



Loneliness Among Wives in Long Distance Marriage: A Descriptive Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the level of loneliness experienced by wives in long distance marriages (LDM). A quantitative descriptive method was employed with 227 participants who completed the UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3. Participants were selected using a snowball sampling technique, and data were collected online. The analysis was conducted using JASP 19.0 software. Results indicated that 54.1% of participants experienced high to very high levels of loneliness. The primary contributing factors included emotional disconnection, infrequent meetings, and limited social support. These findings highlight the psychological vulnerability of wives in long distance marriages and underscore the need for further research and psychosocial interventions.

INTRODUCTION

An ideal marriage, according to Papalia, Olds, and Feldman (2005), is one that offers intimacy, commitment, companionship, affection, sexual fulfillment, opportunities for emotional growth, mutual support, and shared experiences between partners. Every couple desire to remain close, yet certain life circumstances require them to live apart. A marital arrangement where couples are physically separated is referred to as a *long-distance marriage* (LDM). Gertsel and Gross (in Rhodes, 2002) define long-distance relationships as marital situations in which distance physically separates the spouses. Couples in long-distance marriages may be together for a day to several months, but also may be apart for less than a week to more than a month, with the entire arrangement lasting from three months to over 14 years. These couples typically meet on weekends or during certain occasions, which limits their opportunities to spend meaningful time together.

The primary causes of physical separation among married couples are typically related to work, education, career advancement, family obligations, and caregiving responsibilities. Certain professions inherently require geographical separation from family, such as military personnel (e.g., members of the Indonesian National Armed Forces or *TNI* assigned to conflict zones), sailors, mining workers, and civil servants who are stationed in locations far from home. Another reason for separation occurs when one partner must care for a sick parent, compelling the other partner to remain in a different city to continue earning a livelihood. Furthermore, educational pursuits can necessitate separation if one partner studies in a different city or abroad, making it unfeasible to bring the entire family (Siap Nikah, 2020).

A study conducted by Kariuki (2014) found that 73% of women in long-distance marriages lived as though they were single, particularly among those aged 20 to 50. These women often had to become more independent and responsible for their daily lives due to the absence of their husbands (Arifin, Rini, & Pratitis, 2023). Consequently, LDMs can be particularly burdensome for wives who must endure physical and emotional challenges on their own. This study also revealed numerous negative consequences associated with long-distance marriage, including weakened marital bonds, loneliness, social suspicion from friends and relatives, reduced family cohesion, lost opportunities to have children, frequent conflicts, divorce, and financial strain (Rachman, 2017).

Wives in long-distance marriages often face unique challenges, such as when their husbands are busy or unreachable while they themselves are going through difficult situations and need someone to talk to. Additionally, emotional strain intensifies during pregnancy when the wife longs for her husband's presence. After childbirth, new challenges arise when she must raise the child alone (Ratasya, 2022). Women in such marriages frequently report feelings of loneliness. A 2023 survey by the Campaign to End Loneliness found that women are approximately 24% more likely to experience loneliness.

Loneliness is an unpleasant emotional state resulting from a perceived gap between desired and actual social relationships (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). According to Santrock (2002), loneliness is a subjective experience characterized

by feelings of being misunderstood, isolated, and lacking someone to turn to in times of need. Individuals may feel lonely when they fail to establish meaningful connections in interpersonal relationships that meet their expectations. Loneliness can affect anyone, regardless of circumstances, location, or environment. Even in crowded places, one can feel lonely if their social needs are unmet.

Many individuals expect marriage to provide companionship and emotional closeness, allowing them to share stories and engage in activities together (Stokes, 2017). However, having a spouse does not necessarily prevent loneliness. Some wives report persistent feelings of isolation despite being married. Contributing factors include a husband's inattentiveness during conversations, which leads the wife to feel ignored and eventually conceal her own struggles. Others feel they must handle financial burdens independently due to a lack of support. Emotional or romantic disconnects may also cause a sense of distance between spouses. Lastly, some wives are forced to make important decisions alone due to their husband's lack of engagement (Hapsari & Mila, 2022). Loneliness in marriage often stems not from physical solitude, but from a lack of emotional intimacy (Stokes, 2017).

Marriage is often viewed as a protective factor against loneliness, yet long-distance marriages may increase the likelihood of experiencing loneliness (Talsi & Rinaldi, 2024). Not living with one's spouse can heighten the risk of feeling isolated (Campaign to End Loneliness, 2023). A wife in a long-distance marriage may suffer from loneliness, mourning the absence of her partner and experiencing intense longing. Feelings of despair, boredom, and even depression are common, often stemming from limited interaction not only with the husband but also with others in the social environment (Yusninta & Budiman, 2018). Couples in long-distance marriages often report experiencing longing, sadness, and profound loneliness (Janethes, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Loneliness is a subjective and unpleasant emotional experience that arises when there is a discrepancy between the social relationships an individual desires and those they actually possess. Russell et al. (1984) stated that loneliness stems from an individual's perception of deficiencies in their social relationships, whether in quantity or quality. Peplau and Perlman (1982) further explained that loneliness results from a mismatch between desired and actual social interactions, leading to emotional dissatisfaction. Myers (2010) emphasized that loneliness is closely associated with social relationships that are temporary, damaged, or not developing as individuals expect.

Austin (1983) described three important dimensions of loneliness. The intimate others dimension refers to feelings of being separated from emotionally close individuals and lacking someone with whom to share emotional experiences. The social others dimension reflects an individual's inability to form a reliable social network. Meanwhile, the belonging and affiliation dimension relates to the feeling of not being part of a meaningful social group. When

individuals fail to fulfill needs across these three dimensions, loneliness may intensify and become more deeply rooted.

According to Weiss (as cited in Bevinn, 2011), loneliness can be divided into two primary types: emotional loneliness and social loneliness. Emotional loneliness arises from the absence of deep, emotionally intimate relationships – such as with a life partner or close friend – that provide a sense of security and understanding. In contrast, social loneliness results from a lack of involvement in broader social networks or communities, leaving individuals feeling socially disconnected. Both forms of loneliness can have long-term negative effects on an individual's psychological well-being.

Peplau and Perlman (1982) also classified the causes of loneliness into two main categories: triggering factors and maintaining factors. Triggering factors include physical separation, environmental changes, and low levels of social support from family and friends. Maintaining factors, on the other hand, are more closely related to personality traits such as low self-esteem, social anxiety, and shyness. These factors not only contribute to the onset of loneliness but also hinder the individual's ability to rebuild meaningful social relationships.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach aimed at providing an overview of the level of loneliness experienced by wives in long-distance marriages. The research was conducted in April 2025. Loneliness was measured using the UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3 developed by Russell (1996) and adapted into Indonesian by Fahira et al. (2021). The scale consists of 20 items: 11 positively worded and 9 negatively worded statements, with four response alternatives. The population of this study comprised wives who are currently in long-distance marriages across Indonesia. A non-probability sampling method, specifically snowball sampling, was utilized to recruit participants.

Data were collected using an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to identify the mean, minimum and maximum values, and standard deviation of loneliness levels among wives in long-distance marriages. Analysis was performed using JASP version 19.0 for Windows to present a comprehensive distribution of loneliness scores. The results of the analysis were then interpreted to explain the tendency and patterns of loneliness experienced by wives in long-distance marriages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved 227 respondents, all of whom were wives living in long-distance marriages (LDM). The demographic distribution of respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Reason for LDM	Employment	178	78.4
	Education	47	20.7
	Family	2	0.9
Frequency of Meeting Husband	Weekly	43	18.9
	Monthly	81	35.7
	Every few months	87	38.3
	Less than once a year	16	7.0
Location of LDM	Inter-city	103	46.7
	Inter-provincial	106	45.4
	International	18	7.9
Total Respondents		227	100.0

The majority of respondents (78.4%) reported that the main reason for engaging in an LDM was employment. This suggests that economic and professional demands are the primary causes of physical separation between spouses. Meanwhile, 20.7% of respondents were in LDMs due to educational pursuits, such as studying in a different city or abroad. Only 0.9% cited family-related reasons, indicating that family issues are not a dominant factor in the occurrence of LDMs.

In terms of frequency of meeting with their husbands, the largest proportion of respondents (38.3%) stated that they meet their husbands only every few months. This infrequency suggests a significant duration of separation that may increase vulnerability to loneliness. Furthermore, 35.7% meet monthly, 18.9% meet weekly, and 7.0% reported seeing their husbands less than once per year—a condition that can be considered extreme in the context of marital relationships.

Regarding the geographical scope of LDM, most respondents reported inter-city separation (46.7%), followed by inter-provincial (45.4%), and international separation (7.9%).

The description of loneliness levels is based on empirical and hypothetical values of minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation, as shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Empirical and Hypothetical Scores of Loneliness

Variable	Empirical				<i>Hypothetical</i>			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Loneliness	20	79	49.6	15.7	18	80	42	14

The empirical mean score of loneliness was 49.6, with a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 79. The hypothetical mean score was 42, with a minimum of 18 and a maximum of 80. These values were used to develop categorical norms for classifying the levels of loneliness.

Table 3. Categorization of Loneliness Scores

Score Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-33.4	Very Low	38	16.7
33.5-48.9	Low	66	29.0
49-64.4	High	73	32.1
64.5-80	Very High	50	22.0
Total		227	100.0

Based on Table 3, most respondents fell into the *high* loneliness category (32.1%). A significant number (22%) experienced *very high* levels of loneliness. Only 29% were categorized as experiencing *low* loneliness, while 16.7% fell into the *very low* category. These findings suggest that the majority of wives in long-distance marriages experience loneliness at a high level.

This study aimed to examine the level of loneliness among wives living in long-distance marriages (LDM). Based on data from 139 subjects, 66 participants (47.5%) experienced mild loneliness, while 73 participants (52.5%) experienced severe loneliness. Thus, the majority of respondents experienced a high level of loneliness, with the highest percentage reaching 32.1% of the total cumulative score. This indicates that loneliness is a significant phenomenon experienced by women in long-distance marital relationships.

The high loneliness scores among participants highlight a mismatch between the need for emotional closeness and the reality of physical separation between spouses. As explained by Austin (1983), loneliness is not merely the absence of social relationships, but rather the perception of losing meaningful connections that offer emotional intimacy and closeness. In this context, many wives who live apart from their husbands report a sense of lost relationship meaning because they cannot share burdens, emotions, or daily experiences directly. They feel an emotional distance growing in parallel with the physical distance, which worsens their perception of the relationship.

Furthermore, according to Peplau and Perlman (1982), loneliness arises when there is a discrepancy between the social relationships an individual desires and those they actually possess. In long-distance marriages, wives tend to expect their husbands' presence in both emotional and practical aspects of daily life. However, limited physical interaction and infrequent or poor-quality communication often led to unfulfilled expectations.

The situation becomes more complex when wives also face domestic pressures and challenges on their own, such as during pregnancy, raising children, or dealing with illness. In such conditions, the absence of direct emotional support from a partner exacerbates feelings of alienation and helplessness. This is consistent with findings by Damayanti, Ratnawati, and Fevriasanty (2016), which show that loneliness is one of the primary emotional experiences of military wives whose husbands are deployed to conflict zones. This loneliness arises from prolonged physical separation, uncertainty about their husbands' safety, and limited communication due to field conditions. These women feel the absence of emotional support, especially during critical moments such as facing household

problems, caring for sick children, or giving birth. The situation is worsened by the burden of dual roles they must carry alone, as well as a lack of social and psychological support from their surroundings.

Several subjects in this study also stated that they felt they had no source of emotional or social support, as support from their surrounding environment was perceived as inadequate. This reinforces the findings of Naibaho and Virilia (2016), which show that the lack of social support can intensify the experience of loneliness, particularly in relationships that demand emotional involvement, such as marriage. Based on the research findings by Yusnita, Rusli, and Budiman (2018), wives experience loneliness in various ways, yet a common pattern emerges involving both social and emotional loneliness. Social loneliness is experienced through physical separation from the husband, distance from the family of origin, and limited social interaction within the surrounding environment. The husband's absence in daily life leads to feelings of emptiness and a lack of closeness, including unmet emotional and biological needs. Additionally, weakened family ties and a lack of friendships in the residential setting further intensify the sense of isolation. Emotional loneliness is expressed through feelings of hopelessness, depression, and boredom, which stem from the absence of deep and meaningful connections with others.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reveals that wives in long-distance marriages (LDM) experience a relatively high level of loneliness. The majority of participants (54.1%) fell into the categories of high and very high loneliness. The empirical mean score of loneliness (49.6) was above the hypothetical mean score (42), indicating a general perception among the wives of a mismatch between their expectations and the reality of their social relationships, particularly with their spouses. This loneliness arises from limited direct interaction, lack of emotional support, and the burden of dual roles that must be carried out independently. The dominant dimensions of loneliness identified include feelings of lost intimacy with the spouse, the absence of a supportive social network, and a sense of not belonging to a meaningful social group. The primary contributing factors to loneliness were physical separation and low levels of social support.

These findings underscore the importance of psychosocial interventions to assist wives in long-distance marriages in coping with loneliness. It is recommended to strengthen social support systems, both from family members, the surrounding community, and peer groups of other long-distance marriage wives. These supports can provide shared spaces for emotional expression and help reinforce a sense of connectedness.

FURTHER STUDY

This study is limited by its descriptive approach, which does not investigate other psychological or relational factors that may contribute to loneliness in wives undergoing long distance marriage (LDM). Future research should consider incorporating variables such as social support, marital

satisfaction, and communication patterns to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the emotional experiences within LDM dynamics.

Additionally, the study did not explore potential psychological comorbidities that may coexist with loneliness, such as anxiety, depression, or stress. Investigating these conditions in future research may help reveal how emotional distress interacts with loneliness and whether certain psychological factors heighten the risk of emotional disconnection in long distance relationships.

Further research is also recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of targeted psychosocial interventions, such as peer support groups or online counseling, in reducing loneliness among LDM wives. Exploring the role of protective factors, including the use of technology to maintain intimacy and trust in the relationship, could provide valuable insights for developing mental health strategies tailored to this population.

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