Dimensions of Workplace Loneliness: A Review Study

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Abstract

Human beings are social animals, so they need affiliations or social relationships. If these needs are not fulfilled, they feel lonely. According to a study, a person can feel lonely at any time during the life period, whether it's childhood, adulthood, or old age. A review of the literature suggests that loneliness in the workplace has received less attention from researchers and practitioners. So, there is a need to study loneliness in today's turbulent work environments. This study aims to provide a brief review of the concept of workplace loneliness and its dimensions. Workplace loneliness is a feeling when employees do not feel satisfied with their social contacts at their workplace. The results of the review reveal that workplace loneliness: is a multi-dimensional construct comprising of four dimensions namely: emotional, social, interpersonal, and existential loneliness.

Keywords: Workplace Loneliness, Emotional Loneliness, Social Loneliness, Interpersonal loneliness, Existential Loneliness

1. Introduction

Human beings are considered social animals, so they need to have social contacts or social relationships. If social affiliation needs are not fulfilled, ultimately people will experience feelings of loneliness (Weiss, 1973). Loneliness is one of the most basic and influential human experiences (Wood, 1986). Loneliness could be explained as a sense of being in distant or removed from others, which shows a negative psychological mood (Rook, 1984). Cacioppo et al. (2006) defined loneliness as "a complex set of feelings that occur when intimate and social needs are not adequately met".

Despite a plethora of resources, including psychiatric care, loneliness remains a big issue.

People of all ages are impacted by it these days, whether they are children, professionals, students, married couples, or others. Out of all these, loneliness among working people is the least studied and is currently raising major social concerns. Workplace loneliness is a perception when someone is not able to fulfill their social needs at their workplace, and it is frequently thought of as having two different aspects: emotional deprivation and social companionship (Wax et al., 2022). Some authors believe in different aspects of workplace loneliness which includes interpersonal loneliness and existential loneliness (Tian, 2021; Tilburg, 2021; Jiang et al., 2022). There is no consensus in the literature on the dimensions of workplace loneliness. The present study conducts a review of previous studies and considers all the dimensions of workplace loneliness in the literature.

The term "workplace loneliness" describes a person's inability to bridge the gap between the intended and actual interpersonal relationships at work, either in terms of quantity or quality (Jiang et al., 2022). There

is an old and popular UCLA loneliness scale to measure loneliness. UCLA is a single-dimensional scale with 20 items. Sarah Wright (2005) developed a scale for workplace loneliness with two dimensions: emotional deprivation and lack of social companionship. Mao Chonglin had constructed a scale for workplace loneliness with two different aspects, interpersonal loneliness and existential loneliness. So, there are four dimensions explaining workplace loneliness in past studies.

2. Need and Purpose of the study

Workplace loneliness is difficult to define, as it has different aspects to measure. It can be measured by four different types of loneliness, Emotional, Social, Interpersonal, and Existential. Emotional loneliness occurs due to the absence of a close emotional attachment (Degges, 2019). A person could experience social loneliness when he does not have a wide circle of social support (Degges, 2019). When a person feels socially isolated or perceives himself removed from a significant other, he is said to have interpersonal loneliness (Serani, 2017). A person surrounded by a lot of people could still feel existential loneliness (Larsson et al., 2018).

The purpose of this study is to examine the concept of workplace loneliness and its dimensions. Very little research has been done on all four dimensions of loneliness at work altogether in a study.

3. Dimensions of workplace loneliness

Emotional Loneliness

Emotional loneliness is a kind of feeling when you feel emotionally cut off from the people around you or are unable to establish a meaningful connection with them (Tilburg, 2021). Many studies have included emotional loneliness as the dimension of workplace loneliness (Wright, 2005; Wright, 2006; Ayazlar & Guzel, 2014; Akcit, 2017; Zhou, 2018; Uslu, 2021; Jung & Yoon, 2022; Wax et al, 2022).

Social Loneliness

A person feels this kind of loneliness due to the absence of social networks and a broader group of contacts (Yanguas, 2018). A lot of past studies on loneliness or workplace loneliness have included social loneliness as a dimension (Wright, 2005; Wright, 2006; Ayazlar & Guzel, 2014; Akcit, 2017; Zhou, 2018; Uslu, 2021; Jung & Yoon, 2022; Wax et al., 2022)

Interpersonal Loneliness

Interpersonal loneliness refers to a qualitative and quantitative dissatisfaction with the interpersonal relationship with others (Lam & Lau, 2012). Interpersonal loneliness has been taken in few studies as a dimension of workplace loneliness (Tian, 2021; Jiang et al., 2022)

Existential Loneliness

Existential loneliness refers to a feeling of broader separation, particularly when people lose meaning in life (Tilburg, 2021). A person could overcome other types of loneliness but existential loneliness has no permanent solution as per the phenomenological approach (Mayers & Svartberg, 2001). Limited research has been done on existential loneliness. In a few researches, existential loneliness has been taken as the dimension of loneliness (Tian, 2021; Tilburg, 2021; Jiang et al., 2022).

Many researchers have proposed emotional loneliness and social companionship as dimensions of workplace loneliness (Wright, 2005; Wright, 2006; Ayazlar & Guzel, 2014; Akcit, 2017; Zhou, 2018; Uslu, 2021; Jung & Yoon, 2022; Wax et al, 2022). However, few studies have also added dimensions of interpersonal and existential loneliness to the concept of workplace loneliness. Table 1 shows the dimensions of workplace loneliness taken in the past studies.

Table 1: Overview of dimensions of workplace loneliness in the literature

Author(s)	Concept	Definition	Dimensionality of Workplace Loneliness
Hakan Ozcelik & Sigal G. Barsade (2018)	Workplace loneliness	It is an affiliated relationship that is related to job-related outcomes.	• Uni dimensional
Serkan Deniz (2019)	Workplace loneliness	Loneliness in the workplace can have a negative impact on the success of an organization and harmony in the workplace.	Two dimensional: • Emotional deprivation • Social companionship
Guomei Tian, Lin Pu & Han Ren (2021)	Workplace loneliness	Loneliness is a bad, subjective emotion brought on by a cognitive assessment of the interpersonal relationship's shortcomings, either qualitatively or quantitatively.	Two dimensional: • Interpersonal loneliness • Existential loneliness
Hyo Sun Yung, Min Kyong Song & Hye Hyun Yoon (2021)	Workplace loneliness	Workplace loneliness is harmful for employees as well as organizations, as it impacted employees' engagement and commitment negatively.	Two dimensional: • Emotional deprivation • Social companionship
Amy Wax, et al., (2022)	Workplace loneliness	A lack of relatedness fulfilment, since lonely people believe that their present social connections fall short of their needs.	Two- dimensional: • Emotional Deprivation • Lack of Social Companionship
Chi Chiao, Kuan-Chen Lin & Laura Chyu (2022)	Workplace loneliness	Loneliness among working people may be influenced by factors such as frequency of alcohol intake at work, work-life balance, and workplace contentment.	Two dimensional: • Social loneliness • Emotional loneliness
Jiang et al., (2022)	Workplace loneliness	The term "workplace loneliness" describes a person's inability to bridge the gap between the intended and actual interpersonal relationships at work, either in terms of quantity or quality.	Two dimensional: • Interpersonal loneliness • Existential loneliness

Panagiotis V. Kloutsiniotis et al., (2022)	Workplace loneliness	It is interpreted as a "tough sensation that situationally resulted from a lack of desired social relationships in a workplace."	• Uni dimensional
Shuyun Du, Yinan Ma & Jeoung Yul Lee (2022)	Workplace loneliness	The experience of being stripped of one's need to manage relationships with others and one's sense of self within an organization is known as workplace loneliness.	• Uni dimensional
Teresa C, D'Oliveira & Liana Persico (2022)	Workplace loneliness	When employees do not have fair interpersonal connections at work.	Two dimensional: • Emotional deprivation • Social companionship
William J. Becker et al., (2022)	Workplace loneliness	Unpleasant emotion that develops when a worker believes that their intended and real social connections with co-workers don't match	• Uni dimensional
Yoon-Sik Jung, Hyo-Sun Jung & Hye-Hyun Yoon (2022)	Workplace loneliness	Workplace loneliness defined as a construct with two dimensions emotional and social domains.	Two dimensional: • Emotional Deprivation • Lack of Social Companionship
Jiaying Jin & Hiroshi Ikeda (2023)	Workplace loneliness	Discontent with the discrepancy between ideal and real relationships	Two dimensional: • Emotional deprivation • Social companionship

4. Discussion

UCLA loneliness scale (Peplau, 1978) was the most, popular single-dimensional scale to measure loneliness. There were many revisions to this scale (Russell D,1980; Russell, 1996). This scale was popularly used by researchers to measure workplace loneliness. Besides this, in many researches, workplace loneliness had been measured by adopting the scale of Wright et al.,2006, which explains workplace loneliness with two dimensions emotional deprivation and social companionship (Amy wax et al., 2022; Jung and Yoon, 2022; Deniz, 2019 and many more). Olivera and Persico (2023) also adopted scale of Wright, Burt, and Strongman's (2006) Loneliness in the workplace scale, which has two dimensions, emotional deprivation and social companionship Some researchers use interpersonal loneliness and existential loneliness to explain workplace loneliness and adopted the scale of Mao Chonglin, (2013) to measure workplace loneliness.

5. Conclusion and future research

The concept of workplace loneliness got less consideration and less discussion, even though it is experienced by most of the employees these days. Loneliness could be experienced by individuals at any age, but the type or nature of loneliness could differ. Rokach and Brock (1997) have studied the literature on loneliness at different stages of life and recommended that loneliness could prevail during childhood, adulthood, at the time of retirement and old age. However, very little research has been done during the stage of individuals where career and family roles are more challenging, due to limited time and resources. Therefore, more research needs to be done on this topic.

As some scales measure workplace loneliness with different dimensions, emotional and social loneliness, and interpersonal and existential loneliness. Some uni-dimensional scales are also present for explaining workplace loneliness.

However, no scale has been constructed and validated with all the four dimensions of workplace loneliness mentioned in the literature. So, in the future, researchers can do work in this context.

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