

From Loneliness to Adverse Outcomes: Investigating the Roles of Psychological Flexibility and Inflexibility

Dixy Melendez, Madeline Adair Blackwell, Oscar Velasquez, Olga V. Berkout

INTRO

- Loneliness is predictor of negative outcomes including sleep, psychological distress, and general health (Park et al., 2020).
- Lower psychological flexibility and greater inflexibility may serve as mechanisms for undesirable consequences in this relationship (Ortega-Jimenez et al., 2021).
- Investigating whether psychological flexibility/inflexibility account for the relationship between loneliness and these outcomes can help suggest avenues for intervention.

METHODS

- Participants

 - (N= 461)
 - Ages 18– 80
 - Primarily White (48.8%)
- Instruments

 - UCLA-LS-V-3
 - DASS-21
 - PROMIS (SD-SF8a, PF-SF-6b, F-SF7a)
 - GTQ
- We explored the relationship between loneliness, psychological flexibility, and inflexibility with adverse consequences related to sleep, distress, and general health.
 - Mediation analysis examined these relationships.

RESULTS

- Loneliness directly predicted worse distress, fatigue, sleep impairment, and physical function, as well as lower psychological flexibility and higher inflexibility ($p < .001$).
- Psychological inflexibility partially mediated the effects of loneliness on all four outcomes ($p < .05$).
- Psychological flexibility partially mediated the effect of loneliness on sleep impairment ($p < .001$), but did not significantly mediate the effect on distress, fatigue, or physical function ($p > .05$).

DISCUSSION

- Individuals experiencing loneliness may benefit from working with the psychological flexibility model to ameliorate negative outcomes.
- Interventions may target psychological flexibility and inflexibility for reduced distress, fatigue, sleep impairment, and physical dysfunction.
- Limitations included convenience sampling and cross-sectional design that could limit generalization.

Psychological flexibility may explain the effects of loneliness on sleep impairment, contributing to better sleep, while psychological inflexibility may account for adverse effects of loneliness, leading to increased distress, fatigue, sleep impairment, and physical dysfunction.

Psychological Flexibility				
Outcome	Indirect (ACME)	Direct (ADE)	Total Effect	% Mediation
Distress	.07.	.89***	.96***	.07.
Fatigue	.02	.29***	.31***	.13
Sleep Impairment	.07***	.21***	.28***	.25***
Physical Function	-.01	-.15***	-.16***	.07

Note: Indirect effects reported refer to the effect of loneliness on the outcome via psychological flexibility. Direct effects refer to the effect of loneliness on the reported outcome. Significance codes: 0 = ***, 0.001 = **, 0.01 = *, 0.05 = .

Psychological Inflexibility				
Outcome	Indirect (ACME)	Direct (ADE)	Total Effect	% Mediation
Distress	.33***	.63***	.96***	.34***
Fatigue	.08***	.22***	.31***	.27***
Sleep Impairment	.06**	.22***	.28***	.20**
Physical Function	-.03*	-.13***	-.16***	.17*

Note: Indirect effects reported refer to the effect of loneliness on the outcome via psychological inflexibility. Direct effects refer to the effect of loneliness on the reported outcome. Significance codes: 0 = ***, 0.001 = **, 0.01 = *, 0.05 = .

