation showed significant relations to girls' social anxiety when variance attributable to other variables was partial out whereas mother's social skills and social avoidance and distress did not.

Bekhet, Zauszniewski and Nakhla, (2008) explicate the concept of loneliness through the examination of its conceptual definition and uses, defining attributes, related concepts and empirical references. They carried out their review using hand search and database as sources of information. According to them, because loneliness is commonly encountered in nursing situations, the information provided serve as framework for assessment, planning, intervention and evaluation of clients.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although psychologists have been concerned with loneliness since the 1950s, it has recently become the focus of substantial research. Despite its pervasiveness in society, the experience of loneliness for college/university students especially new intake has generated little conceptual discussion and empirical substantiation. Therefore, to add to the body of knowledge and empirical basket of this construct, present study deem it necessary to study the influence some variable such as friend-sickness and homesickness will have on loneliness among year one students of Enugu State University of Science and Technology. The aims of this study are to examine whether homesickness and friend-sickness will predict loneliness among year one university students of ESUT.

### **Hypotheses**

Homesickness will significantly predict loneliness among year one university students of ESUT.

Friendsickness will significantly predict loneliness among year one university students of ESUT.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

A total of 244 participants comprising 140 female s and 104 males were used. The participants were within the age range of 18 – 26 years with a mean age of 21.52 years and a standard deviation of 2.01 years. All the participants lived with their parents before they gained admission. The participants were selected among the population of year one students living in the hostel of Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani – Enugu State using available sampling technique.

## **Instrument**

Three sets of instruments were used for the study: Loneliness questionnaire, Homesickness questionnaire and Friendsickness questionnaire

### **Loneliness Questionnaire**

This is a 20 item questionnaire designed by Agu (2013) to measure the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of friends/social relationships is deficient in some important ways either qualitatively or quantitatively. The items of the questionnaire has both reverse and direct scores. The reverse scores are items 2,3,4,7,8,11,12,13,14,15,17,18 while the direct scores are 1,5,6,9,10,16,19 and 20. The questionnaire has a four response option of never (1 point), rarely (2 points), sometimes (3 points) and always (4 points). A highest possible score of 80 and a least possible score of 20 can be obtained by any given respondent. Thus, high score indicate a low experience of loneliness while a low score indicate high experience of loneliness. The mean score obtained by the participants is 50. Therefore, scores above 50 indicates low experience of loneliness while scores below 50 indicate high experience of loneliness.

Face/content validity was ascertained by exposing the items of the questionnaire to 5 psychology lecturers who served as expert judges. Thus, items accepted by 50% of the lecturers were accepted. Hence, the initial 27 items were reduced to 20 items. Agu (2013) established a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of .54 in a pilot study using 100 participants (50 males and 50 females) between 20-25 years from the population of student living in the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus.

### **Homesickness Questionnaire:**

It is a 20-item questionnaire with a liker type response format of not at all, weak, moderate, strong and very strong designed by Agu (2013) to measure the degree of functional impairment caused by an actual separation from home and attachment objects, such as parents. The items of the questionnaire were worded positively with not at All 1 point and very strong -5points. Thus a least possible score of 20 and a highest possible score of 100 could be obtained by any respondent. Hence, score 20-60 indicate no homesickness and score between 61-100 indicate homesickness. The researcher obtained face/content validity by exposing the items of the questionnaire to 5 psychology lecturers and items accepted by 50% of them were accepted. Hence, the initial 24 items were reduced to 20 items.

To obtain the reliability, a pilot study was carried out Agu (2013) established a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of .52 using 100 participants (50 males and 50 females) between 20-25 years from the population of students living in the hostel, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus.

### **Friendsickness Questionnaire:**

This is a 10 item questionnaire with liket type response format of not at all like me 1 point, somewhat unlike me 2 points, somewhat like me 3 points and very much like me 4 points designed by Agu (2013) to measure the degree of languished experienced by new university students that is induced by moving away from an established network of friends. All the items are direct scores and are worded positively with not at all like me at I point and very much like me- 4 points. Hence, a least possible score of 10 and a highest possible score of 40 could be

obtained by any given participant. Thus, scores between 10-25 indicates no friend sickness while score between 26-40 indicates friend sickness.

The items of the questionnaire were validated on a facial/content base by exposing the items to 5 lecturers who served as expert judges. Therefore, items accepted by 50% of the judges were accepted. Thus, the initial 16 items were reduced to 10 items. Agu (2013) established a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of .80 in a pilot study using 100 participants (50 males and 50 females) between 20-25 years from the population of students living in the hostel, University of Nigeria Enugu campus.

### Procedure

The researchers, selected 275 first year student; living in the hostel of Enugu State University of Science of technology using simple random sampling. The researcher went to the girl's hostel while the male classmate took the boy's hostel. Individual testing was used because the participants filled out their questionnaires individually on their own. This exercise lasted for 2 months. Out of the 275 copies of questionnaires gathered, Only 244 that were correctly filled and returned were used for data analysis, thereby discarding 31 copies of the copies of the questionnaires.

### Design/Statistics

A survey research design was adopted because the researcher shared questionnaires without manipulating any variable. Hence, Pearson product moment correlation coefficient statistics was used to analyze the data to test the hypotheses.

### Results

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics and inter correlations among variable, (independent variables: friendsickness and homesickness and dependent variable: loneliness)

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3
Loneliness	58.25	9.10	1	.80	.84
Friendsickness	26.11	5.23	.80	1	.81
Homesickness	57.27	11.90	.84	.81	1

Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2tailed).

The correlation table revealed that the predictor friendsickness has a significant correlation with loneliness ( $r=.80$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

Also the 2<sup>nd</sup> predictor variable homesickness has a significant correlation with loneliness ( $r=.84$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Both predictor variables: friendsickness and homesickness have a significant positive correlation with loneliness.

Moreover, the mean and standard deviation of the two predictor variables (friendsickness and homesickness) are as follows: ( $x = 26.11$ ,  $SD = 5.23$  and  $x = 57.27$ ,  $SD = 11.90$ ) respectively. Homesickness and friendsickness have a significant positive correlation ( $r=.807$ ,  $P<.01$ ).



**Table 2:** Model summary table of friendsickness, homesickness and loneliness.

Model	R	R squared	Adjusted R square	Std error of the estimate	Change statistics				
					R squared change	F change	df1	df2	Sigt change
	.86	.74	.74	5.10	.74	346.07	2	241	.000

a. predictor (constant), homesickness, friendsickness.

The result of the regression analysis presence in table 2 shows that the predictor variable accounted for 74.5% ( $R^2$  change) variance on loneliness which is significant (F. change (2,241) = 346.073,  $p < .001$ )

**Table 3:** Regression coefficient table of friendsickness and homesickness as predictors of loneliness.

Model	Under standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		T	Sig
	B	Std. error	Beta			
Constant	14.18	1.72			8.24	.000
Friendsickness	.66	.02	.345		6.21	.000
Homesickness	.47	.05	.559		10.08	.000

a. Dependent variable loneliness.

Table three above (coefficient table) reveals that the regression equation friendsickness showed significant predictor to loneliness ( $B = .345$ ,  $P < .001$ ), thus the alternate hypothesis is accepted. Also homesickness showed significant predictor of loneliness ( $B = .559$ ,  $P < .001$ ), therefore, the alternate hypothesis is accepted.

## Discussion

Obviously the two hypotheses tested in the study yielded significant outcome. The first hypothesis tested which stated that "homesickness will significantly predict loneliness among year on students of ESUT" was accepted. In other words, homesickness as a variable significantly correlated with loneliness among year university students of ESUT. This is based on the fact that the alternate hypothesis tested was accepted. The outcome of the study shows that students who manifest high degree of homesickness experience higher degree of loneliness compared to those with low homesickness.

The study revealed that most of the students who manifested loneliness in school are suffering from homesickness. This may not be surprising because a child who is so attached to the parents will find it difficult leaving out of them for any reason including students. This may also be attributed to why most people find it difficult to study abroad or study in a state that is very far from their own. In addition to that, some students do not travel every week to see their parents just to cushion or reduce the degree of loneliness in them. On the other hand, a student whose home is not enjoyable may be very happy leaving the home for another destination. For

instance, most children which see their being at home as imprisonment will be very happy leaving their home and may not complain of loneliness as a result of leaving home.

The outcome of this study is in consonance with the finding of earlier studies. Wilcox, Munn and Fyrie-Gauld (2005) correlated friendsickness, homesickness and loneliness among college freshers. In addition, Fisher, Murray and Frazer (1985) reported that distance of relocation and features of new environment combined to evoke the feeling of homesickness and loneliness. Other studies that support the present study include; Stroebe, Van Vilet, Hewstones and Willis (2002); Barker, (1998).

Also, the second hypothesis tested which stated that “friendsickness will significantly predict loneliness among first year students of ESUT” was accepted. In other words, friendsickness as a factor significantly correlated with loneliness among first year students of ESUT. This is based on the fact that the alternate hypothesis tested was accepted. From the data analysis, year one students who manifest high degree of friendsickness show higher degree of loneliness compared to those with low/no friendsickness. The reason for this may be attributed to the fact that those students who manifest higher degree of friendsickness find it difficult to adjust to the new environment, they find it difficult making new friends thereby exposing themselves to loneliness. On the other hand, those who manifest low/no friendsickness adapt easily to the new environment which eventually help them make new friends. Thus, the presence of these new friends cushion the experience of loneliness. Those with high degree of friendsickness may always live in the memories of their old-peer mates which makes them feel depressed especially when remembered that it will no longer be as usual. A year one student who gets to the university, makes new friends as quick as possible may not really complain of loneliness because the new friends are always there to chat and play with. Unlike one who finds it difficult making new friends.

However, the outcome of this study is in line with the findings of earlier researcher Shams (2001) reported that missing home and friends at home subject college students to feelings of loneliness. Other studies that report same include cutrona (2002) who said that loneliness normally results from lack of social motivation from friends. Derlega and Margulis (2002) Shaver, Furnam and Buhermester (2005); Paul and Brier (2001) share similar observation in their studies. Therefore, friendsickness irrespective of culture has a strong influence on loneliness among new college/University students across the globe. Both variables (friendsickness and homesickness) have positive predictors to loneliness. This implies that as friendsickness and homesickness are increasing, loneliness is also increasing.

### **Implications of the Finding**

This study has obvious implication. First, the study will serve as an empirical study for further researcher who will carry out similar study. In addition, the study is an eye opener to understanding that factors such as friendsickness and homesickness are strong correlates of loneliness among year one university students of ESUT. From the outcome of this study, the researcher may predict that the outcome of this study will guide stakeholders in the education system on ways to control loneliness among students. This is very important because a student with a high degree of loneliness will not do well academically owing to the fact that he/she will always feel insecure. This study has also paved way for stakeholders in the education sector to further explore the effect loneliness could have on the overall academic performance of the

study. Finally, the study will help the students to know when they are experiencing homesickness and friendsickness with a view to controlling them.

### **Limitations of the Study**

No doubt, the present study has obvious limitations:

First, only 244 students were used out of myriads of year one students living in the hostel. Another constrain in this study was the difficulty the researcher encountered in getting the attention of the students in responding to the questionnaires. Hence, the researcher used rapport and assured the participants of confidentiality which enhanced data collection.

### **Suggestions for further Study**

Based on the outcome of this study, the researcher hereby suggest that future researchers should carryout similar study in other universities and even in secondary schools to determine the cross validity of the present study. They should also increase their sample size. The researcher also urges future researchers to check the influence of homesickness and friendsickness on academic performance. There is also the need to check the relationship between loneliness and academic performance.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Homesickness was found to correlate significantly with loneliness among year one undergraduate students of ESUT with those who manifest high degree of homesickness showing a higher manifestation of loneliness than those with low degree of homesickness. In addition, friendsickness correlated significantly with loneliness with those who show a higher degree of friendsickness experiencing a higher degree of loneliness than those with low friendsickness.

However, based on the outcome of this study, the researcher hereby concludes that homesickness as well as friendsickness are strong correlate of loneliness among year one university undergraduate students of ESUT.

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