

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FEELING OF LONELINESS IN THE WORKPLACE AND THE AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT OF EMPLOYEES TOWARD THE ORGANIZATION

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to disclose the relationship between the feeling of loneliness in the workplace and the affective commitment of employees to the organization. Loneliness in the workplace is treated in two dimensions, emotional and social. The study explains one of the most important issues of the work environment, namely organizational psychology.

The methodology of this study is non-experimental correlational. The sample of this study consists of 205 purposeful sampled respondents, employees of public and private institutions.

The findings show that there is a strong negative relationship between the feeling of loneliness in the workplace and the affective commitment of employees to the organization. Linear regression analysis showed that 37% of affective commitment is explained by loneliness at work.

In terms of the relationship between loneliness at work, respectively affective deprivation and social relationships, and affective commitment, the findings show that there is a moderate negative relationship. Meanwhile, a moderate positive relationship was found between the dimensions of loneliness at work. On the other hand, the dimensions of loneliness in the workplace were significant predictors in explaining the variance of affective commitment.

*Keywords:* loneliness in the workplace, emotional deprivation, social relationships, affective commitment, employees

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## Introduction

The issue addressed in this paper pertains to the field of organizational psychology. The motivation to conduct such research is found in the significance and necessity of this study in our country, perhaps even more broadly, precisely because there is a lack of studies of this nature, namely in the context of the relationship between the feeling of loneliness in the workplace and the affective commitment. As stated in the theory of Wright, Strongman & Burt (2006), loneliness in the workplace occurs when the employee perceives a lack of social ties at work, as well as feels dissatisfied with the quality of these interpersonal relationships in that workplace. Among other things, as emphasized in various theories, loneliness in the workplace leaves marks not only on the person experiencing this phenomenon but on the organization in general. Different studies have found that experiencing loneliness in the workplace by the employee affects organizations in terms of reducing performance in the workplace but also affects the reduction of affective commitment. As for affective commitment, by defining it as the affective relationship of the employee to the organization, Planer (2019), among others, underlines that the employees express their identification with the organization and their involvement in its work. It is worth mentioning that when employees are effectively committed, they work in the organization of their own free will, not perforce, in other words, it is a personal choice of an employee to remain committed to the organization, through affective identification with it. Therefore, the practical implication of these findings will serve organizations as well.

## **The feeling of loneliness in the workplace**

For a human being, loneliness is a concept that is against his nature since a human being is always in need of social communication and social integration (Cacioppo and Patrick, 2008, cited by Ayazlar & Güzel, 2014). Regarding loneliness at work, it occurs when the employee perceives a lack of social ties at work, as well as feels dissatisfied with the quality of these interpersonal relationships in that workplace (Wright, Strongman & Burt, 2006). Authors such as Stoica, Brate, Bucuță, Dura & Morar (2014) share the same approach to this phenomenon, emphasizing that when interpersonal relationships in the work environment are perceived as poor, then it is about loneliness at the workplace. According to them, this phenomenon has negative effects on a person since experiencing it increases anxiety and depression in them, may increase hostility towards others and may reduce cooperation capacity. Deniz (2019), on the other hand, emphasized that in the time we are living, loneliness has become a very serious problem. Thus, noted that it is no longer seen only in everyday life but also in the workplace, which has a negative effect on both, employees, and organizations. According to Erdil & Ertosun (2011), loneliness in the workplace is important to the individual since it has a negative impact on their private life, as well as on organizations since it has a negative impact on the work quality. When we talk about loneliness in the workplace, Wright et al. (2006) divide it into two dimensions: the emotional dimension and the social one. Supporting Weiss's theory (1973), they relate the emotional dimension to the perception of the quality of the relationships that a person has with their co-workers at work. On the other hand, the social dimension refers to the number of interpersonal relationships in a working environment, which means the degree a person is involved in a group.

The words affective commitment implies and associates us with a strong relationship between an employee and the organization, based on several assumptions. Firstly, employees have a strong belief in the organization, and acceptance of the organizational goals and values. Secondly, there is a willingness of utilizing considerable efforts on behalf of the organization. Finally, there is a strong desire for employees to maintain and enjoy the relationship with the organization (Shahid & Zain, 2018). Based on the theory of Meyer & Allen (1997), the researchers as Batholomew, Awa & Ukoha stress that affective commitment is characterized by three factors: belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, a willingness to focus effort on helping the organization achieve its goals and objectives, and the strong desire to maintain organizational membership. Thus, according to them, when all these are present, an employee identifies with a particular organization and its goals and objectives to maintain membership and enhance the achievement of these goals and objectives.

In line with this, Neziri (2021) in his study highlights that the affective commitment of employees is quite important for organizations since when there is a strong affective relationship between the employee and the organization, this makes the employees go more regularly to work, be more active during working hours and inclined to give their maximum at work. It is important to note that this strong affective relationship is created when the employee values are the same as the values promoted by the organization where they work. However, in a similar study to the doctoral dissertation of Wright (2005), it is found that between loneliness in the workplace and organizational commitment, there is a moderate negative, but statistically significant correlation,  $r = -.52$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . On the other hand, the study by Ozcelik & Barsade (2018) found that loneliness in the workplace considerably negatively predicts the affective commitment of employees in the organization. Regarding the dimensions of loneliness to affective commitment, the study of Ayazlar & Güzel (2014) found that affective commitment is negatively related to the emotional dimension ( $r = -.183$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and the social dimension ( $r = -.244$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Correspondingly, this study has found that only the social dimension of loneliness explains the affective commitment at a 5% level ( $\beta = -.204$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

## **Methodology**

The main purpose of this study is to verify the relationship between the feeling of loneliness in the work environment and the affective commitment of employees. Relevant variables are not part of this paper. The study treated the findings through the non-experimental correlational method, due to the type and content of the data.

### **The population and sample**

The population of this study was the employees in public and private institutions, respectively respondents from North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Preshevo Valley. The sample of this study consisted of a total of 205 respondents, of which 110 or 53.66% are male and 95 or 46.34% of participants are female. As for the age, the youngest age of participants included in this study is 18, while the oldest is 63, with an average of 32.20 years and a standard deviation (SD=8.46). On the other hand, the work experience is operationalized as the number of years an employee has spent in an institution, and in this study, it expands from 0 to 38 years. The average experience of participants is 7.46 with a standard deviation of (SD= 6.79).

### **Instruments**

Regarding loneliness in the workplace and its dimensions, the instrument used is compiled by Wright, Strongman & Burt (2006), also based on the fact that we have elaborated the basic theory of this study based on the concepts of these authors. The instrument measuring loneliness in the workplace is divided into two dimensions, emotional and social. In total, the instrument consists of 16 questions, of which the first 9 refer to the emotional dimension of loneliness in the workplace and the other 7 questions refer to the social dimension, expressed by the Likert scale from 0 (Completely disagree) to 4 (Completely agree). This instrument has resulted in test-retest reliability .80, for emotional deprivation (emotional dimension) its value is .93, while .87 is the value for social relations (social dimension).

The questionnaire is translated from English into Albanian by a professional translator. According to the reliability analysis, Alpha Cronbach's coefficient for loneliness in the workplace is .83, for emotional deprivation is .80, while for social ties, its value is Alpha .70. Based on the Alpha Cronbach reliability analysis, its value shows high internal consistency in the scale for measuring loneliness in the workplace and its dimensions. The instrument has gone through adaptation stages through factor analysis for the given population.

The instrument compiled by Neziri (2016) was used in this study. This instrument was used in his doctoral dissertation and has been adapted and modified for our country by the scale of Mowday, Steers & Porter (1979). He administered this instrument to a sample of 298 teachers of public and private universities in North Macedonia, and it resulted in a reliability of Alpha .86. The instrument consists of 9 questions scored on the Likert scale: 0 (Strongly disagree) to 4 (Strongly agree). In our study, this instrument results in high internal consistency (Alpha .80).

### **Data collection**

The data collection phase started in mid-January and lasted until mid-February 2020, mainly after the end-of-year holidays, supposing that the effect of the holidays could affect the results of the study. The study was a double-blind, online form, through the social network Facebook.

First, 20 people were purposefully selected to share the questionnaire link in their profiles. The people sharing the questionnaire link were from different cities and did not know each other, and they had no mutual friends, so the latter was not given the chance to fill out the questionnaire twice. As for the structure of the questionnaire, the instruction part provided all necessary instructions for filling it out, while the e-mail address of the researcher was also provided in case further clarifications were needed. The variables of the study were not mentioned in the instructions due to the direct impact on respondents while answering questions. However, it does provide information that the questions refer to different situations in the workplace. It is important to note that even the people who shared the questionnaire were not informed about the problem of the study, to enable us to control all the factors that affect the responses, respectively, the latter could not provide information to others about the problem being addressed.

The respondents were informed about the time necessary to fill out the questionnaire. They were also informed and had the technical option to withdraw from completing the questionnaire at any time, without any response being recorded. For the respondents who filled out the questionnaire, there was no option to leave any question without a response.

Ethical research rules were respected, the anonymity of the respondents, their voluntary participation in the study, and the protection of personal data. This survey form provided complete anonymity and was used to avoid direct contact between the researcher and the respondent. All data were processed with the SPSS program, using relevant statistics at a tolerance level of 0.05.

## Findings

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of loneliness in the workplace and its dimensions, emotional and social, as well as descriptive statistics of affective commitment. The mean score by respondents on loneliness in the workplace is  $M=21.26$ ,  $SD=9.90$ , the lowest score obtained from the LW scale is 0 and the highest value is 41. The mean obtained is lower than expected. According to the normal distribution values, we find that the distribution of this variable is within the allowed limits at the level of 0.05 (1.96).

The mean score of affective commitment is  $M = 19.33$ ,  $SD = 7.40$ . Based on how the questions were rated from 0 (Strongly disagree) and 4 (Strongly agree), the lowest value obtained from the affective commitment scale was 3, and the highest value 36. The mean is slightly higher than expected, which implies that the presence of this variable is negative.

The emotional dimension of loneliness in the workplace results in a mean score of  $M=9.98$ ,  $SD=5.59$ , with a minimum value of 0 and a maximum of 23. The mean score obtained from the respondents is lower than expected. According to the values of the normal distribution of Skewness .046 and its standard error ( $SE=.171$ ), we conclude that it is within the allowed limits on a level of 0.05 (1.96).

The social dimension of loneliness in the workplace, shown through descriptive statistics in Table 1 shows a mean  $M=10.92$ , which results to be slightly lower than the expected one, with a standard deviation  $SD=5.20$ , a minimum value of 0, and a maximum of 19. According to the values of Skewness  $-.394$  and its standard error ( $SE=.172$ ), we conclude that normal distribution is within the allowed limits on a level of 0.05 (1.96).

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of main variables and their dimensions.

		Loneliness in the workplace	Affective commitment	Emotional deprivation	Social relationships
N	Valid cases	203	205	202	199
	No answer	2	0	3	6
Arithmetic mean		21.26	19.33	9.98	10.92

Standard deviation	9.90	7.40	5.59	5.20
Skewness	-.230	.255	.046	-.394
Skewness Error	Standard .171	.170	.171	.172
Kurtosis	-.890	-.477	-.676	-.937
Kurtosis Error	Standard .340	.338	.341	.343
Minimum	.00	3.00	.00	.00
Maximum	41.00	36.00	23.00	19.00

Pearson correlation is applied to test the relationship between the feeling of loneliness in the workplace and the affective commitment of employees to the organization. The results presented in Table 2 show that there is a strong negative relationship between loneliness in the workplace and affective commitment ( $r = -.612, p < .01$ ). This means that by increasing loneliness in the workplace, employees' affective commitment to the organization decreases.

**Table 2.** The correlation between the loneliness in the workplace and the affective commitment

			Affective commitment
Loneliness in the workplace	Pearson correlation		-.612**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		203

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

This part shows the prediction proportion of explained variance of affective commitment by the loneliness in the workplace. The linear regression analysis is used mainly, since the conditions to use this analysis are met. The results from Table 3, show that 37.2% of the variance of affective commitment is explained by loneliness in the workplace ( $R^2 = .372, F = 120.44, df = 1, p < .01$ ). The results show that loneliness in the workplace as a predictor variable, statistically valid, predicts the variance of employees' affective commitment ( $\beta = -.612, p < .001$ ) and thus proves our claim that the feeling of loneliness as a predictor variable explains the variance of affective commitment.

**Table 3.** The prediction coefficient of variation of affective commitment by the loneliness in the workplace

Model		Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	29.121	.980		29.707	.000
	Loneliness in the workplace	-.459	.042	-.612	-10.975	.000

a. Dependent variable: Affective commitment  
 R2=.372  
 Durbin-Watson 2.111  
 p=.00

This part shows the prediction proportion of explained variance of affective commitment by the dimensions of loneliness in the workplace. The preconditions to use this statistic are met, whereas referring to the correlation analysis between the dimensions of loneliness in the workplace and affective commitment, there is a statistically significant moderate negative relationship.

The model of multiple linear regression in Table 4 shows that 36% of dimensions of loneliness in the workplace explain the variance of affective commitment (R2=.369, F=58.099, p<0.01). The model is significant. Regarding the prediction proportion, the emotional deprivation resulted statistically significant according to the standardized beta ( $\beta=-.288$ , p<0.01), while social relationships ( $\beta=-.402$ , p<0.01) are also statistically significant in explaining the proportion of the affective commitment. The results show that the social dimension is a predictor of affective commitment to a greater extent than the emotional dimension.

**Table 4.** The prediction of the affective commitment by the dimensions of loneliness in the workplace a

Model		Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	29.253	.977		29.947	.000
	Emotional deprivation	-.366	.088	-.288	-4.173	.000
	Social relationships	-.549	.094	-.402	-5.815	.000

a. Dependent variable: Affective commitment  
 R2=.369  
 p=.001

## Discussion

### The level of loneliness in the workplace and its dimensions

Wright, Burt & Strongman (2006) theory is the basic theory on which the treatment of the variable of loneliness in the workplace is based. According to them, when a person perceives a lack of social relationships in the workplace or when they are dissatisfied with the relationships between co-workers, then we are talking about loneliness in the workplace. The findings of our study show that the level of loneliness in the workplace of the respondents is lower, below the expected mean, respectively, participants do not possess the variable in question, and they do not feel lonely at work. In line with our findings, the authors Kaymaz, Eroglu & Yuvsel (2014) have found that respondents in their study did not feel lonely in the workplace. The study was carried out in Türkiye. They came to a conclusion related to these data. Turkish society is a collectivist society and as such, it directly affects the behaviors of individuals, in their social and organizational life. In collectivist societies, the motives to act together, establish strong social ties, engage in collective behavior against difficult conditions, etc., always come to the fore, and all these factors shape organizational life. Consequently, based on this, it can be rightly concluded that individuals who do not feel

lonely in their personal and social life, do not feel lonely even in their professional life. Considering our findings, such a statement makes sense even when we talk about our country, given the fact that we too are considered a collectivist society. The authors Mercan, Oyur, Alamur, Gül, & Bengül (2012) have the same approach related to this phenomenon, and they also found that the professors who participated in their study had a low level of loneliness in the workplace and its sub-dimensions, respectively, emotional deprivation and social relationships. Among others, they note that since Turkish culture is in the category of socialist cultures, it can be concluded that there is no level of social-emotional loneliness. In socialist cultures, particular attention is paid to group and collective behavior. Therefore, relationships with others are paramount to them.

Likewise, the results of our study show that the means obtained by emotional deprivation and social relationships are lower than expected. Such findings are also documented in the study of Deniz (2019), who found that loneliness in the workplace in general and its dimensions are below the expected mean. The same findings are shown in the study of Yilmaz & Kaplan (2011) who found that there is a low level of loneliness in the workplace in teachers, as well as low levels of its dimensions, respectively, emotional deprivation and social relationships. The researchers Akçit & Barutçu (2017) found that the mean of the emotional deprivation dimension was  $M = 2.34$ , the mean of the social relationships dimension was  $M = 1.8$ , and the mean of loneliness in the workplace was  $M = 2.1$ . Since loneliness in the workplace is low in the sample, these authors stress that employees in the sample have good friendships with other co-workers, and have people close to them with whom they can spend time together and share feelings and experiences, i.e. they just do not find it difficult to communicate with others. They are mainly people who feel comfortable in their workplace. We can relate to such a statement with our findings, regarding our respondents. Moreover, referring to the theory of Mercan, Oyur, Alamur, Gül, & Bengül (2012), who, when talking about the social relations of loneliness at work, among other things, emphasize that employees who do not communicate effortlessly with other co-workers do not participate in social events such as picnics, parties, meals and show no interest in various activities such as weddings, births and funerals, experience loneliness in terms of social relationships. Therefore, knowing that the above-mentioned activities in our society are not only present but special attention is paid to them, we can conclude that such indicators have influenced a low presence of experiencing loneliness in the workplace respectively, of the social dimension in our respondents.

### **The level of affective commitment to the organization**

The results show that the affective commitment, to a small extent, results above the expected mean. However, it is present in employees in our country. In his study, Neziri (2016) studied commitment in detail and found that affective commitment is positively valued by the respondents. Among others, he points out that the affective commitment is more present in professors when it comes to personal identification with the type of work, emotional involvement, and shared vision, when the employee makes a great effort solely for the attainment of the institution's success, when there is a consistency of values and goals, when they feel proud to work in that institution, etc. Since the study was conducted with higher education teachers in North Macedonia, he linked their affective commitment to the history of Albanians regarding higher education, and the efforts and sacrifices made to establish a university in the Albanian language. In support of such an opinion, it is worth noting that considering our results, we think that not only teachers but generally employees across different profiles show affective commitment to their work and organization. We claim this because in this study the profession is not specified, and despite this, it resulted in positive in the respondents. This might be related to the fact that the employment opportunities in our country are scarce, and the likelihood to quit your job and find a better one is minimal, thus this makes employees effectively committed to the work they do and the organization where they work. Nevertheless, these remain assumptions only, but which paved the way for more detailed future studies in our country. Jena (2015) also

found that, compared to normative and continuance commitment, the affective dimension of commitment is higher in the study participants. According to this researcher, it means that most employees think that they would be very happy to spend the rest of their career in this organization. The researchers BinBakr & Ahmed (2015) also found that the affective commitment in respondents is higher compared to normative and continuance commitment. Because the survey is conducted with faculty members, they highlight that respondents were connected to the universities and the university had a great personal meaning to them. The results of Alshetri (2013) are consistent with these findings, who found a high level of affective commitment in participants. According to him, affective commitment is related to the socio-cultural structure, respectively, cultural individualism/collectivism, i.e., the work dimensions of Geert Hofstede (Hofstede 2013) which give significance to social ties and group goals. The study is conducted in Saudi Arabia, and this country is classified as a collectivist culture. In these cultures, being committed is extremely important, even issues such as non-compliance with the rules, or simply the employer-employee relationships are perceived under moral terms. On the other hand, analyzed in a slightly different approach, when Karakus & Aslan (2009) talk about commitment, they point out that the teaching profession, the school in which they work, and the working group are some of the focuses through which commitment is directed. If a teacher can commit to one of these focuses, and not to the other, it is very important to strengthen their commitment through different focuses, all to achieve desirable results at work. Moreover, when talking about these focuses, these authors have found that teachers have high affective just as normative commitment to the teaching profession but have low levels of affective and normative commitment to the focus of the working group and the school where they work. Even though they like their profession as teachers, they have issues with their working groups and the schools where they work.

### **The relationship between loneliness in the workplace and employee affective commitment to the organization**

The main purpose of this study was to verify the relationship between loneliness in the workplace and employees' affective commitment to the organization. The results of the study found that there is a strong negative relationship between loneliness in the workplace and employees' affective commitment to the organization. The affective commitment mainly decreases with the increase of the feeling of loneliness in the workplace. The results also show that 37% of affective commitment is explained by loneliness in the workplace and it is statistically significant. We mentioned in the introductory part of the paper that there are no studies that treat a problem similar to ours. However, what is documented in Wright's (2005) doctoral study is that between loneliness in the workplace and organizational commitment, a negative, moderate but statistically significant correlation was found,  $r = -.52$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Organizational commitment is among the 17 variables, which are theoretically assumed to have an impact on loneliness in the workplace. In the study by Ozcelik & Barsade (2018), it was found that loneliness in the workplace considerably negatively predicts the affective commitment of organization employees. Ayazlar and Güzel (2014) found that loneliness in the workplace explains organizational commitment at the 3% level ( $\beta = -.181$ ;  $p < .00$ ). These authors set the hypothesis that loneliness in the workplace will negatively affect organizational commitment.



## **The relationship between loneliness in the workplace and employee affective commitment to the organization**

For a more detailed analysis, this study has also measured the relationship between workplace loneliness dimensions and affective commitment as well as the relationship between the dimensions of loneliness in the workplace. The findings show that there is a moderate negative relationship between emotional deprivation and affective commitment, as well as a moderate negative relationship between social relationships and affective commitment which are statistically significant.

Moreover, this study found that 36% of loneliness in the workplace dimensions explain affective commitment. It is mainly the social dimension of loneliness that explains the affective commitment to a greater extent. In line with our findings, Ayazlar and Güzel (2014) found that affective commitment is negatively related to emotional deprivation ( $r = -.183$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and social relationships ( $r = -.244$ ;  $p < .01$ ). On the other hand, this study has documented that although affective commitment is related to the concepts of emotional deprivation and social relationships, it is the social relationships that explain affective commitment at the 5% level ( $\beta = -.204$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Since only social relationships influenced affective commitment, Ayazlar & Güzel (2014), among others, point out that it is not quite important if a person is left out by their co-workers, as this does not affect the affective commitment, but the very lack of friends with whom they can share their thoughts, or rather the fact that social relationships are not established, negatively affects the affective commitment of employees to the organization. Ertosun & Erdil (2012) found that emotional deprivation of loneliness has no significant impact on affective commitment, but social relationships affect it negatively. These authors set an important fact that affective commitment has to do with social support. Positive social relationships should be incited by the managers. Social activities and training related to social relationships (e.g. conflict management, improving social skills) may be organized aiming at improving social interactions between employees. The authors Kaymaz, Eroglu & Yuvel (2014) have the same approach as we have pointed out in the literature review, who suggest that social relationships between employees should be improved to reduce the level of loneliness. All of this can be achieved by organizing training on topics about conflict management, and training on communication techniques, which will lead to the prevention of this phenomenon. On the other hand, Tabancali & Korumaz (2015) in their study found that the dimensions of loneliness in the workplace have an impact on the affective commitment ( $R = 0.688$ ,  $R^2 = 0.474$ ) ( $F(2-120) = 54.062$ ,  $f < 0.01$ ). 46.5% of the loneliness dimensions explain affective commitment. Emotional deprivation was significant in terms of statistical value of standardized beta  $\beta = 0.466$  as well as social relationships  $\beta = 0.280$ ,  $p = 0.01$ . This study has also found that there is a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between emotional deprivation and social relationships, results which are in line with our findings. The study by Wright, Burt & Strongman (2006) has also found that there is a strong positive relationship between the dimensions of loneliness in the workplace.

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