

THE EFFECT OF EMPLOYEE LONELINESS TOWARDS WORK PERFORMANCE IN THE INDONESIAN WORKPLACE SETTING

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ABSTRACT

Workplace loneliness is a psychological issue with growing relevance, yet it remains underexplored in Indonesia. This study examines how emotional and social loneliness affect individual work performance in an Indonesian cultural context. Using a quantitative approach, 72 active employees from various sectors completed a structured online questionnaire. The instruments used were the Loneliness at Work Scale (LAWS) and an adapted version of the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IW PQ). Data were analysed using linear regression and Spearman correlation. Results indicate that both emotional and social loneliness significantly and negatively influence work performance. The higher the level of perceived loneliness, the lower the performance. These findings highlight the need for Indonesian organisations to foster inclusive and socially supportive work environments.

Keywords: workplace loneliness; employee performance; organizational behavior

INTRODUCTION

Loneliness has increasingly been recognized as a pressing psychological and organizational issue, particularly within modern work environments. While often perceived as a private or personal matter, workplace loneliness has emerged as a significant factor influencing employee well-being and performance (Sullivan & Bendell, 2023). In organizational settings, individuals may feel disconnected despite being physically surrounded by colleagues, highlighting the difference between mere presence and meaningful connection.

Extensive research in Western contexts has demonstrated that workplace loneliness is associated with a range of negative outcomes, including reduced engagement, diminished creativity, weaker collaboration, and increased absenteeism (Akçit, 2017; Bryan et al., 2023). These consequences not only impair individual performance but also contribute to substantial organizational costs. For example, workplace loneliness has been linked to productivity losses amounting to an estimated £2.5 billion annually in the UK alone (Bryan et al., 2023).

Loneliness is generally defined as the subjective distress resulting from a discrepancy between desired and actual social relationships (Perlman & Peplau, 1981; Lim & Gleason, 2014), and should be distinguished from social isolation, which refers to an objective lack of social contact (Fang & Gu, 2020). Importantly, loneliness may manifest in emotional, social, or even collective forms (Cacioppo et al., 2015), and it has been shown to impact both mental and physical health (Kets de Vries, 2024).

Despite growing awareness of this issue in Western and European contexts, there remains a lack of empirical research examining workplace loneliness in culturally distinct societies, including Indonesia. Given Indonesia's collectivist culture; where interpersonal

relationships and communal harmony are deeply valued; the experience of workplace loneliness may differ in both intensity and impact. Understanding how loneliness manifests and affects job performance in this context is therefore essential for both scholars and practitioners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Loneliness in the Workplace

Loneliness is widely defined as a subjective psychological experience arising from a perceived discrepancy between desired and actual social relationships (Perlman & Peplau, 1981; Lim & Gleeson, 2014). While it may be commonly associated with personal life or social isolation, loneliness is distinct in its emotional and cognitive components, and it can occur even in the presence of others. Scholars have emphasized that loneliness manifests in different forms, such as emotional loneliness; marked by the absence of intimate relationships; and social loneliness, which reflects a broader lack of social integration (Cacioppo et al., 2015; Kets de Vries, 2024). Importantly, loneliness has been shown to negatively affect both mental and physical health outcomes (Alspach, 2013; Lim & Gleeson, 2014).

In the context of the workplace, loneliness is increasingly recognized as a critical issue that undermines employee well-being and performance. Workplace loneliness refers to a feeling of dissatisfaction with the quality or quantity of social relationships at work (Kaur & Kaur, 2024). It may arise from emotional deprivation or insufficient social companionship and is associated with lower levels of engagement, collaboration, and organizational citizenship (Wright & Silard, 2021; Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018, as cited in Kaur & Kaur, 2024). Remote work, organizational hierarchy, and lack of inclusive culture have also been found to exacerbate loneliness in professional settings (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2023; Bryan et al., 2023).

Measuring Workplace Loneliness

Workplace loneliness has been primarily assessed through self-report scales. Among the most widely used instruments are the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996), designed to measure general loneliness, and the Loneliness at Work Scale (LAWS) developed by Wright et al. (2006), which specifically targets emotional and social loneliness in organizational settings. The latter is particularly suited for research in work environments, offering better construct validity in this context. While the UCLA scale captures broader personal loneliness, LAWS distinguishes between emotional deprivation and lack of social companionship at work; two key dimensions used in this study.

Work Performance

Work performance is typically conceptualized as a set of behaviors relevant to achieving organizational goals. Campbell (1990) emphasizes that performance should be understood as behavior rather than outcomes alone, arguing for a multidimensional perspective. Koopmans et al. (2011) extend this view by including task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behaviors. Measurement tools such as the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ) (Koopmans, 2014) have gained prominence for assessing these dimensions in organizational studies. However, adapting performance scales to specific cultural or linguistic contexts, such as Indonesia, is crucial for ensuring valid assessments (Widyastuti & Hidayat, 2018).

The Relationship Between Loneliness and Work Performance

A growing body of evidence supports a negative relationship between loneliness and job performance. Studies have found that employees who experience loneliness often

report lower engagement, creativity, and satisfaction, and exhibit higher absenteeism and turnover intentions (Akçit, 2017; Bryan et al., 2023; Sajjad et al., 2020). Workplace loneliness disrupts collaboration and weakens both leader–member and organization–member exchange quality, leading to diminished task execution and reduced extra-role performance (Lam & Lau, 2012; Babin et al., 2021). Additionally, psychological capital; such as optimism and self-efficacy; has been identified as a potential buffer to these negative effects (Firoz & Chaudhary, 2021).

Gaps in the Literature and the Indonesian Context

Despite the expanding literature on workplace loneliness in Western countries, research in non-Western, collectivist societies remains limited. Studies have shown that cultural heritage plays a substantial role in shaping how loneliness is experienced and expressed (Fokkema et al., 2012; Yang & Victor, 2008). In collectivist cultures such as Indonesia, where social connectedness and group harmony are highly valued, the emotional toll of loneliness may be more severe, even when objective social isolation is minimal. Indonesian workplace norms; characterized by high power distance and hierarchical structures; may further influence how loneliness is experienced and reported (Mangundjaya, 2013; Suharnomo & Syahruramadhan, 2018).

Current Indonesian research has largely focused on adolescent or elderly loneliness, with few studies investigating loneliness in workplace settings. Emerging studies by Wahyuni and Muafi (2021) and Hidayat and Ginting (2022) have begun to explore loneliness among Indonesian employees, particularly in the context of remote work and social support. However, the scarcity of comprehensive empirical studies highlights a significant research gap. This study aims to address that gap by analyzing how emotional and social loneliness affect individual work performance within Indonesia’s culturally unique organizational landscape.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The relationship between employee loneliness and work performance is multifaceted, particularly when examined across different cultural and organizational contexts. Drawing from the literature, this study focuses on two principal dimensions of loneliness; emotional and social; both of which are theorized to influence work performance negatively.

This conceptual distinction originates from the work of Wright et al. (2006), who developed the *Loneliness at Work Scale (LAWS)* to measure loneliness in organizational settings. Their model differentiates between emotional loneliness, characterized by the absence of close, emotionally meaningful bonds at work, and social loneliness, defined as a lack of broader, less intimate workplace relationships. This distinction has since been widely used in workplace studies (Kaur & Kaur, 2024; Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018) and serves as the foundation for the hypotheses in this study.

Emotional loneliness is associated with feelings of psychological isolation and the perception that one lacks trusted allies in the workplace. In collectivist societies such as Indonesia; where interpersonal harmony and emotional closeness are highly valued; such a disconnect may be particularly harmful, undermining motivation, commitment, and psychological well-being (Mangundjaya, 2013; Bryan et al., 2023).

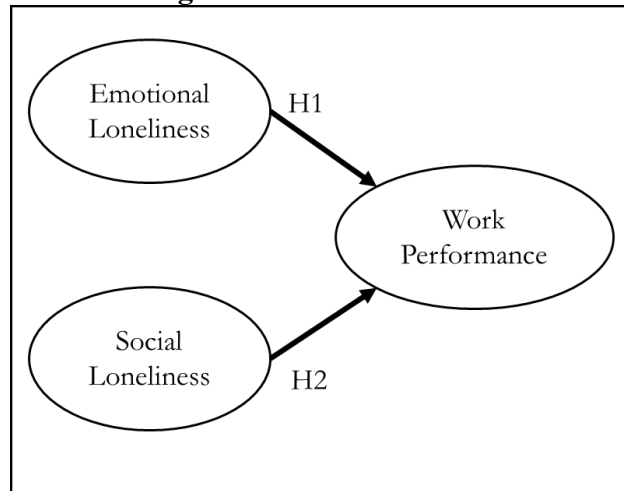
Social loneliness, while less intimate in nature, also carries implications for organizational life. It reflects the absence of companionship and social inclusion in the workplace. Employees experiencing this form of loneliness often report reduced collaboration, diminished belonging, and a reluctance to engage in team-based activities, all of which can negatively impact performance outcomes (Lam & Lau, 2012; Degges, 2019, as cited in Kaur & Kaur, 2024).

Given these theoretical foundations and empirical insights, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **H1:** Emotional loneliness negatively affects work performance in Indonesia.
- **H2:** Social loneliness negatively affects work performance in Indonesia.

These hypotheses are grounded in Wright et al.'s (2006) framework and supported by subsequent research emphasising the detrimental effects of loneliness on job outcomes (Akçit, 2017; Firoz & Chaudhary, 2021; Babin et al., 2021).

Figure 1. Research Model



Source: Wright et al. (2006); Kaur & Kaur (2024); as well as the concept developed in this research.

This theoretical model positions emotional and social loneliness as distinct but related predictors of individual work performance. It emphasizes the contextual relevance of Indonesia's collectivist work culture, where both forms of disconnection may manifest uniquely and affect performance through different mechanisms. By testing this framework empirically, the study contributes to a more culturally nuanced understanding of loneliness at work.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between employee loneliness and individual work performance in the Indonesian workplace. A structured survey was used to collect data from respondents across various organizational sectors, enabling statistical analysis of the proposed hypotheses.

The independent variables, emotional and social loneliness, were measured using the Loneliness at Work Scale (LAWS) developed by Wright et al. (2006). This instrument consists of 16 items—9 for emotional loneliness and 7 for social loneliness—adapted into Bahasa Indonesia for local relevance. Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The dependent variable, work performance, was assessed using a shortened and adapted version of the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ) (Koopmans, 2014), translated into Indonesian by Widyastuti and Hidayat (2018). To ensure consistency with the LAWS scale and reduce response fatigue, the IWPQ was reduced to 10 items—covering task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior—and adjusted to a 7-point frequency scale.

Data were collected via an online questionnaire distributed between April 4 and April 8, 2025. The final sample comprised 72 valid responses from active employees

working in Indonesia. Respondents represented a range of job types and organizational sectors, ensuring diversity in the sample.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS, employing linear regression to test the relationship between loneliness and work performance. Additionally, Spearman correlation tests were performed to validate the direction and strength of the relationships. A significance level of $p < .05$ was used as the threshold for hypothesis acceptance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study collected 72 valid responses from Indonesian employees across various sectors. All respondents confirmed active employment status within Indonesia, meeting the criteria for data inclusion.

Descriptive Statistics

The sample was relatively balanced in gender (59.7% male; 40.3% female) and diverse in age, ranging from 21 to 40 years. The majority were clerical workers (69.4%), followed by professionals (12.5%), academics (8.3%), and others (9.7%). Most participants were employed in the private sector (65.3%), with the remainder in public sector (25%) and nonprofit or organizational roles (9.7%).

Table 1
Repondent’s profile

No.	Description	Number of responses	Percentage (%)
1	Actively working in indonesia		
	Yes	72	100%
	No	0	100%
2	Gender		
	Male	29	40%
	Female	43	60%
3	Age		
	18-20	0	
	21-30	31	43%
	31-40	41	57%
	>40	0	
4	Job Types		
	Manager or professional	9	13%
	Clerical	50	69%
	Academist	6	8%
	Others	7	10%
5	Type of organization		
	Public sector	18	25%
	Private sector	47	65%
	Organizational	7	10%

Source: Research data processing, 2025

Emotional Loneliness and Work Performance

The mean score for emotional loneliness was 4.01 on a 7-point Likert scale, indicating a neutral response. Notably, no respondents selected “strongly disagree” on key items like feeling abandoned under pressure (EL1), workplace satisfaction (EL5), or camaraderie (EL6), suggesting an overall moderate sense of emotional disconnection.

Work performance showed a mean score of 4.11, indicating that most respondents reported performing positively, though not at the highest frequency. Linear regression analysis revealed a statistically significant negative relationship between emotional loneliness and work performance ($p < .05$). Spearman’s correlation confirmed this result, supporting Hypothesis 1.

Figure 2
Descriptive statistic of 'Emotional loneliness'. R: Reversely scored items.

Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
EL1	72	2	7	4.08
EL2	72	1	7	4.07
EL3	72	1	7	4.06
EL4	72	1	7	4.21
EL5R	72	1	6	3.64
EL6R	72	1	6	4.04
EL7	72	1	7	4.03
EL8	72	1	7	4.00
EL9	72	1	7	4.01
Avg.EL	72	1.11	5.33	4.0154
Valid N (listwise)	72			

Source: SPSS statistics data processing

Figure 3
Descriptive statistic of Work performance

Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
WP1	72	3	6	3.78
WP2	72	2	7	4.35
WP3	72	3	6	4.19
WP4	72	4	6	4.57
WP5	72	3	6	4.36
WP6	72	2	6	3.89
WP7	72	2	6	4.01
WP8	72	3	6	3.97
WP9	72	2	6	4.42
WP10	72	2	5	3.58
Avg.WP	72	3.10	5.80	4.1125
Valid N (listwise)	72			

Source: SPSS statistics data processing

Figure 4
Linear regression coefficient of EL towards WP

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.656	.309		18.303	<.001
	Avg.EL	-.384	.076	-.518	-5.062	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Avg.WP

Source: SPSS statistics data processing

Figure 5
Spearman correlation between Employee loneliness and Work performance

		Avg.WP	Avg.EL
Spearman's rho	Avg.WP	1.000	-.489**
	Correlation Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	72	72
Avg.EL	Avg.EL	-.489**	1.000
	Correlation Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	72	72

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

Source: SPSS statistics data processing

Social Loneliness and Work Performance

The average score for social loneliness was slightly higher at 4.12, with several indicators showing no extreme responses (e.g., having someone to talk to during breaks or feeling listened to at work). These findings suggest a relatively modest sense of disconnection from workplace communities.

Figure 6
Descriptive statistic of ‘Social loneliness’.” R”: reversely scored item

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
EL1	72	2	7	4.08
EL2	72	1	7	4.07
EL3	72	1	7	4.06
EL4	72	1	7	4.21
EL5R	72	1	6	3.64
EL6R	72	1	6	4.04
EL7	72	1	7	4.03
EL8	72	1	7	4.00
EL9	72	1	7	4.01
Avg.EL	72	1.11	5.33	4.0154
Valid N (listwise)	72			

Source: SPSS statistics data processing

Linear regression analysis indicated a significant negative relationship between social loneliness and work performance ($p < .05$), confirming Hypothesis 2. Spearman's correlation also yielded a significant result, reinforcing the conclusion that social isolation impairs job performance in the Indonesian context.

Figure 7
Linear regression between SL and WP

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.862	.448		6.390	<.001
	Avg.SL	.303	.108	.319	2.813	.006

a. Dependent Variable: Avg.WP

Source: SPSS statistics data processing

Figure 8
Spearman correlation between SL and WP

Correlations				
		Avg.WP		Avg.SL
Spearman's rho	Avg.WP	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.355**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.002
		N	72	72
	Avg.SL	Correlation Coefficient	.355**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.
		N	72	72

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

Source: SPSS statistics data processing

Discussion

This study examined the impact of employee loneliness; both emotional and social; on individual work performance in Indonesia. The findings confirm that both forms of loneliness are significantly and negatively associated with self-reported work performance. These results are consistent with previous studies conducted in Western and developed economies (Akçit, 2017; Bryan et al., 2023), affirming the generalizability of the loneliness–performance relationship across cultural contexts. However, this study also offers unique insights relevant to the Indonesian workplace, characterized by collectivist values, high power distance, and evolving professional dynamics.

Result interpretation

The first hypothesis, that emotional loneliness negatively affects work performance, was supported by the data. Employees who lack meaningful emotional connections at work may feel psychologically unsupported, less valued, and isolated in decision-making or collaborative contexts. This disconnection likely impairs intrinsic motivation and reduces commitment to organizational goals. While prior literature has noted that emotional loneliness impacts engagement and well-being (Kaur & Kaur, 2024; Wright et al., 2006),

this study confirms that such disconnection also hinders tangible performance metrics among Indonesian employees.

The second hypothesis that social loneliness negatively affects work performance, was also supported. Social loneliness reflects the absence of broader, informal networks within the workplace. In Indonesia's highly communal culture, such social integration is not peripheral but essential. A lack of informal social bonds—such as casual conversation, shared breaks, or inclusive team dynamics—may leave employees feeling socially excluded, leading to reduced morale and lower productivity. This confirms previous studies indicating that weak social ties can damage collaboration and diminish extra-role behaviors (Lam & Lau, 2012; Firoz & Chaudhary, 2021).

Furthermore, the data showed that most respondents scored near the midpoint of the loneliness scales. This suggests that while loneliness was present, it was not extreme, possibly due to underlying collectivist norms that still promote some level of interpersonal connection. However, even moderate loneliness was found to significantly impair work outcomes, emphasizing the sensitivity of performance to social and emotional deficits.

Theoretical Implications

This research extends existing literature on workplace loneliness by validating Wright et al.'s (2006) conceptualization of emotional and social loneliness in a Southeast Asian context. The application of LAWS in Indonesia provides cross-cultural support for the two-dimensional structure of workplace loneliness and confirms its predictive utility in non-Western environments.

Moreover, this study contributes to the theoretical discourse on employee well-being by reinforcing loneliness as a critical psychological construct in organizational behavior research. While burnout, stress, and engagement have long been considered core predictors of performance, these findings place loneliness, often treated as peripheral, within the central conversation about work-related outcomes. In collectivist settings, where social connectedness is deeply tied to identity and group belonging, the theoretical impact of loneliness may be more pronounced than in individualistic contexts. This calls for a more culture-sensitive application of organizational psychology models that traditionally originate in Western contexts.

Managerial Implications

From a practical standpoint, these findings carry several important implications for human resource management and organizational leadership, particularly within Indonesia and similar collectivist cultures:

- Organizations should prioritize strategies that enhance both emotional and social integration. Emotional loneliness can be reduced through mentorship programs, one-on-one supervisory support, and peer recognition systems that cultivate meaningful interpersonal bonds. Social loneliness, on the other hand, may be addressed through inclusive team-building, informal gatherings, and community-building activities within departments.
- Given that remote and hybrid work models may exacerbate loneliness (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2023), leaders must actively design work environments; both physical and digital; that facilitate connection. Rotating task teams, buddy systems for onboarding, and cross-functional collaborations are possible approaches.

- Organizations should monitor loneliness-related indicators, such as disengagement or withdrawal behaviors. Training HR personnel to recognize signs of social disconnection and implementing employee assistance programs can provide early interventions.
- Multinational and Indonesian companies must recognize that workplace well-being interventions developed in individualistic cultures may require adaptation to local norms. In Indonesia, this includes understanding that silence or politeness may mask social withdrawal, and that hierarchy may discourage junior employees from expressing feelings of isolation.

By acknowledging loneliness as a performance-relevant factor and integrating this perspective into organizational practices, leaders can enhance both employee well-being and operational effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the relationship between employee loneliness and individual work performance in the Indonesian workplace. Grounded in Wright et al.'s (2006) two-dimensional model of workplace loneliness, the research examined both emotional and social loneliness as predictors of job performance. The findings reveal that both dimensions are significantly and negatively associated with self-reported performance, underscoring the detrimental role of loneliness in organisational life.

These results affirm prior literature on the harmful effects of loneliness while extending its findings to a non-Western, collectivist setting. In a cultural context like Indonesia, where interpersonal harmony, social cohesion, and relational proximity are deeply valued, even moderate feelings of loneliness can substantially undermine employee effectiveness.

The study contributes to organisational theory by reinforcing the importance of workplace loneliness as a distinct construct, meriting consideration alongside established predictors of job performance such as engagement and job satisfaction. Furthermore, it highlights the need for culture-sensitive frameworks in organisational psychology, particularly in diverse Southeast Asian contexts where relational norms and professional hierarchies differ from Western paradigms.

From a managerial standpoint, the findings call for deliberate organisational strategies that promote emotional bonding and social inclusion among employees. Interventions designed to address employee loneliness not only support psychological well-being but also have direct implications for performance, productivity, and retention.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that employee loneliness is not merely a private emotion; it is a workplace issue with tangible effects. As such, it demands both scholarly attention and proactive organisational response, particularly in cultures where the value of social connection is paramount.

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