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Psychometric analysis of the short-form UCLA Loneliness Scale (ULS-8) in Taiwanese undergraduate students

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to validate the short-form of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (ULS-8; Hays & DiMatteo, 1987) in Taiwanese undergraduate students. A total of 130 undergraduate students participated in this study. Participants completed the ULS-8 in addition to measures of life satisfaction, social support, and adult attachment style. Result of confirmatory factor analysis supported the one-factor model of the ULS-8 with adequate values of various fit indices, revealing that the 8 items of the scale were homogeneous for measuring loneliness. In addition, the ULS-8 had a negative relationship with life satisfaction, and social support; and a positive one with anxiety and avoidant attachment tendency. All the findings showed that the ULS-8 was an adequate short-form measure of loneliness.

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1. Introduction

Research on the phenomenon of loneliness has advanced for the last 30 years (Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Weiss, 1973). In the literature, loneliness plays an important role in investigating

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the psychological process of human feelings and behaviors. Many studies indicated that loneliness has an influential effect on health (e.g., Cacioppo et al., 2002), social anxiety (e.g., Jones, Rose, & Russell, 1990), psychopathology (e.g., Solomon, Waysman, & Mikulincer, 1990), and even the behavior on the Internet (e.g., Moody, 2001; Morahan-Martin, 1999). However, when conducting empirical studies on loneliness, an adequate measure of loneliness is required. This measurement should capture the meaning of loneliness with a solid operational definition.

Among the empirical studies, the UCLA Loneliness Scale (ULS, Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978; Revised ULS version, Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980; ULS version 3, Russell, 1996) is the most commonly used self-report loneliness instrument (Russell, 1996). It was developed to assess subjective feelings of loneliness or social isolation. However, because the scale has 20 items, participants may feel burdened when answering the questionnaire. Hays and DiMatteo (1987) and Russell et al. (1980) developed short-forms of the UCLA Loneliness Scale. Both of the short-forms were derived from the Revised ULS version (R-ULS, Russell et al., 1980).

Russell et al. (1980) short-form scale, the ULS-4, has just 4 items. They were selected according to regression analysis, in which the 4 items were the best subset in predicting the self-labeling loneliness index consisting of 6 items, such as “During the past two weeks, how lonely have you felt?”. Hays and DiMatteo (1987) short-form scale, the ULS-8, has 8 items. These items were selected according to an exploratory factor analysis result, in which 8 items had a substantial load on the first factor.

Hays and DiMatteo (1987) and Wilson, Cutts, Lees, Mapungwana, and Maunganidze (1992) had compared the two short-form scales with the R-ULS. Their results revealed that the ULS-8 is a better substitute for the R-ULS than the ULS-4 in three aspects. First, the correlation between the ULS-8 and R-ULS ($r = 0.91$, Hays & DiMatteo, 1987; $r = 0.82$ to 0.87 , Wilson et al., 1992) was higher than the correlation between the ULS-4 and R-ULS ($r = 0.88$, Hays & DiMatteo, 1987; $r = 0.69$ to 0.74 , Wilson et al., 1992). Second, the internal reliability (coefficient α) of the ULS-8 ($\alpha = 0.84$, Hays & DiMatteo, 1987; $r = 0.56$ – 0.60 , Wilson et al., 1992) was higher than that of the ULS-4 ($\alpha = 0.63$, Hays & DiMatteo, 1987; $r = 0.31$ – 0.45 , Wilson et al., 1992). Third, the correlations between the ULS-8 and other related measures, such as social anxiety, alienation, satisfaction with friends, sex life, family, and self, were similar to the correlations between the R-ULS and these measures, but higher than those of the ULS-4 and these measures (Hays & DiMatteo, 1987). In addition, Wiseman, Gutfreund, and Lurie (1995) showed that the ULS-8 was positively correlated with depression. These findings were consistent with the theoretical relations of loneliness. Thus, the existing findings suggested that ULS-8 was a better substitute for the R-ULS than the ULS-4.

The purpose of this study was to validate the ULS-8 with a sample of Chinese individuals in Taiwan, because no short-form version of the ULS was validated on Chinese samples. In addition, the most important reason was that a short-form scale can facilitate researchers to conduct a large-scale survey using only several items to measure loneliness. For example, Academia Sinica conducts the Taiwan Social Change Survey (TSCS) every year. The TSCS is a national survey, which contains many questionnaires assessing various constructs within a specific topic of the year. In order to assess as many constructs as possible, items in the full version of a standard measurement cannot all be included in the survey. Researchers in the survey committee have to abbreviate the length of questionnaires. As a result, validating the ULS-8 on Chinese people makes a practical contribution in a large-scale survey when loneliness is one of target constructs.

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