



Faculty of
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"Ovidius" University
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The influence of loneliness at work on occupational depression

Stănică Andreea Georgiana¹, Tănase Tasente²

¹Independent Researcher, Romania; ²Ovidius University in Constanta, Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences, Romania

stanicaandreeag@yahoo.com¹, tanase.tasente@365.univ-ovidius.ro²

Abstract. This paper aims to study the influence of loneliness at work on occupational depression among workers. In order to measure these concepts we used the Loneliness at Work Scale (LAWS) as well as the Occupational Depression Inventory (ODI). The sample of participants on which we applied these two tests consisted of 60 people, divided into 2 representative samples, a sample of 30 women and a sample of 30 men, and the sampling method we opted for was nonprobability, i.e. convenience or incidental sampling, through which we selected participants available to contribute to this work. The completion of the questionnaires was carried out using a form that we prepared using the Google Forms platform, and subsequently distributed online. In order to ensure the ethics of the research, we obtained digital consent from all those involved in the research prior to the start of completion. In the statistical analysis we aimed to achieve the proposed objectives and hypotheses. According to the results obtained there is an interdependent relationship between loneliness experienced at work and occupational depression. Also in the present research, we found that the gender aspect is a rather important aspect in dealing with loneliness at work, men find it harder to cope with loneliness compared to women.

Keywords. loneliness, occupational depression, job, workers, men, women

1. Introduction

Work, of all the types of activities that people engage in throughout their lives, consumes most of their time, and colleagues at work are the people with whom they spend most of their days. Paradoxically, work is a vital necessity because for most people it is the way to survive and the way to acquire and develop their skills. Work can influence people's lives on many levels, psychologically, materially, personally and in the family.



Therefore, having established this, it is desirable that the work carried out should be enjoyable, so that satisfaction and balance can exist in people's lives. If the work is not enjoyable for the person doing it, there may be psychological, physical and social repercussions, because man is a rational being with feelings and a conscience, and an unsuitable job would affect him in a negative way.

Man is essentially a social being, so the need for social contact is extremely strong. So, another important aspect to mention would be the interpersonal relationships created in the workplace, because as mentioned above, co-workers are the people with whom a person spends most of his days.

People, most of them, in order to be able to live normally and to develop, need others. The need for others, sociability in academic terms, is part of the fundamental needs of the human being. This fundamental human need manifests itself in the need for affiliation, i.e. the need for the human being to get close to others, to establish relationships with others. This human need for affiliation is a general human phenomenon, a tendency to establish relationships with others (Sîntion, 2018). Affiliation is the joining and participation of a person to a group, even minimal being (two people). It is an interactive process of identification with and by another (reciprocity), which contributes to a person's social recognition (Selosse, 1999).

Sociability, the fundamental human need to be and to act, is manifested and realised in interpersonal relationships. Essentially, interpersonal relations refer to any relationship between people in the form of perception, understanding, evaluation, preference of one person by another.

As an operational definition, an interpersonal relationship is "a direct, conscious, psychological union based on a complex reverse relationship and involving at least two people"

Interpersonal relationships have been viewed by sociologists as a glue that binds society together. When a society is made up of isolated members, it is bound to fall apart because loneliness, like alienation, high divorce rates and crime, is seen by some as a cause or symptom of social decay (Perlman et al., 1982).

2. The concept of loneliness and its characteristics

People need each other for a multitude of reasons, yet loneliness exists and even seems to be one of the undesirable characteristics of contemporary society. From a psychological point of view, an individual is said to be lonely when his network of social relationships is precarious, or when it is less satisfying than he wishes (Gergen et al., 1985). Loneliness, therefore, does not necessarily imply the physical absence of others, but that they fail to provide the person with the stimulation and psychological resources he or she needs. Of course, we are not referring to self-imposed physical loneliness (asceticism), but to the fact that some people may feel lonely among others, including those close to their family. (Philaret, 2018)

In 1973 Weiss distinguished between emotional loneliness (where the individual suffers from the absence of an emotional relationship, a form of intimacy that others, parents, acquaintances, cannot provide) and social loneliness (the effect of the lack of friends, community, networks of belonging).

Research indicates that loneliness tends to be more intense and painful when individuals feel alone in a social environment, rather than feeling lonely as a result of being alone. (Jones,



1981); (Sermat, 1980). It is therefore important to note that emotional loneliness is experienced more painfully than social loneliness.

Some researchers (Williams et al., 2005) thus believe that loneliness is caused more by the low quality of social relationships than by their (low) quantity.

Peplau et al. also agree, defining loneliness as a very painful, unpleasant state experienced when the person's network of social relationships is significantly deficient in quality or quantity (Peplau et al., 1984).

Weiss argues that loneliness can occur in situations where there is not enough social interaction or satisfactory close relationships.

Loneliness essentially involves the inability/loss of the ability to relate to others in an effective and mutually satisfying manner (Jones et al., 1982).

Gordon (1976), identifying a high correlation between depression and loneliness, adds that sometimes lonely people self-blame, feel too much guilt for having missed out on something (considered) important and do not consider themselves to be equal to those who have succeeded, such people retreat into depression and then loneliness, avoiding contact with others, contact which might 'remind' them of their 'inferiority' (refusal of social comparisons).

Wood (1986) argues that loneliness is fundamental, basic and one of the most powerful human experiences. This can lead to psychological regression, as loneliness is emotionally draining and inhibiting in interpersonal relationships. This feeling of loneliness that we are talking about causes people to feel lonely and empty, thoughts can be distorted and reactions to some events become exaggerated. (Booth, 1996)

Whether expressed or not, most people experience loneliness throughout their lives in response to events in their lives (Rodway, 1992), but some live with it for years at a time, few go through life and escape the feelings of being alone (Wright, 2005).

According to theorists such as Weiss (1973) individuals are reluctant to express feelings of loneliness both past and present. Moreover, a large number of people are embarrassed to admit loneliness because of the thought of social failure (Peplau, 1984); (Stoekli, 2010).

Loneliness is a common and distressing problem for many people. (Russell, 1984)

Despite the many definitions of loneliness, there are some basic assumptions common to most of these definitions. First, loneliness is thought to result from perceived deficiencies in the social world. Second, loneliness is thought to be a subjective state experienced by the individual rather than an objective feature in the individual's social world. Third, it is fundamentally an aversive and upsetting experience (Peplau, 1984); (Weiss, 1987); (Jong et al., 2006).

Loneliness at work has received relatively little attention in the literature; few studies have empirically investigated the concept in the literature (Gumbert et al., 1984); (Bell et al., 1990); Reinking et al., 1991); (Chadsey-Rusch., 1992); (Steinburg., 1999).

2.1. Loneliness at work

Loneliness in the workplace is not a new concept, but it has received relatively little attention from researchers and its effects on the quality of human life and organisational operations have so far been proven by limited empirical research.

Two general distinctions are mentioned in the literature regarding loneliness. The first one is social loneliness due to the lack of satisfying social relationships or friendships. The other is



emotional loneliness due to lack of close emotional commitment or satisfying romantic relationships (Russ et al., 1984). Also, (Wright et al., 2006) defined the two-dimensional concept of loneliness in the workplace. One of the dimensions is emotional deprivation to define the quality of interpersonal relationships at work. It involves concepts such as feeling, being isolated and being alienated, this dimension has a similar structure to emotional loneliness. The other dimension is defined as social companionship within the scope of the appropriateness of social networks at work. Involving expressions such as sharing, spending time and being part of a group, this dimension also resembles social loneliness. Seen from this perspective, loneliness at work is a multidimensional structure.

Loneliness at work can occur in the form of distress caused by perceived poor interpersonal relationships in the work environment.

Loneliness at work is the psychological state given by the discrepancy and its real relationships, then this phenomenon will be influenced by cognitive processes and emotional reactions that support the individual's interactions in his work environment.

The pressures and stresses of the workplace are permanent. And the relocation policy adopted by large companies generates feelings of insecurity, isolation, loneliness and depression.

For a human being, loneliness is a concept that is against its nature, because a human being always needs communication and social integration (Cacioppo., et al., 2008). When considering that the value relationship is frequently influenced by the structure of work or organization, it could be said that the socialization process expected at work could be frequently hindered. This leads to a difference in the quality of the desired social relationship and the development of work-based relationships. In this way, loneliness at work manifests itself as sadness resulting from the lack of good quality interpersonal communication among employees in the work environment (Wright., 2005).

Loneliness at work refers to the lack of close, quality relationships at work and can be triggered by an organisational climate that encourages individualism combined with an individual tendency to avoid socialising. In L. W. Wright's view, when we talk about loneliness at work or in the workplace, we know that it distorts social cognition and influences interpersonal behaviour, thus increasing hostility, negativity, depression, anxiety on the one hand and diminishing the capacity for cooperation on the other.

Building friendships at work is a positive thing, which helps to manage tasks and pressures more effectively. It is therefore absolutely essential that workplace relations are as good as possible in order to facilitate a beneficial working climate and thus increased team performance.

Organisation and loneliness are two complex phenomena. The complexity of the organisational environment can lead to feelings of loneliness in the individual member of the organisation. Therefore, loneliness by definition is an experience that arises due to the social deficits involved in the social environment.

As with the transactional model of occupational stress described by R.S. Lazarus and S. Folkman in 1984, loneliness in the workplace is probably experienced as a transaction between the individual and their work environment.



3. The concept of depression and its characteristics

Depression is a serious medical condition that can negatively influence one's mood, thinking and behaviour. In general, it manifests itself as a feeling of deep sadness, a sense of emptiness and a marked loss of interest in any activity.

People often tend to confuse sadness with depression.

Throughout life, most people experience feelings of sadness, lack of mood, but these states usually last no more than a few days. When it comes to depression, sadness will tend to interfere with daily functioning, causing discomfort to both the person concerned and those around them.

More than 300 million people are affected by this illness, called depression. It is a common disorder that requires specialist care. Many people suffering from depression endure the symptoms of the disorder for a long time before they get the help they need, which unfortunately leads to unnecessary suffering, family problems, social isolation and even job loss.

Depression is the result of complex interactions between social, psychological and biological factors.

Depression is considered to be "a condition involving mood swings being characterized by sadness, helplessness, despondency" (Trandafir., 2017).

Edward Bibrig(1953) explains the notion of depression as the individual's inability to let go of "unattainable" ideals.

Aaron Beck(1967) develops the cognitive theory of depression according to which, it occurs as a result of a deficit of adaptation of cognitive structures.

3.1. Depression at work

Depression, as mentioned above, is a mental disorder characterized by sadness, decreased interest and pleasure, feelings of guilt, low self-esteem, sleep and eating disorders, fatigue and mnesic-prosexic disorders. This has a major impact on functionality, and can lead to decreased productivity and work capacity, changes in relationships with colleagues (tendency to isolate, lack of interaction) and, in severe cases, loss of will to live and even suicide. Chronic depression of medium or high intensity can have a major negative influence on the person affected, decreasing their functionality at work.

Communication plays an important role in determining the social dimensions of psychological well-being at work, and if various disruptive factors such as depression intervene it can lead to decreased productivity and reduced physical or mental health.

Occupational depression is people's reaction to repeated and excessive pressure or other types of demands, demands such as long hours, overloads, constant unscheduled decisions, lack of breaks, etc. In this case, the cost to the individual can be high, as quality of life, relationships, self-esteem and health will be undermined, but at the same time, the organisation will also suffer, as productivity at work becomes reduced.

Therefore, good communication can have a very positive effect on morale and motivate people to want to work and do their best.

As inherently social beings, most human beings find their greatest source of happiness and satisfaction in relationships with other people.



Communication is much deeper than simply speaking and pronouncing words - it is also a vital part of well-being, mental health and a quality life. Communication is indeed fundamental to our well-being and quality life, but it is not always easy. We all have responsibilities for how we behave in the workplace, we can bring benefits or we can become the weak link, that component that through attitude and behaviour blocks the group in its natural evolution.

The key to managing depression at work is therefore communication.

4. Similar studies

Loneliness has negative effects on both the organisation and the individual employee.

Harris Interactive Service Bureau used the CEO Snapshot Survey and reported in January 2012 the results of the survey conducted online from October to November 2011, with 83 US office managers participating. According to the survey 50% of CEOs feel lonely at work, and of those 61% believe that isolation from their colleagues affects their own performance. Also, 70% of those reporting high loneliness scores believe it negatively affects their ability to do their job very well. Half of the managers who responded to the survey estimated that most other leaders experience the same feelings of loneliness (Perjan et al., 2017).

In the view of J. Pfeifer and J.F. Veiga (1999), "The actual social support provided by managers and colleagues at work can lead to feelings of trust and organizational attachment, and if the social support received at work is poor it can become an important source of stress, which can generate feelings of isolation and loneliness, i.e. depression. Also, the social interaction that takes place between colleagues, employees and supervisors is very important for the success of the organization" (Stoica et al., 2011).

Another quite important aspect in tackling loneliness at work is the gender aspect, when men find it harder to cope with loneliness. This is because men feel lonely because of dysfunctions occurring in their peer group, while women experience loneliness when close and stable emotional contacts are lacking. This is why for men the number of social contacts is more important than for women, who value the quality of their social contacts more.

In studies conducted by S. G. Korceaghina, it was shown that loneliness is an effect rather than the cause of social isolation. Moreover, there is a linear interdependence between loneliness and social isolation. It has been shown that feelings of loneliness depend on the time spent in the company of other people. If a person spends 5-6 hours a day without social contact, this leads to loneliness. If, however, about 10 hours a day are usually allocated to social contacts, loneliness is not even mentioned. The less social contact an individual has with people at work, friends and acquaintances, the greater the likelihood of loneliness and depression.

5. Applied research

5.1. Research objectives and hypotheses

The main objectives of this work are:

1. To study the relationship between loneliness at work and occupational depression.
2. To study the differences found in loneliness at work according to gender.



The hypotheses of this paper derive from our objectives. Thus, the hypotheses from which we started are:

1. It is presumed that there is a positive correlation between loneliness at work and occupational depression, in other words, it is presumed that the 2 variables mentioned above are in an interdependent relationship.

2. Men are presumed to experience loneliness at work more intensely compared to women.

5.2. Tools used

In order to determine the level of loneliness experienced by women and men at work, we applied the Loneliness at Work Scale (LAWS)

The questionnaire consists of 16 items that aim to diagnose loneliness at work. The basic concept of the questionnaire is to assess how people perceive the relationships they have with colleagues at work.

It was translated and adapted for the Romanian population by Borşan Ionela, Dumbravă Andrei Cosmin and Sîrbu Alexandru-Andrei.

Scoring guidelines: Summative scale. Items marked with (R) are reversed, the scores thus obtained for the items are then summed. 5-step Likert scale, where 1 = Total disagreement and 5 = Total agreement. As the score increases, occupational loneliness is present at a higher level.

It is also very important to instruct not to confuse symptoms associated with other life problems with symptoms specifically associated with work.

To determine occupational depression we applied the Occupational Depression Inventory (ODI).

The questionnaire consists of 9 items that aim to diagnose depression experienced at work. The basic concept of the questionnaire is to assess how people perceive their relationships with co-workers.

It was translated and adapted for the Romanian population by Ioana Carmen Nicolae.

Scoring guidelines: Scoring is on a Likert scale from 0 to 3, where: 0 – „Never or almost never”, 1 – „Only a few days”, 2 – „More than half of the days”, 3 – „Almost every day”. The higher the score, the higher the level of occupational depression present.

It is also very important to instruct people not to confuse symptoms associated with other life problems with symptoms specifically associated with work.

Presentation and interpretation of results

5.3.1. Hypothesis 1

„It is presumed that there is a positive correlation between loneliness at work and occupational depression, in other words, it is presumed that the 2 variables mentioned above are in an interdependent relationship”.

In order to test and verify the proposed hypothesis, we first calculated the starting indices, then plotted the histograms and normality curve for both variables, and then inserted the table of starting indices and the graphical representation of normality for each variable. The variables of interest were loneliness at work and occupational depression.

5.3.1. Start index table

Descriptives		Statistic	Std. Error
Occupational Depression	Mean	12,43	0,458
	Median	12	
	Variance	12,589	
	Std. Deviation	3,548	
Loneliness In The Workplace	Mean	30,70	1,309
	Median	29	
	Variance	102,756	
	Std. Deviation	10,137	

Next we looked at calculating the normality of the distributions using the Tests of Normality, where the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests appear.

Table 5.3.2. Table of normality of distributions

Tests of Normality	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Occupational Depression	,187	60	,000	,919	60	,001
Loneliness In The Workplace	,287	60	,000*	,855	60	,000

We note from the above table that the sig. coefficient of the Kolmogorov Smirnov Test is < 0.05 for both variables, therefore, we have an asymmetric distribution, which makes us use a non-parametric method of calculating the coefficient by selecting the Spearman correlation coefficient.

Table 5.3.3. Table of correlation coefficient

Correlations		Occupational depression	Loneliness in the workplace
Occupational depression	Spearman Correlation	1	,772**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	60	60
loneliness in the workplace	Spearman Correlation	,772**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	60	60



Following the analysis, we obtained a Spearman correlation coefficient of 0.772 which shows that we have a very high positive correlation between the 2 variables, the Sig.(2-tailed) coefficient being < 0.05 .

The graphical representation of the correlation we obtained is visible at the level of the point cloud, where the points are oriented in the right-up corner, which attests to the presence of a positive correlation.

5.3.2. Hypothesis 2. „Men are presumed to experience loneliness at work more intensely compared to women”.

To test and verify the proposed hypothesis, we first calculated the starting indices, then plotted histograms and the normality curve for both variables, and then inserted the table of starting indices and the graphical representation of normality for each variable. The variables we were interested in were workplace loneliness by gender.

Table 5.3.4. Start index table

Descriptives	GENDER		Statistic	Std. Error
	Women	Men		
Loneliness in the workplace	Women	Mean	24,03	0,747
		Median	24,00	
		Variance	16,723	
		Std. Deviation	4,089	
	Men	Mean	37,37	1,829
		Median	30,00	
		Variance	100,378	
		Std. Deviation	10,019	

Next, we followed the calculation of the normality of distributions with the help of the Tests of Normality normality test, where the results obtained from the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests appear.

Table 5.3.5. Table of normality of distributions

Tests of Normality	Gender	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Loneliness in the workplace	Women	,110	30	,200*	,970	30	,552
	Men	,304	30	,000	,780	30	,000

We note from the table above that the sig. coefficient of the Kolmogorov Smirnov test is < 0.05 in at least one of the 2, therefore, we have an asymmetric distribution, which makes us use a nonparametric method.



Table 5.3.6. Table of sum of ranks

Ranks				
	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Loneliness in the workplace	women	30	17,05	511,50
	men	30	43,95	1318,50
	Total	60		

Tabelul 5.3.7. Table of sum of ranks

	loneliness in the workplace
Mann-Whitney U	46,500
Wilcoxon W	511,500
Z	-5,991
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,000
a. Grouping Variable: Gender	

After analysis, it was found that there was a significant difference between the 2 because the sig. (2-tailed) of the Mann-Whitney U Test is less than 0.05. Thus, among women there was an average of 17.05, and among men an average of 43.95, which proves that men have a harder time coping with loneliness at work compared to women.

Conclusions

This chapter presents a summary of the previous chapters, as well as the results obtained from the study carried out of this paper. Also included are the findings of this research.

Through the activities carried out, we can conclude that the proposed objectives have been achieved.

First of all, we obtained a positive correlation between loneliness at work and occupational depression of employees.

Therefore, the real social support offered by managers and colleagues at work can cause the emergence of a feeling of trust and organizational attachment, and if the social support received at work is weak, it can become an important source of stress, which can generate feelings of isolation and loneliness, respectively depression. Also, the social interaction that takes place between colleagues, employees and superiors is very important for the success of the organization" (Stoica et al., 2011)

Secondly, a significant difference was identified between women's occupational depression compared to men's, which attests to the fact that gender is quite important in addressing loneliness at work, making it harder for men to cope with loneliness. This happens because men feel lonely because of dysfunctions that occur in the group to belong, while women experience loneliness when close and stable emotional contacts are lacking. For this reason, for



men, the number of social contacts is much more important than for women, who value more the quality of their social contacts.

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