



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Influence of loneliness on self-esteem and mental wellbeing in non-domicile postgraduate students in Bangalore

Saloni M. Thacker¹, S. Z. Zubair Ahmed^{2#}, Anaurene Roy^{1*#}

Abstract

The study aimed to understand the associations between loneliness, self-esteem, and mental wellbeing among non-domiciled postgraduate students in Bangalore. Using the interactionist approach to loneliness (Weiss, 1973) as a theoretical backdrop, the research investigates how the interplay of environmental and situational factors contributes to the wellbeing of students studying away from their home environments. The participants recruited for the study were $N=103$ postgraduate students relocated and residing in Bangalore presently. The obtained data of the participants is analysed using SPSS version 21. With data being normally distributed, Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis is used to understand if there was a relationship between loneliness, self-esteem and mental wellbeing of non-domiciled students. The findings of the study revealed a moderately significant inverse correlation between loneliness and self-esteem ($r = -.44, p = .001$). Additionally, a moderately significant inverse correlation was also observed between loneliness and mental wellbeing ($r = -.54, p = 0.001$). These results are consistent with theoretical frameworks suggesting that perceived social disconnection influences self-perception and emotional resilience. Individual vulnerabilities, such as feeling low, along with environmental stressors like social isolation, cultural adjustment, and separation from familiar support systems, can influence self-perception and emotional resilience. All of these factors contribute to loneliness, which in turn may affect their self-esteem and overall mental wellbeing.

Keywords: Loneliness, Self-esteem, Mental wellbeing, Non-domicile, Postgraduate students.

Introduction

Transitioning away from home to pursue educational opportunities is a significant and challenging milestone in an individual's life. For students, this period involves navigating academic obstacles, personal growth, and social adjustment. Non-domicile students—those who originate from distant locations—often encounter additional challenges due to the absence of established social support

systems. This lack of support can intensify the pressures to succeed in unfamiliar academic and social environments, leading to feelings of loneliness and emotional distress, eventually affecting the mental wellbeing of an individual. Particularly, in reference to students pursuing postgraduate education, which is generally associated with academic and professional advancement, the psychological effects of relocation and potential social isolation (such as loneliness) are frequently underestimated (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009). This pilot research study is aimed at exploring the influence of loneliness, self-esteem, and mental wellbeing of non-domiciled postgraduate students in Bangalore.

Loneliness is defined as the perceived experience of social isolation, which involves a lack of social connections and the perception of insufficient meaningful relationships (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). Life changes like moving or losing a loved one can lead to profound loneliness. As individuals grow, they become more independent and start seeking meaningful relationships. (Gürses, Merhametli & Metin, 2011). The Lonely Society's 2010 report found loneliness to be a greater concern among young people. Reports suggest that nearly 60% of those aged between 18 and 34 years reported feeling lonely, compared with 35% of those aged over 55 years (Casey, 2010). The demands of academic life, coupled with the pressure to excel in a competitive

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environment, can exacerbate feelings of isolation. Postgraduate students—especially those coming from other countries or those who are locals but away from their support networks—often face challenges in establishing new social connections. As these students distance themselves from their familiar support systems, including family and close friends, they may experience emotional instability. This emotional turmoil can significantly affect their self-esteem and overall wellbeing, making it even more difficult for them to navigate both their academics and social interactions.

Other reasons to experience loneliness are the advancements in transportation, which facilitate a trend of individuals relocating from their hometowns to larger, more prosperous cities. This invariably results in the shedding of basic social network systems. Recent studies show that lonely students often perceive themselves as socially disconnected, report fewer close relationships, and experience lower interpersonal satisfaction (Venya & Pushparaj, 2022; Van Tonder *et al.*, 2023). Feelings of unhappiness and perceived threats can significantly distort an individual's self-perception and are associated with diminished positive affect (Adib & Sabharwal, 2024; Saeed, 2020), as well as pessimistic cognitive biases (Bedi, Roberts, & Duff, 2024). Students who experience persistent loneliness may also demonstrate lower social competence and heightened social anxiety (Nahar, Sheikh, & Parvin, 2025), which reinforces social withdrawal. Furthermore, loneliness among university students is closely linked to reduced life satisfaction and compromised mental wellbeing (Misirlis *et al.*, 2020; Sharifi, 2022). Throughout evolution, social bonds have been essential to our survival. Social neuroscientists propose that we inherit our expectations for social connection from our parents, establishing a baseline level of comfort in our relationships (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018). This expectation variation explains why individuals experience loneliness differently; each individual's needs and anticipations differ. When these expectations go unmet, the body reacts by signalling a sense of physical threat. If the loneliness persists, it starts interfering with the ability to regulate the associated emotions. In time, this alters social cognition and how one interprets interactions with others. Thus, loneliness is associated with personality traits that foster maladaptive interpersonal behaviours, indicating a positive correlation with low self-esteem and emotional intelligence (Ze-wei *et al.*, 2014).

Most studies have examined correlations between loneliness and various social, emotional, and structural variables. Recent research confirms that disrupted close relationships and emotional disconnection are key contributors to loneliness among students (Bedi, Roberts, & Duff, 2024; Adib & Sabharwal, 2024). Even individuals in close relationships may report emotional loneliness when

their relational needs go unmet (Venya & Pushparaj, 2022). Institutional environments that lack inclusivity or emotional support can also exacerbate feelings of isolation (Sharifi, 2022; Bedi *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, health-related issues such as impaired vision and hearing difficulties can significantly exacerbate feelings of loneliness (Matteson & McConnell, 1988). Windriver (1993) highlighted that loneliness can result in severe mental and physical health complications, ultimately contributing to a reduction in life expectancy (Mesi, Chen, Hawkey, & Cacioppo, 2010). Researchers have been exploring the reasons behind feelings of loneliness, but there is still no consensus on the matter. However, studies have consistently shown that low self-esteem, which is a common cognitive trait among lonely individuals, is linked to loneliness. Additionally, low self-esteem is considered a potential contributing factor to the experience of loneliness (Kirova-Petrova, 2000; Ze-wei *et al.*, 2014).

Self-esteem is a crucial element of psychological wellbeing, reflecting how individuals assess themselves in terms of social relationships, self-acceptance, and the ability to form meaningful connections. Low self-esteem can often result in feelings of loneliness (Ze-wei *et al.*, 2014). This is because prolonged experiences of loneliness can trigger a detrimental cycle of emotional distress and social withdrawal. This isolation not only heightens feelings of sadness and inadequacy but also makes it increasingly difficult for individuals to engage with others, thus, affecting the mental wellbeing of the individual. Mental wellbeing includes emotional stability, psychological health, and strong social connections. It has been reported that women who feel lonely often display higher levels of self-criticism and are more sensitive to rejection. In contrast, men often internalise their feelings of loneliness due to societal expectations of stoicism, which can further undermine their self-worth (Mahalik *et al.*, 2003). Experiences of withdrawal can have a significant negative impact on an individual's mental wellbeing. Over time, such withdrawal can decrease an individual's psychological resilience and weaken their ability to cope with everyday challenges (Segrin & Flora, 2000). Several studies have shown that persistent feelings of loneliness, along with low self-esteem, can severely affect mental health. This often leads to major challenges such as depression, anxiety, and elevated stress levels (Cacioppo *et al.*, 2006). Affective models of self-esteem propose that it develops early in life and includes two key feelings: belonging and mastery. Belonging is the sense of being unconditionally loved and valued simply for who one is. This feeling provides individuals with a secure foundation, ensuring that they feel valued and respected no matter the circumstances. The roots of self-esteem are linked to different attachment styles. People are motivated to maintain and enhance their self-esteem because higher self-esteem is associated with psychological benefits. Lonely

individuals often withdraw from social interactions and avoid seeking emotional support, leading to increased isolation and difficulties in emotional regulation, with low self-esteem being a significant factor (Baumeister and Twenge, 2001). According to Winch (2013), those with low self-esteem are more vulnerable to failure, experience greater declines in motivation, and show less persistence after setbacks. They are also more susceptible to anxiety and stress, releasing elevated levels of cortisol that linger longer than in those with higher self-esteem. This suggests that increased loneliness leads to decreased self-esteem, which negatively impacts emotional intelligence. Therefore, fostering strong social connections and improving self-esteem are vital for supporting mental wellbeing and alleviating the negative impacts of loneliness and psychological distress.

Mental wellbeing encompasses a broad spectrum of an individual's emotional, psychological, and social functioning. It reflects how people think, feel, and behave, encompassing aspects such as their ability to handle stress, establish and maintain relationships, and make informed decisions (Keyes, 2002). It is important to note that mental wellbeing is not merely the absence of mental illness; rather, it embodies the presence of positive attributes such as life satisfaction, emotional resilience i.e., the ability to bounce back from challenges and psychological flexibility, which refers to the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances (Tennant *et al.*, 2007). Students who pursue their academics while residing in their hometowns enjoy greater family support and social connections, which greatly enhance their mental health (Sawir *et al.*, 2008). In contrast, students who move to different regions often encounter distinct challenges, such as adapting to a new culture, coping with increased academic pressure, and maintaining fewer social contacts (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Lacking a solid social foundation in an unfamiliar area, the students may experience heightened feelings of loneliness, which could also affect their self-esteem, along with homesickness. This argument is also supported in the previous research, which indicates that students who live at home have greater access to family and social support. They also have more opportunities to connect with others who share similar experiences, which can significantly benefit their mental health (Sawir *et al.*, 2008). In contrast, students who move to different regions often face unique challenges, such as adjusting to a new culture, dealing with increased academic pressure, and maintaining fewer social connections (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Students who maintain strong mental wellbeing are better equipped to manage academic and social stress, which is especially important for non-domiciled students who may struggle with cultural adjustment and feelings of dislocation. Supporting their mental wellbeing is essential to improving their overall quality of life. Although there are studies to substantiate many positive and negative factors

experienced by postgraduate non-domiciled students, there is a lack of research evidence that helps explore the interplay between loneliness and self-esteem and their joint effects on the mental wellbeing of non-domiciled students in Bangalore. We believe that this research will highlight the need for universities to become more inclusive and supportive through tailored interventions for non-domiciled students in the future. With this as the basis, the present study aimed to understand the influence of loneliness on self-esteem and mental wellbeing in non-domiciled postgraduate students in Bangalore.

Review of literature

Research consistently demonstrates a strong connection between loneliness and adverse mental health outcomes, including heightened levels of depression and anxiety (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009). Limited social connections significantly contribute to feelings of loneliness, with studies indicating that individuals who are lonely tend to have poorer mental health profiles (Beck *et al.*, 1979). Additionally, loneliness has been associated with an increased risk of mortality (Cacioppo *et al.*, 2006; Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009). According to cognitive-behavioural theory (Beck *et al.*, 1979), self-esteem is influenced by an individual's thoughts and beliefs, which in turn affect emotional experiences. Hence, those individuals with low self-esteem often feel worthless and become trapped in negative thought patterns, further reinforcing their loneliness and leading them to perceive themselves as unappealing in social contexts. The following section examines the literature on loneliness, self-esteem, and mental wellbeing among non-domiciled students in Bangalore.

Loneliness and Self-Esteem among Young Men and Women

Loneliness, defined as the subjective experience of social isolation and insufficient social connections, significantly affects self-esteem, especially among young adults. This demographic is often in a transitional phase where they seek to establish their social identity and form lasting relationships. As a result, loneliness can diminish self-esteem by reinforcing negative self-perceptions and fostering social withdrawal. Vanhalst, Luyckx, Scholte, Engels, and Goossens (2013) study examined low self-esteem as a potential risk factor for loneliness during adolescence. They found that low self-esteem is perceived as an underlying mechanism linked to social acceptance, rather than being a direct indicator of actual social acceptance. The study examined the relationship between loneliness and self-esteem through two longitudinal studies. The study examined the relationship between loneliness and self-esteem through two longitudinal studies. The first involved Dutch adolescents (average age 15.22 years; 47% female; N = 428) across five waves, while the second focused on Belgian

adolescents (average age 14.95 years; 63% female; $N = 882$) across three waves. Results indicated that self-esteem and loneliness influenced one another in a reciprocal manner. Furthermore, the dominant path from self-esteem to loneliness was partially mediated by perceived but not actual social acceptance. In another study, Ma Ze-Wei, Liang, Zeng, Jiang and Liu (2014) examined whether social anxiety mediates the relationship between self-esteem and loneliness in 285 Chinese college students. A series of questionnaires to measure self-esteem, social anxiety and loneliness were administered to them. The causal steps approach indicated that social anxiety partially mediated the relationship between self-esteem and loneliness. Similarly, Hu, Jin, Hu, and He (2013) studied loneliness and its relationship to explicit and implicit self-esteem and found that there is a relationship between the variables. A few studies in India found that adolescents aged 10-11 years reported higher self-esteem than those aged 12-13 years ($p < .01$), while low global, general and home-parents self-esteem were associated with high levels of loneliness. Additionally, it was found that adolescents with high self-esteem were securely attached, while those with low self-esteem had preoccupied and fearful attachment (Dhal, Bhatia, Sharma, and Gupta, 2007).

Loneliness and self-esteem are closely related psychological factors that significantly affect mental health. Chronic loneliness can lead to internalised rejection, undermining self-worth and self-concept (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). Young women tend to perceive loneliness as a personal issue, often linking it to their own perceived shortcomings. In contrast, young men may hesitate to acknowledge their feelings of loneliness due to societal expectations that discourage emotional expression in males. This can result in men internalising their loneliness as a personal failure, which in turn contributes to their isolation. Loneliness can lead to negative thoughts and maladaptive behaviours, including self-criticism and feelings of unworthiness (Beck *et al.*, 1979). This forms a cycle where loneliness diminishes self-esteem, and in turn, low self-esteem exacerbates feelings of loneliness. For instance, individuals with low self-esteem may view themselves as socially unattractive and may withdraw from meaningful interactions, resulting in further isolation (Wei *et al.*, 2005). This cycle can significantly affect mental wellbeing, as both loneliness and low self-esteem are associated with increased rates of depression, anxiety, and stress (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009), which eventually affects mental wellbeing. Attachment styles are also found to affect loneliness and self-esteem. Individuals with insecure attachment styles often struggle with loneliness and low self-esteem (Wei *et al.*, 2005). This can hinder the possibilities of forming supportive relationships. Understanding the connection between loneliness and self-esteem is essential for the mental health

of young adults, especially postgraduate students. As many non-domicile students relocate away from their homes and support networks, they may experience increased loneliness, making them more vulnerable to declines in self-esteem and mental wellbeing (Cacioppo *et al.*, 2006).

Mental Wellbeing among Non-Domiciled Students

Health is the state of mental wellbeing influenced by an individual's feelings, family and personal relationships, and educational success. These factors can be measured by emotional stability over time (Keyes, 2002). Non-residential students pursuing higher education often face unique challenges that can affect their wellbeing. Starting fresh in a new environment involves navigating unfamiliar cultures, building social connections, and adapting to academic expectations, all of which can increase pressure and mental health risks for new settlers (Sawir *et al.*, 2008). Research indicates that non-domicile students experience higher rates of loneliness, anxiety, and even depression while studying abroad compared to their domicile peers (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Wilcox *et al.* (2005) found that non-domicile students who lacked strong peer and faculty support networks experienced increased feelings of isolation and fatigue. This, in turn, intensified their sense of helplessness, ultimately contributing to a structural vulnerability to depression. Similarly, Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) discovered that non-domiciled students, particularly those from international backgrounds, faced higher levels of psychological issues. These problems often stemmed from the challenges of navigating two different languages, including difficulties with adjustment and the interpretation of professors' communication styles.

Psychological adjustment theory, like Berry's (1997) model of acculturation, helps explain the mental health challenges faced by non-domiciled students. Berry identifies four strategies that individuals use to adapt to new cultures: assimilation into the local culture, blending their native customs with the new environment, isolating themselves from culturally different peers, or remaining marginalised (Ward *et al.*, 2001). Students who struggle to integrate into academic and social settings are at a higher risk of experiencing acculturative stress, which may lead to anxiety, depression, and poor academic performance. Leong *et al.*, research indicates that students from collectivist cultures, such as East Asia, may face greater psychological distress due to the significant differences between their host country and their home environment, requiring substantial adjustments in social dynamics and expectations (Leong *et al.*, 2015). Strong social ties help to protect against both loneliness and stress. University services for support, such as counselling centres, mentor programs and peer support groups, are vital in mitigating mental health problems associated with changing one's residential location. A recent study suggests that students who actively participate in college-sponsored

programs for help and guidance enjoy greater psychological resilience and general wellbeing (Kiltz *et al.*, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

The Interactionist approach to loneliness

Weiss (1973) was a leading spokesperson for the interactionist approach. His explanation of loneliness can be classified as interactionist for two reasons. First, he emphasises that loneliness is not solely a function of personality factors or situational factors. Instead, loneliness is the product of their combined (or interactive) effect. Second, Weiss (1973) has written on the provisions of social relationships, such things as attachment, guidance, and a sense of worth. Implicit in such an analysis is the view that loneliness results when one's social interactions are deficient in supplying crucial social requirements. Weiss postulated two types of loneliness:

- *Emotional loneliness*

This type of loneliness results from the absence of a close, intimate attachment, such as a lover or a spouse. An emotionally lonely person should feel something akin to the separation anxiety of a child: anxiety, restlessness, and emptiness.

- *Social loneliness*

This type of loneliness occurs as a response to the absence of meaningful friendships or a sense of community. A socially lonely person experiences boredom and feelings of being socially marginal.

So far, there have been sufficient studies conducted on loneliness, self-esteem and mental wellbeing with other concepts or as a single factor in various disciplines. However, few studies have concentrated on loneliness, self-esteem and mental wellbeing specifically on non-domiciled postgraduate students in India. Understanding how loneliness and low self-esteem interact can reveal the mechanisms that lead to emotional distress affecting mental wellbeing. This study helps to bridge the research gap by understanding the influence of loneliness on self-esteem and mental wellbeing among postgraduate students in Bangalore. With this as the base, the objective of this research is to understand the influence of loneliness, self-esteem and mental wellbeing of postgraduate students who are non-domiciled in Bangalore. The study hypothesises that there is a relationship between loneliness, self-esteem and mental wellbeing among non-domiciled postgraduate students.

Methods

Participants

The participants recruited for the study included full-time postgraduate students in Bangalore universities. Their age ranged between 20 and 30 years, and they were recruited using convenience sampling and snowball sampling

methods. There were a total of 119 participants who responded, of which 103 participants (male = 28 and female = 75) were confirmed based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria as pre-defined.

Research Approach

This study employed a non-experimental, correlational, and comparative design to investigate the relationship between loneliness, self-esteem, and mental wellbeing among postgraduate students who are non-domiciled. Such a method is adopted because we believe that transitioning to new places can have a profound impact on the students' psychological wellbeing, especially as self-esteem plays a key role in mediating feelings of loneliness and influencing mental health. These dynamics can lead to difficulties in social and academic integration.

Measures

To reach the purpose of the study, three established questionnaires were administered to the participants. Firstly, the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3), a 20-item scale, was developed by Daniel Russell (1996), which is revised from the original scale developed by Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson (1978). The scale assessed subjective feelings of loneliness and social isolation in the individuals. An example of an item is "How often do you feel left out?". The responses of this scale are rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *never*, 4 = *often*). The scale demonstrated good psychometric properties with an excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .89$ to $.94$), and long-term test-retest stability ($r = .73$). Confirmatory factor analyses affirm its construct validity.

Secondly, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (RSES) was developed by Rosenberg (1965). This scale is a unidimensional self-reported scale that measures global self-worth by measuring the positive and negative feelings of the self. The scale included ten statements rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. An example of the scale is "on the whole, I am satisfied with myself. This scale also demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .77$ – $.88$) and test-retest reliability ($r = .82$ – $.85$).

Finally, the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) by Tennant *et al.* (2007) is a 14-item measure of positive mental health encompassing emotional and psychological functioning. Items (e.g., "I've been feeling optimistic about the future") are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = *None of the time* to 5 = *All of the time*, yielding scores between 14 and 70. Higher scores reflect greater mental wellbeing. Good psychometric properties were also reported for this scale with an excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .89$ on student sample and $.91$ population sample) and construct, criterion and content validity in student samples. Confirmatory analysis also supported a single-factor hypothesis.

Procedure

After receiving ethical approval, participants in this study were thoroughly informed about the nature of the research. Informed consent was obtained, and participation was voluntary, allowing individuals to withdraw at any time. All responses were assured to be used for academic purposes only, maintaining anonymity. With adequate instructions provided, this research gathered data through both paper surveys and Google Forms. An online questionnaire link was circulated on social media (e.g., Whatapp, Facebook, and Instagram), and hard copies were also made available. Participants completed both the online and offline versions, which included demographic questions and three psychological scales. The responses were then cleaned using Excel and later imported into SPSS for further analysis.

Data Analysis

The data is analysed using the SPSS software version 21. A summary of statistics (mean, standard deviation, and data normality) is presented as descriptive analysis. Furthermore, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was used to determine the relationships among loneliness, self-esteem and mental wellbeing.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of the study is to understand if loneliness influences self-esteem and mental wellbeing in non-domiciled postgraduate students in Bangalore. The results derived are exclusive to students who are non-domiciled and residing in Bangalore city at the time of the research undertaken. The data was analysed using the Pearson Product-Moment method, and the results are presented accordingly. The descriptive statistics revealed that the mean values were higher for loneliness ($M = 46.46$, $SD = 9.74$) than for the other variables (e.g., self-esteem ($M = 17.58$, $SD = 4.84$) and mental wellbeing ($M = 44.12$, $SD = 9.15$). The data is also found to be normally distributed, as skewness and kurtosis were within the normal range of psychometric properties $+2$ to -2 (Field, 2013). The correlation findings showed that loneliness and self-esteem had an inverse, yet a moderately significant correlation ($r = -.44$, $p = .001$), which implies that the higher the loneliness experience, the lower self-esteem is predicted. Similarly, a moderately significant inverse correlation was found between loneliness and mental wellbeing ($r = -.548$, $p = .001$), which means that greater loneliness correlates with poorer mental wellbeing.

The results outlined above provide strong support for the theoretical framework of the interactionist approach to loneliness. This framework posits that loneliness emerges from the dynamic interaction between individual traits, such as personality, and contextual or situational challenges, including the social environment. When students transition from their hometowns to new locations for academic pursuits, they may find themselves feeling vulnerable and

overwhelmed. These experiences can adversely affect their self-esteem and social skills. The contributing factors include separation from family members, such as parents and siblings, as well as experiencing culture shock due to the challenges of adapting to a different cultural setting. The moderately inverse relationship between loneliness and self-esteem may arise from the challenges of adapting to a new environment. Furthermore, a lack of familiarity with the local language can exacerbate feelings of distress. Individuals with lower self-esteem may be more prone to interpreting social situations pessimistically, leading them to feel rejected and, as a result, avoid social gatherings and interactions altogether. These findings align with research showing that emotional isolation negatively impacts cognitive and emotional functioning in students (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; Misirlis *et al.*, 2020). Nevertheless, if the individual experiences a more supportive and inclusive environment, it can reduce vulnerabilities and the risk of loneliness, highlighting the connection between individual traits and social context (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009).

The associations between loneliness and mental health show a complete experience that could significantly impact overall mental health. Using the backdrop of the theoretical framework, feelings of loneliness can intensify mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, which are caused by environmental and situational factors. With such challenges experienced an individual's willingness to socially engage and interact diminishes (Qualter *et al.*, 2015). This may be noticeable for non-domiciled students who do not have sufficient support systems or resources that domiciled students may have. Given the various factors contributing to the mental health challenges faced by non-domiciled students, especially in diverse post-pandemic environments, universities should take a holistic approach to enhance these underrepresented students' understanding and sense of belonging. By cultivating inclusive teaching environments, implementing culturally sensitive systems, and promoting awareness of mental health education theories, institutions can substantially improve both the psychological wellbeing and academic success of these learners.

In conclusion, this study emphasises the interactionist approach to understanding loneliness in non-domiciled students. Specifically, the study has found that there is a significant inverse relationship between loneliness, self-esteem, and mental wellbeing, which indicates that both internal issues and external challenges contribute to psychological distress. The study has several limitations that should be addressed. The sample size was relatively small and limited to a few institutions, which may affect generalisability. It may not possibly capture the experiences among non-domiciled students, particularly those from various cultural or socio-economic backgrounds. While the correlational design reveals associations, it does not

establish causation. A mixed-methods or qualitative approach would help us understand the meanings and coping mechanisms for overcoming loneliness, enhancing our grasp of the interactionist processes involved. This research also highlights the need for institutions to implement comprehensive, multi-tiered interventions that consider not only individual support needs but also the social and structural factors influencing students' ability to connect, adapt, and succeed.

Author Contributions

The first author and the corresponding authors have contributed substantially to the conception of the manuscript and to preparing the initial draft. The first, second and corresponding authors collaboratively revised and refined the second draft, culminating in the final version of the manuscript. All authors have thoroughly reviewed the manuscript, made necessary revisions, and approved the final version. They also declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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