

## **LONELINESS IN SCHOOL: SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S PERSPECTIVE ABOUT WHAT, WHY AND HOW**

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### **Abstract**

Loneliness is a mental state that is destructive, a stressful experience, painful and unpleasant. Loneliness happens when someone doesn't feel the intimate relationship both quantitatively as well as qualitatively. Loneliness is divided into two, emotional loneliness and social loneliness. In General, changes in physical, psychological and cognitive in teenagers sparked various circumstances that contribute to loneliness. Studies have shown the negative effects of loneliness such as physical health problems, lack of psychological well-being, social problems and even trigger teenagers to commit suicide. The school counselor should be alert to the symptoms of loneliness at school. In accordance with its functions, school counselor has a strategic position to detect up to cope with the case of the lonely. The qualitative descriptive study was designed to describe the counselor's perspective on issues of loneliness at school. This research used questionnaires that contained open-ended questions with answer forms exploratory. The respondent was the school counselor in secondary school who comes from 12 regencies and cities of five provinces in Indonesia. **Result:** most of the school counselor have not paid special attention to recognizing lonely students, not knowing their symptoms and effects, and have not learned yet how to cope. This is indicated by the limited response given by the counselor. There was no specific program to overcome loneliness in their schools. This study provides direction to those field practitioners, academics, and policy makers to take steps aimed at increasing the knowledge and skills of school counselors in dealing with cases of loneliness. Advanced research on various topics needed to enrich the study of loneliness in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Loneliness, Emotional Loneliness, Social Loneliness, Coping Strategies.

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Loneliness is a state of emotion that can be a barrier to social development and at the same time have an impact on physical health and mental state (Krause-parello, 2008, p. 66). Maintenance of social life strongly gives impact on life satisfaction. Therefore, the issue of loneliness is a threat to life satisfaction of students, both the present life and the future life. The school runs the educational efforts. With this effort, students are expected to have academic and non-academic achievement, socially skilled, and has a mature personality.

In fact, not all the individual shows the development of the ideal. Among them there are students who are stunted, left, alienated from these ideal circumstances, one is a lonely student. School counselor as a student "helper" has a strategic position to show his contribution to handling the lonely student. School counselors prioritize diagnosis as signposts in providing services. These diagnoses include mental states (psychological states), socio-emotional (social relationships with others) and instrumental (physical aspects such as living and health facilities) (Prayitno & Amti, 2004, p.133-214). With diagnostic skills, School counselors are deemed to have the ability to identify and alleviate cases of loneliness in schools.

This article contains results of preliminary research to see how the first perceptions of school counselor on the issue of loneliness at school. Counselors are given the opportunity to explore knowledge and describe their perceptions of lonely students about how the state of the lonely student, the causative factors, the impact, and the coping strategies. In the end of the questionnaire, asked also about the availability of the program in the school that is specifically used as a strategy to overcome loneliness. No training was provided to the counselor before the questionnaire was given.

## **2 LONELINESS**

### **2.1 Definition**

Loneliness is an unpleasant and distressing subjective phenomenon resulting from the lack of quality of one's social relationships, almost always accompanied by painful discomfort (Gerson & Perlman, 1979; Perlman & Peplau, 1981). Loneliness occurs in varying intensities and encompasses various circumstances and causes (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). The intense feeling of being empty, being in a state of being left behind, and being in a grief are the manifestation of loneliness (Dong, Chang, Wong, & Simon, 2012). Loneliness is a sense of distance from others, low relational value, and lack of friendship (Dong et al., 2012, p.151). So, loneliness is a state where one feels a very depressing feeling of emptiness as a result of the low quality of social relationships rather than the quantity or number of friends. The quality of friendship is more emphasized because loneliness can happen when someone is in the crowd.

### **2.2 Form of Loneliness**

Weiss divides loneliness into two forms, social loneliness and emotional loneliness (Dong et al., 2012). Emotional loneliness is a very painful form of isolation. Emotional loneliness is indicated by the weak intimacy of relationships due to the lack of close emotional bonding of someone close to and associated with a sense of emptiness and anxiety (Gierveld, 2006; Galanaki & Vassilopoulou, 2007). Social loneliness leads to a mixture of rejected or unacceptable circumstances, along with the presence of boredom (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). Social loneliness begins in the absence of a network of relationships and is associated with a sense of not belonging, life without purpose, marginalization and boredom (Russell, Cutrona, Rose, & Yurko, 1984; Galanaki & Vassilopoulou, 2007).

Not all kinds of loneliness happen for a long time. There are two states of loneliness to note, namely chronic loneliness and temporary loneliness which caused by the situation (Gerson & Perlman, 1979). In students, temporary loneliness can occur as he enters the beginning of the semester where students meet new friends, teachers, and school environments. Students who need more time to build comfort in new social relationships may feel temporary loneliness. Then, students who fail to build a relationship will be very vulnerable to feel the type of chronic loneliness. At school, lonely students are detected as individuals who have somatic complaints, vague habits at school hours and excessive absenteeism (Krause-Parello, 2008, p. 66).

### **2.3 The Causative Factors of Loneliness**

Loneliness is often triggered by the low intensity of social interaction (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). The most commonly recognized causes are the limited face-to-face contact, lack of physical interaction, and the weakness of the meaning of friendship (Krause-Parello, 2008, p. 66). Peplau, *et al.* (1982) describes the low self-esteem as a trigger for someone who feels lonely on two things. First, self-alienation that takes place within the psyche. Second, low self-esteem is followed by a set of attitudes and behaviors that impede satisfactory social interactions. In addition to low self-esteem, personality traits such as shyness, introvert, coward and low social skills contribute to strengthening loneliness levels (Krause-Parello, 2008, p. 67).

Individuals as social beings, their lives are influenced by external decisions derived from the individual around them. Decisions of parents to divorce, choosing to work with a busy schedule, living separately with other family members are a small part of external factors that can trigger loneliness (Ebesutani et al., 2015).

In addition, relocation (residence), a person's precious mortality, chronic illness, and long-term hospitalization are situations that also trigger individuals to feel lonely (Krause-Parello, 2008, p 67). In school life, difficulties in peer groups can contribute to increasing levels of loneliness. This difficulty can be caused by the destruction of individual beliefs to the peer group because of a lie committed by members of his group (Galanaki & Vassilopoulou, 2007, p.458). Birch & Ladd says that conflict is positively related to loneliness (Galanaki & Vassilopoulou, 2007, p 460).

## 2.4 The Impact of Loneliness

The lonely teenager, will appear as anxious individuals, have low levels of happiness and life satisfaction (Moore & Schultz, 1983; Ebesutani et al., 2015). This anxiety can also be social anxiety where students have difficulties to participate as part of the community. Loneliness can have an impact on the presence of poor lifestyle choices such as smoking, alcoholism, weight gain that can damage physical and emotional health (Dhanalaksmi, 2015, p. 218). Juvenile delinquency is also identified as the impact of loneliness (Perlman & Peplau, 1981, p 56). Juvenile delinquency tends to be easy to find in school. Over the next few years, this situation leads teens to poor health risks and low psychological well-being. Furthermore, depression is often identified as a serious impact of loneliness (Moore & Schultz, 1983; Dhanalaksmi, 2015). It is also mentioned that loneliness leads people to attempted suicide (Perlman & Peplau, 1981; Schinka, Van Dulmen, Bossarte, & Swahn, 2012).

## 3 METHOD

This research used a qualitative descriptive method in which researcher used questionnaire which contains an open question. Questions in the questionnaire were intended to collect information about school counselor's perceptions on loneliness issues at students in schools. The respondents were 30 school counselors from 12 regencies and cities from five provinces in Indonesia consist of Banten, DKI Jakarta, West Java, Central Java and West Sumatra. Respondents were 21 female and 7 male who taught in different secondary school.

## 4 RESULT

Some students will not admit that they feel painful loneliness because of the negative social stigma of a lonely experience. Students will tend to deny this situation and try to cover it up (Galanaki & Vassilopoulou, 2007, p 462). School counselor plays an important role in identifying lonely students. Based on the results of the questionnaire filling, this is the answer given by school counselors about the initial perception of loneliness. All the answers will be summarized and presented in graphs and tables.

### Question 1: Do you know the loneliness issue at school?

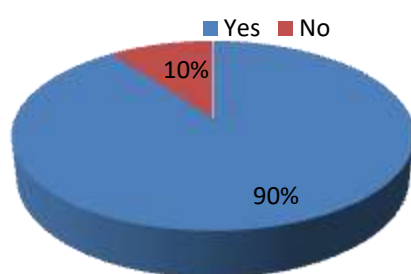


Fig. 1. Percentage of School counselors' answer toward loneliness issue at school

### Question 2: In your opinion, how is the students' condition who experiencing the loneliness?

Tabel 1. The summary answers toward the state of students who feeling lonely

Summary of Answer	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Not eager to learn	3	6.38
Isolate themselves/aloof	5	10.64
Seeking attention in negative ways	5	10.64
Hypochondriac	9	19.15
Being left by friends	1	2.13
Uncomfort being at school/ not enjoying the surroundings	2	4.26
Lack of interaction with the society (difficult to socialize) / less talk	7	14.89
Behaving indisciplin	1	2.13
Often daydreaming	5	10.64
Lack of social relation	1	2.13
Low achievements	1	2.13
Making mistakes	1	2.13
Showing unstable emotion	1	2.13
Feeling ignored/alienated	3	6.38
Seeking escape activities is like joining a gang	1	2.13
Looks nervous	1	2.13
The total of answers	47	100

The majority of counselors answer more than one characteristic. Based on the data in the charts, hypochondriac, isolating themselves, often daydreaming, seeking attention around, weakening the intensity of social interaction, and feeling neglected, are identified as characteristic of lonely students.

### Question 3: In your opinion, what are the causal factors that students feel lonely?

Table 2. The summary of the answers dealing with the causal factor why the students feel lonely

No.	Summary of Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Lack of parents attention	7	17.07
2	Less appreciation from the environment	1	2.44
3	Less quality of relationship	1	2.44
4	Isolated from friendship (shunned by friends)	4	9.76
5	Study time is too long / the number of school tasks	2	4.88
6	Not having close friends	8	19.51
7	Physically far away from parents	1	2.44
8	Less confidence/ embarrassed by their own self	4	9.76
9	Being the victim of parents' problems	2	4.88
10	Borring friends, counselors, and school environment	2	4.88
11	Difficult in adapting to the new environment	3	7.32
12	Bullying victim	1	2.44
13	Experiencing a certain trauma	1	2.44
14	Low communication ability	2	4.88
15	Conflict with peer friends	1	2.44
16	Losing valuable things from themselves	1	2.44
	The total of answers	41	100

Based on the table, in sequence, the factors that counselors often mentioned as loneliness factors are lack of friends, lack of attention from parents, self-embarrassment, isolation from friendship, and difficulty adapting to new environments.

**Question 4: In your opinion, What do you think impacts occur when students feel lonely?**

Table 3. Summary of answers to the impact of loneliness on students at school

Resume of Answer		Frequency	Percentage (%)
General Description	Spesific Description		
Poor learning performance	Have no focus on learning, have no spirit of learning, achievement declines.	12	30.77
Incondusive performance at school	Just busy with themselves, lazy to go to school, not participating in school activities, not comfortable at school, being a rebel in school.	8	20.51
Negative self-condition	Negative self-concept, depression, low self-esteem, juvenile delinquency, stress, being a closed person, unable to socialize.	12	30.77
Maladaptive performance in an environment	Isolate themselves, join a bad group, bullying victims, alienated from the group, disappointed with the environment.	7	17.95
The total of answers		39	100

Grouping into four circumstances is intended to make it easier to see the trend of the answer. This is because the counselor gave the identical same response even though it uses a different structure of the sentence. Based on the table, the impact of loneliness is more associated to poor learning performance and a negative self.

**Question 5: How is the way to overcome loneliness with students at school?**

Table 4. Summary of answers to possible efforts to overcome loneliness.

Summary of Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Given information on loneliness issues at school	1	2.78
Create peer groups that match the student's needs	3	8.33
Making peer group study strategy	1	2.78
Procurement and channeling of varied extracurricular activities and procurement of varied school activities	5	13.89
Giving special attention (motivating counselors, inviting discussion, listening to students' stories, becoming friends with students, etc.)	10	27.78
Skills training for socializing (how to build friendships)	3	8.33
Encourage other students to accompany lonely students	1	2.78
Providing assistance in Guidance and Counseling services (no specific description of how to provide assistance)	10	27.78
Collaborate with parents	2	5.56
The total of answers	36	100

Based on the table, paying special attention to lonely student and addressing the issue through a series of guidance and counseling services in schools be the most selected answer. In addition, the provision of

varied school activities and the distribution of students into a variety of extra-curricular activities to be one of the efforts of handling loneliness in students.

#### Question 6: Is there a special program for dealing with lonely student problems at school?

Percentage availability of Special Programs Overcoming Loneliness

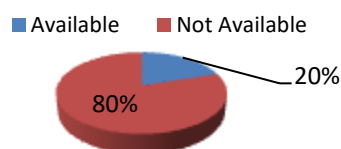


Fig. 2. Percentage availability of special programs at school to cope with loneliness

## 5 DISCUSSION

In General, based on the answers to the questionnaire, the majority of school counselors have heard of this issue. Although there is no information on whether they have specifically dealt with lonely cases

### Loneliness Manifestation

The counselor's perception of the state of the lonely student at school (see table 1) resulted in 16 variations of the answer. Some counselors have identified more than one characteristic. The state of the lonely students most often mentioned is a hypochondriac, lacking interaction with the environment, often aloof, daydreaming, and other people's attention in a negative way. If noticed, all variations of answers are specific state of loneliness those can be seen visually from the lonely student. Counselors have not mentioned this theoretically, but this is a good start to recognize the symptoms of loneliness in students in school.

Perlman & Peplau (1981, p. 34-37) describes the manifestations of loneliness in four categories, consist of affective, motivational and cognitive manifestations, behavior and social problems. First is an affective manifestation. A negative self-image is an affective manifestation. The study by Russel *et al.* (in Perlman & Peplau, 1981, p. 35) states that lonely individuals will appear to be angry one, closed, awkward, unhappy, unsatisfied, and more pessimistic. Second is a motivational and cognitive manifestation. Two contradictory things are presented in a motivational manifestation. Loneliness can encourage lonely individuals to build interactions despite the presence of anxiety in each of these interactions. Another thing is the opinion that loneliness can lower motivation. Cognitive motivation is explained by the discovery that lonely individuals are difficult to concentrate and easily split their attention (Perlman's study). The third is a manifestation of behavior. Three possible behaviors that appear in lonely individuals are who behave with anxiety or depression, low assertiveness, and difficulty telling about their loneliness to others. Fourth is a manifestation of social and medical problems. James Lynch (in Perlman & Peplau, 1981, p.37) explains that lonely individuals are susceptible to chronic illness. Brennan & Auslander in his research on American adolescents (in Perlman & Peplau, 1981, p. 37) found that loneliness was associated with poor grades, spending penalties from school, running away from home, theft, gambling, and vandalism. Based on these four forms of manifestation, what the counselor mentioned in the questionnaire included into the state of the lonely student. Among the four, the manifestation of medical issues has not been illustrated in the counselor's answer (table 1).

### Analysis of Counselor Perceptions Regarding the Causes and Impact of Loneliness Based on Framework Theory

It is important to distinguish between causative factors and effects of loneliness. The overall counselor responses in tables 2 and 3 show a good understanding between the two, although there are some counselors who mention the same thing. For example, counselor X mentions bullying as a causative factor and impact of loneliness. This is very normal for counselors who do not work specifically on this issue.

Loneliness is a complex symptom triggered by several factors both within and outside of self. Krause-Parello (2008, p. 68) mentions several factors that contribute to loneliness, namely the social environment, changes

in development, peer relationships, family relationships, lack of social support, and lack of verbal and nonverbal communication skills. This opinion reinforces what counselors describe in Table 2 on the causes of loneliness. More clearly, the answer variations will be mapped according to these factors.

Table 5. Mapping answers based on contributory factors on loneliness

<b>Krause-Parello's Contributing factors</b>	<b>Answer number</b>
Social environment	5, 10
Developmental changes	8,11, 13
Peer relationship	3,4,6, 12, 15
Family relationship	1,7,9
Lack of social support	2
Poor communication skills (Verbal & Nonverbal)	14

The table above shows that perception of School counselors as a whole is quite close to a theoretical explanation. However, not all counselors mention a large variety of answers. Most counselors only mention one to two reasons in each question. So it is not really enough to admit that they are well understood about loneliness.

Next is how the counselor responds to the impact of loneliness. The theoretical explanation of the negative impact of loneliness has been written in Section 2.4. Based on the explanation, it can be seen that 39 variations of counselor's answers (table 3) partly lead to theory. Counselors more often mention the negative impact associated with poor learning performance and negative self-condition. In the literature, loneliness is often associated with the negative effects that follow. For example, the association between loneliness and suicide (Shincka, et al., 2012, p.105-118), loneliness with health consequences (Mahon, Yarcheski, & Yarcheski, 1993, p 23-31), the relationship between loneliness and social anxiety and social avoidance (Johnson, Stud-, & Scranton, 2001, p. 227-235), the relationship of loneliness to suffering (Lars, 1993, p 584-586), loneliness with a sense of community (Pretty, Andrewes, & Collett, 1994, p. 346-358), etc. In addition, the serious impact of loneliness often mentioned in research is depression. Some counselors managed to mention depression in the answer. Other effects that have not been mentioned by the counselor are attempted suicide, alcohol abuse, and anxiety. Theoretically, this is the most damaging negative impact of student life.

### **The Role of School Counselor in Overcoming Loneliness Issues at School**

This study shows that 27.78% of counselors' answers mention that paying particular attention to students is a way to overcome loneliness. At the same percentage, Guidance and Counseling services are also chosen as a way to overcome loneliness. The next answer with a frequency of 13.89% mentions the procurement and distribution of students in a creative school program. Variations of other answers (see table 4) are also appropriate answers and contribute to overcoming loneliness. However, theoretically, there are things that counselors need to know as long as they try to handle the problem of loneliness in school.

Byrnes & Yamamoto's research (in Galanaki & Vassilopoulou, 2007, p. 461-462) found that 42% of students were called "invisible children" of abandoned, isolated, and neglected children. As perceived by lonely individuals. Moore & Schultz (1983, p. 99) describes the lonely teenager feeling boredom, emptiness and feeling isolated. In the results of his research, adolescents choose to watch television, to eliminate boredom, but this way can't be used to overcome the low social interaction. Adults need to take part to help adolescents develop the social interactions of lonely individuals. Rokach (1990, p. 45) calls this as an attempt to build a social bridge, which is to rebuild beneficial social interactions. Affiliation behavior such as the exercise of meeting new people can be part of how to overcome loneliness (Perlman & Peplau, 1981, p. 36).

Reaching out students who are "Invisible" requires ability in detecting symptoms, find an individual, understand the whole symptom, and build a strategy for coping. For starters, the closeness of counselor-students will really help counselors reach them in a way that does not intimidate. The intimate relationship of the counselor-student is a form of support which represents warmth, ties between them adoringly (Galanaki & Vassilopoulou, 2007, p. 459). School counselor should be trained in build closeness with students as the initial step of helping lonely student.

Furthermore, the Krause-Parello (2008, p. 69) exposes two roles that can be performed by the school counselor. First, help the students improve their understanding about why they feel lonely and help them

reduce the pain suffered as a result of loneliness. Second, help students build relationships that are new or strengthen the existing relationship with discussing the alternative ways to develop social relationships and enhance school connectedness. These two ways of coping strategy are in line with what carried by Rokach (1990, p. 41), such as acceptance whole state of the self, re-adjustments involving the process of self-evaluation and rebuild the social interactions concretely.

### **The Availability of the Guidance and Counseling Program to Cope with Students Who are Lonely**

80% of counselors said that there is no special program at the school that is designed to deal with issues of loneliness. Another 20% said ever give Guidance and Counseling services for students who are lonely. There is no specific explanation about the form of the treatment that ever be given by them. One said had used game strategy to cope with students who are lonely. Some literature mentioned several ways to coping with loneliness. Galanaki & Vassilopoulou (2007, p. 467-468) sets seven loneliness coping strategies, those are (1) the identification, understanding, acceptance and the exploration of feelings of loneliness, (2) social competence training, (3) restructuring of classrooms and playgrounds, (4) enhancement of self-esteem, (5) cognitive-behavioral modification, (6) the development of adaptive coping such as problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping, (7) the development of the management skills of aloneness. More specifically, Mcwhirter (1990, p. 419-420) mentions three strategies that can be used in the process of counseling, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, social skills training, and social support.

Results of the study mentioned that the majority of the causes of loneliness was students don't have close friends (see table 2). Possible causes are the students do not have the skills to build a relationship of friendship. If loneliness is caused by a lack of social skills, then the best strategy is social skills training. Other ways can be implied in accordance with specific causes which aspects influenced the issue of loneliness.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

Loneliness is the mental state of a very unpleasant, close to suffering. The lonely student is the "Invisible Children". Counselors need to build a special closeness to reach students who are lonely because it is difficult for students to recognize that their loneliness. The results showed that school counselor is still in need of development perceptions on issues of loneliness at school. The responses that each counselor has given to the questionnaire are still very limited when compared to the complexity of loneliness issues. These limitations need to be acted upon. Overcoming loneliness problems can help improve students' psychological well-being. Various ways of coping have been introduced by many experts. The school counselor is required to provide assistance to overcome the painful loneliness. If school counselors have a high commitment to addressing loneliness issues in schools, the great threat to student success can be avoided.

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