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## ROMANTIC LONELINESS AS A PREDICTOR OF MARITAL READINESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG EMERGING ADULTS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF RELATIONSHIP SELF-EFFICACY

<sup>1</sup>Mahnoor Fatima Siddique, <sup>2</sup>Saira Javed

<sup>1</sup>NUMS Department of Psychology, National University of Medical Sciences, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

<sup>2</sup> NUMS Department of Psychology, National University of Medical Sciences, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

[fmahnoor873@gmail.com](mailto:fmahnoor873@gmail.com) · [Saira.Javedbhati@gmail.com](mailto:Saira.Javedbhati@gmail.com)

### Article Details

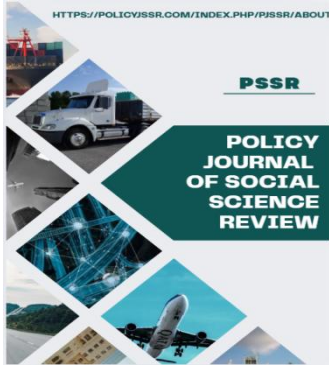
### ABSTRACT

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*Emerging adulthood is a critical developmental period characterized by identity exploration, increasing autonomy, and the pursuit of intimate relationships. During this stage, loneliness has become an increasingly prevalent psychological concern worldwide, with growing evidence suggesting that romantic loneliness represents a distinct and particularly impactful form of loneliness. Unlike social loneliness, romantic loneliness arises from the absence or perceived inadequacy of a desired intimate relationship and remains relatively understudied despite its potential implications for psychological and relational development. The present narrative*



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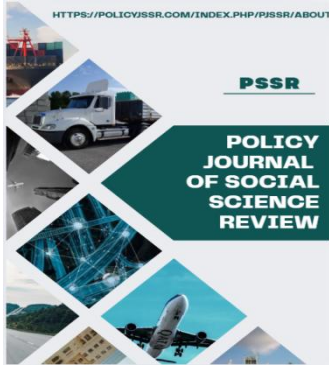
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*review aims to synthesize existing literature regarding the relationship between romantic loneliness, psychological well-being, marital readiness, and relationship self-efficacy among emerging adults. Relevant literature was reviewed using studies identified through Scopus, PsycINFO, Web of Science, and Google Scholar databases. The review integrates theoretical and empirical evidence from developmental, personality, and relationship psychology to examine the mechanisms through which romantic loneliness influences psychological and relational outcomes. Findings consistently indicate that romantic loneliness is associated with lower psychological well-being, including reduced life satisfaction, emotional adjustment, and self-esteem. Evidence further suggests that individuals experiencing higher levels of romantic loneliness report lower perceptions of marital readiness due to reduced confidence in their ability to establish and maintain successful intimate relationships. Relationship self-efficacy emerged as a significant protective factor and appears to mediate the relationship between romantic loneliness and both psychological well-being and marital readiness. The review highlights important theoretical, empirical, and cultural gaps in the literature, particularly within collectivistic societies. Future research should adopt culturally sensitive approaches and longitudinal designs to better understand these relationships. The findings also underscore the importance of counseling interventions, relationship education programs, and university mental health services aimed at strengthening relationship self-efficacy and promoting healthy relational development among emerging adults.*

**Keywords:** Romantic loneliness, psychological well-being, marital readiness,



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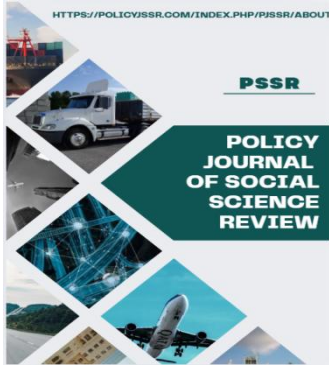
## Introduction

Emerging adulthood has been recognized as a distinct developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, increased autonomy, instability, and the pursuit of meaningful interpersonal relationships (Arnett, 2004). Spanning approximately from the late teens through the twenties, this developmental period involves significant psychological, social, and emotional transitions. Among the various developmental tasks encountered during this phase, the formation and maintenance of intimate romantic relationships occupy a central role. Romantic relationships contribute substantially to individuals' emotional security, social connectedness, self-development, and overall psychological adjustment. Consequently, difficulties in establishing satisfying romantic relationships may result in adverse psychological outcomes, including loneliness, emotional distress, and diminished well-being.

Loneliness has emerged as one of the most significant psychological concerns affecting young adults globally. Traditionally, loneliness has been conceptualized as a subjective and distressing experience arising from discrepancies between desired and actual social relationships (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). However, contemporary research increasingly recognizes loneliness as a multidimensional construct comprising distinct forms, including social loneliness, family loneliness, and romantic loneliness (DiTommaso & Spinner,

1997). Among these dimensions, romantic loneliness has gained growing scholarly attention because of its unique relevance during emerging adulthood, when romantic intimacy becomes a primary developmental concern.

Romantic loneliness refers to the emotional distress resulting from the absence of a desired intimate romantic relationship or the perceived inadequacy of existing romantic connections (Husain et al., 2025). Unlike social loneliness, which reflects deficiencies in broader social networks, romantic loneliness specifically concerns unmet needs for affection, intimacy, companionship, and emotional closeness within a romantic context. Individuals experiencing romantic loneliness often report feelings of emptiness, rejection, inadequacy, and emotional isolation despite having otherwise adequate social support systems. This distinction is particularly important because emerging adults may possess extensive social networks while simultaneously experiencing profound romantic dissatisfaction and loneliness. (Husain et al., 2025). Recent societal transformations have further increased the relevance of romantic loneliness among young adults. Rapid technological advancement, changing relationship norms, delayed marriage, increased academic pressures, and economic uncertainty have significantly altered patterns of romantic involvement among emerging adults. While digital communication platforms have expanded opportunities for social interaction,



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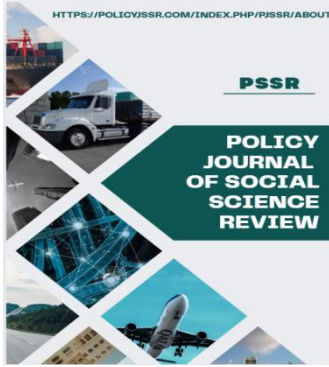
research suggests that they may not necessarily fulfill deeper emotional and intimacy needs. Consequently, many young adults experience heightened feelings of romantic disconnection despite increased social connectivity. Such experiences have important implications for psychological well-being and future relationship development. (Twenge et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2023)

Psychological well-being represents a multidimensional construct encompassing positive psychological functioning, self-acceptance, personal growth, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life, and positive interpersonal relationships (Ryff, 1989). Unlike approaches that define mental health merely as the absence of psychopathology, psychological well-being emphasizes optimal functioning and positive adaptation. Numerous studies have demonstrated that high levels of psychological well-being are associated with greater life satisfaction, resilience, academic success, interpersonal competence, and overall quality of life. Conversely, compromised psychological well-being is associated with emotional distress, reduced productivity, interpersonal difficulties, and increased vulnerability to mental health problems. (Ryff, 1989)

The relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being has received substantial empirical support across diverse populations. Cacioppo et al. (2006) demonstrated that loneliness is associated with heightened psychological

distress, increased physiological stress responses, and poorer overall health outcomes. Similarly, Tu and Zhang (2015) found that loneliness negatively predicted subjective well-being among university students. Kansky (2018) further highlighted the crucial role of romantic relationships in promoting psychological adjustment and emotional health. Although these studies provide valuable insight into the consequences of loneliness, much of the literature has focused on generalized loneliness rather than romantic loneliness specifically. Consequently, the unique effects of romantic loneliness on psychological well-being remain insufficiently understood.

In addition to influencing current psychological functioning, romantic loneliness may have important implications for future developmental outcomes. One such outcome is marital readiness. Marital readiness refers to an individual's emotional, psychological, interpersonal, and social preparedness to enter and maintain a marital relationship (Ningrum et al., 2021). Marriage remains one of the most significant developmental transitions across cultures and is often associated with expectations regarding emotional maturity, relational competence, communication skills, and role fulfillment. Individuals who perceive themselves as adequately prepared for marriage generally demonstrate greater confidence in their ability to manage marital responsibilities and maintain long-term intimate relationships.



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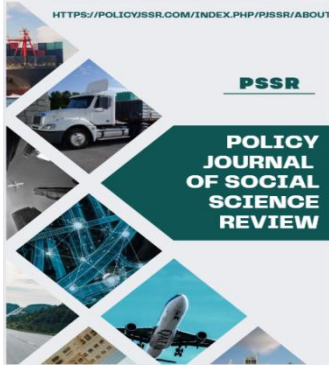
The concept of marital readiness is particularly relevant within collectivistic societies such as Pakistan, where marriage continues to occupy a central position in social and family life. Cultural norms often place substantial emphasis on marriage as a marker of adulthood, social responsibility, and personal achievement. Consequently, emerging adults frequently encounter explicit and implicit expectations regarding their readiness for future marital roles. Within such contexts, romantic loneliness may influence not only current emotional well-being but also perceptions of preparedness for future intimate commitments.

Research suggests that previous relational experiences significantly shape attitudes toward marriage and relationship commitment. Individuals experiencing persistent romantic loneliness may develop negative self-perceptions, reduced confidence in their interpersonal abilities, and pessimistic expectations regarding future relationships. These experiences may undermine their sense of readiness for marriage by fostering doubts regarding their ability to establish and maintain successful intimate partnerships. Bonner (2018) reported that relational competence and confidence play critical roles in determining readiness for long-term commitments. Similarly, Majeed et al. (2018) demonstrated that irrational romantic beliefs and maladaptive relationship expectations can negatively influence relationship outcomes and perceptions of marital preparedness.

Despite increasing recognition of the importance of romantic loneliness, relatively little research has examined the mechanisms through which loneliness influences both psychological well-being and marital readiness. Understanding these mechanisms is essential because not all individuals experiencing loneliness demonstrate similar psychological outcomes. Some individuals exhibit remarkable resilience despite experiencing relational difficulties, whereas others experience significant emotional and developmental challenges. Identifying factors that explain these differences may provide valuable insights for intervention and prevention efforts.

Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory offers a useful framework for understanding these individual differences. Central to Social Cognitive Theory is the concept of self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their capability to successfully perform behaviors necessary to achieve desired outcomes. Self-efficacy influences emotional reactions, behavioral choices, persistence in the face of challenges, and overall psychological functioning. Individuals with strong self-efficacy beliefs generally demonstrate greater resilience, adaptability, and confidence when confronting difficulties.

Within romantic contexts, relationship self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to initiate, maintain, and effectively manage romantic relationships. Relationship self-efficacy encompasses beliefs regarding



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communication skills, conflict resolution abilities, emotional support provision, trust-building, and relationship maintenance. Individuals possessing high levels of relationship self-efficacy are more likely to engage in adaptive relationship behaviors and experience greater relationship satisfaction. Conversely, low relationship self-efficacy may contribute to avoidance, insecurity, relational anxiety, and reduced confidence in future intimate relationships.

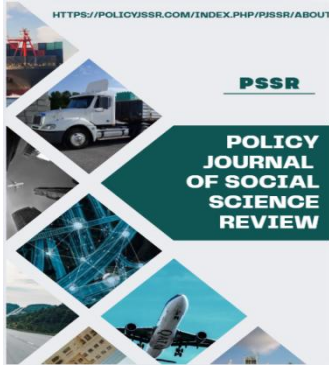
Emerging evidence suggests that relationship self-efficacy may function as a critical mediating mechanism linking romantic loneliness to psychological and developmental outcomes. Tu and Zhang (2015) found that self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being among university students. Similarly, Kaya and Odacı (2024) reported that self-efficacy buffered the negative effects of loneliness on psychological adjustment. These findings suggest that loneliness may influence well-being indirectly by undermining individuals' confidence in their interpersonal and relational capabilities.

Furthermore, relationship self-efficacy may play an important role in shaping perceptions of marital readiness. Individuals who believe they possess the necessary skills to establish and maintain healthy romantic relationships may feel more prepared for marriage, regardless of temporary relationship difficulties. Conversely, individuals experiencing

loneliness coupled with low relationship self-efficacy may perceive themselves as inadequately prepared for long-term commitments. Thus, relationship self-efficacy may serve as a psychological bridge connecting present relational experiences with future developmental expectations.

Although previous studies have examined loneliness, psychological well-being, marital readiness, and self-efficacy independently, the literature remains fragmented. Few studies have integrated these constructs within a comprehensive conceptual framework. Moreover, most existing evidence originates from Western populations, limiting the generalizability of findings to collectivistic societies where cultural expectations regarding intimacy, relationships, and marriage differ substantially. The scarcity of indigenous research further highlights the need for comprehensive theoretical and empirical investigations addressing these variables simultaneously. (Omaç Genç, 2025; Li et al., 2024)

Accordingly, the present review seeks to synthesize existing literature concerning romantic loneliness, psychological well-being, marital readiness, and relationship self-efficacy among emerging adults. Specifically, the review aims to examine the relationship between romantic loneliness and psychological well-being, explore the influence of romantic loneliness on marital readiness, and evaluate the mediating role of relationship self-efficacy. Through integration of existing evidence, the



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review seeks to advance theoretical understanding and provide practical implications for counseling interventions, relationship education programs, and future research initiatives targeting emerging adults.

### Review Methodology Search Strategy

To identify relevant literature, a comprehensive search was conducted across four major electronic databases: Scopus, PsycINFO, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected because they provide extensive coverage of psychological, social science, and relationship research. The search focused on peer-reviewed studies published between January 2000 and June 2025. Additional articles were identified through manual searches of reference lists from relevant publications to ensure comprehensive coverage of the literature.

### Search Keywords

The literature search was conducted using combinations of the following keywords and Boolean operators (AND, OR):

- "romantic loneliness"
- "emotional loneliness"
- "social loneliness"
- "psychological well-being"
- "subjective well-being"
- "mental health"
- "marital readiness"
- "marriage readiness"
- "relationship self-efficacy"
- "romantic relationship self-efficacy"
- "emerging adulthood"
- "young adults"

- "university students"

### Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included in the review if they met the following criteria:

1. Published in peer-reviewed academic journals.
2. Written in English.
3. Published between 2000 and 2025.
4. Included emerging adults, young adults, or university student populations.
5. Examined one or more of the following constructs:
  - Romantic loneliness
  - Psychological well-being
  - Marital readiness
  - Relationship self-efficacy
6. Reported empirical findings, theoretical contributions, or validated measurement tools relevant to the review topic.

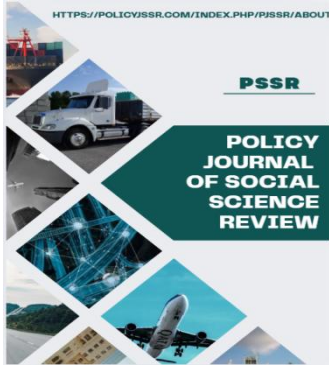
### Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they:

1. Focused exclusively on adolescent populations below 18 years of age.
2. Examined clinical populations with severe psychiatric disorders as the primary sample.
3. Were editorials, conference abstracts, dissertations, book reviews, or non-peer-reviewed publications.
4. Were published in languages other than English.
5. Did not address any of the core variables relevant to the present review.

### Literature Selection Process

The initial database search yielded a broad collection of articles related to loneliness, psychological well-being, relationship functioning, and self-efficacy.



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Following title and abstract screening, studies that were clearly unrelated to the review objectives were removed. Full-text articles were subsequently examined for relevance and methodological quality. Priority was given to highly cite empirical studies, recent publications (2020–2025), seminal theoretical works, and studies directly examining emerging adults and romantic relationships.

The final body of literature consisted of foundational theoretical contributions, empirical investigations, scale development studies, and recent international research examining the relationships among romantic loneliness, psychological well-being, marital readiness, and relationship self-efficacy. This narrative review synthesized evidence from these sources to develop an integrated conceptual understanding of the proposed relationships and identify important directions for future research.

## **Conceptualization and Theoretical Foundations of Romantic Loneliness Understanding Romantic Loneliness**

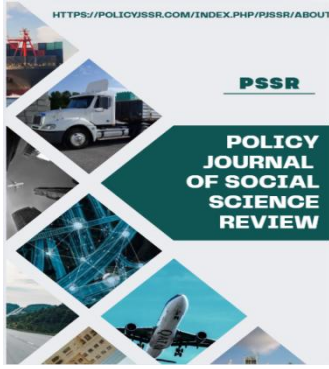
The scientific study of loneliness has evolved considerably over the past several decades. Weiss (1973) was among the first scholars to distinguish loneliness from objective social isolation, proposing that loneliness emerges when important relational needs remain unmet. Weiss further differentiated between social loneliness, resulting from deficiencies in broader social networks, and emotional loneliness, arising from the absence of close attachment relationships.

Building upon this foundation, Perlman and Peplau (1981) conceptualized loneliness as a subjective experience resulting from discrepancies between desired and actual interpersonal relationships. Their cognitive discrepancy perspective emphasized that loneliness is influenced not only by relationship quantity but also by individual expectations and perceptions regarding social and emotional connections.

Later, DiTommaso and Spinner (1997) expanded the conceptualization of loneliness by proposing distinct dimensions, including social, family, and romantic loneliness. Their work highlighted romantic loneliness as a unique psychological experience characterized by dissatisfaction within intimate relationship domains. This distinction provided a stronger theoretical basis for examining romantic loneliness independently from general loneliness and has informed much of the contemporary research on romantic relationships and emotional well-being.

Although situational and relational factors contribute significantly to romantic loneliness, personality characteristics also influence individuals' vulnerability to loneliness and their responses to relationship experiences. Research suggests that certain personality traits and attachment patterns may increase the likelihood of experiencing romantic loneliness during emerging adulthood.

Attachment theory proposes that early interpersonal experiences shape



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individuals' expectations regarding intimacy and emotional closeness (Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Individuals high in attachment anxiety often fear rejection, abandonment, and insufficient affection from romantic partners. These concerns may intensify feelings of loneliness even when relationships are present. Conversely, individuals high in attachment avoidance tend to suppress emotional needs and maintain interpersonal distance, limiting opportunities for genuine intimacy and increasing vulnerability to emotional disconnection.

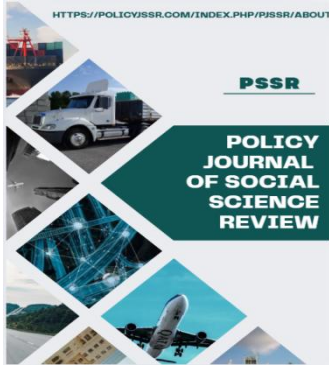
Among the Big Five personality traits, neuroticism has consistently been identified as a significant predictor of loneliness. Individuals high in neuroticism tend to experience greater emotional instability, worry, sensitivity to rejection, and negative affect. These characteristics may contribute to negative interpretations of relationship experiences and increase susceptibility to romantic loneliness. Research suggests that highly neurotic individuals often perceive interpersonal interactions more negatively and experience greater emotional distress following relationship difficulties.

Self-esteem represents another important personality-related factor associated with romantic loneliness. Individuals with lower self-esteem frequently report greater doubts regarding their attractiveness, interpersonal competence, and relationship worthiness. Such negative self-perceptions may interfere with

relationship formation and maintenance, increasing vulnerability to loneliness. In contrast, higher self-esteem has been associated with greater relationship confidence, emotional resilience, and lower levels of loneliness.

Collectively, these findings suggest that romantic loneliness is influenced not only by external relationship circumstances but also by individual personality characteristics and attachment-related processes. Understanding these factors provides a more comprehensive perspective on why some emerging adults experience greater loneliness than others despite similar relational experiences.

Loneliness has traditionally been conceptualized as a subjective psychological experience arising from a discrepancy between desired and actual social relationships (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). Unlike objective social isolation, loneliness reflects an individual's perception that existing relationships are insufficient in quality or quantity to meet emotional needs. Contemporary scholars increasingly emphasize that loneliness is a multidimensional phenomenon comprising distinct relational domains, including family loneliness, social loneliness, and romantic loneliness (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1997). Among these dimensions, romantic loneliness has emerged as a particularly salient construct during emerging adulthood because of the heightened importance of intimate relationships during this developmental period. (Husain et al., 2025)



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Romantic loneliness refers specifically to the emotional distress resulting from the absence of a desired romantic relationship or dissatisfaction with the quality of existing romantic intimacy (Husain et al., 2025). It is characterized by feelings of emotional emptiness, longing, rejection, and the perceived absence of a meaningful romantic bond. Unlike social loneliness, which concerns broader friendship networks and social integration, romantic loneliness centers on unmet needs for affection, intimacy, attachment, and emotional closeness with a romantic partner.

The distinction between romantic loneliness and other forms of loneliness is critical. An individual may possess numerous friendships, maintain close family relationships, and participate actively in social activities while simultaneously experiencing intense romantic loneliness. This distinction highlights the unique psychological significance of romantic relationships in fulfilling specific emotional needs that cannot always be met through other social connections. Consequently, romantic loneliness represents a specialized form of relational deprivation with potentially distinct psychological consequences.

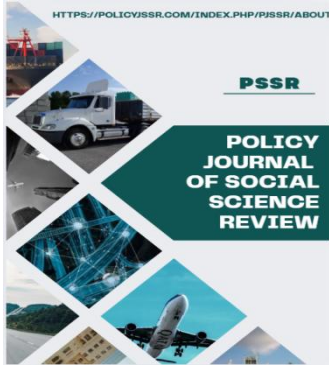
Recent advances in loneliness research have further emphasized the importance of examining romantic loneliness as an independent construct rather than a subset of general loneliness. Husain et al. (2025), through the development of the Romantic Loneliness Scale (RomLon),

demonstrated that romantic loneliness can be reliably measured as a unique psychological experience. Their findings indicate that romantic loneliness predicts psychological distress above and beyond general social loneliness, supporting the argument that it represents a distinct domain of emotional functioning. (Husain et al., 2025)

The developmental significance of romantic loneliness becomes particularly apparent during emerging adulthood. Arnett (2004) described emerging adulthood as a unique developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and increased possibilities for future life directions. During this period, individuals actively seek intimate relationships as part of broader efforts to establish adult identities and life trajectories.

According to Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory, the developmental challenge of young adulthood involves navigating the crisis of intimacy versus isolation. Successful resolution of this stage leads to the development of intimate relationships characterized by commitment, emotional closeness, and mutual support. Failure to establish such relationships may result in feelings of isolation and loneliness. Romantic loneliness can therefore be understood as a manifestation of difficulties encountered during this critical developmental task.

Emerging adults often view romantic relationships as indicators of personal



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competence, attractiveness, and social success. Consequently, the absence of romantic involvement may be interpreted as evidence of personal inadequacy or relational incompetence. Such interpretations can intensify feelings of loneliness and contribute to negative self-evaluations. Furthermore, societal expectations surrounding dating, relationships, and eventual marriage may amplify perceptions of deficiency among individuals who remain romantically unattached. (Adamczyk & Segrin, 2022)

The increasing importance of romantic relationships during emerging adulthood is reflected in research demonstrating strong associations between relationship quality and psychological adjustment. Kansky (2018) reported that romantic relationship experiences significantly contribute to subjective well-being and life satisfaction among young adults. Individuals who perceive themselves as successful in romantic relationships generally report greater emotional stability and psychological functioning. Conversely, those experiencing romantic loneliness frequently report lower well-being and greater emotional distress. (Li et al., 2024)

## **Theoretical Perspectives on Romantic Loneliness**

Several theoretical frameworks provide valuable insights into the development and maintenance of romantic loneliness. Among the most influential are Attachment Theory, Cognitive Discrepancy Theory, and Social Cognitive Theory.

## **Attachment Theory**

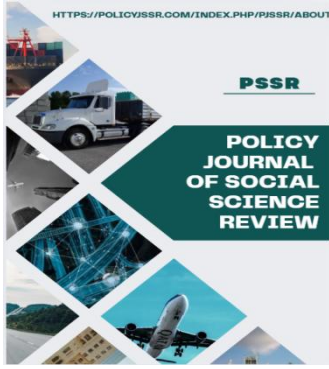
Attachment Theory, originally proposed by Bowlby (1969) and later expanded by Hazan and Shaver (1987), suggests that early interactions with caregivers shape internal working models that influence interpersonal relationships throughout life. Individuals develop expectations regarding intimacy, trust, and emotional availability based on these early attachment experiences.

Securely attached individuals generally view themselves as worthy of love and others as trustworthy and available. Consequently, they are more likely to establish satisfying romantic relationships and experience lower levels of romantic loneliness. In contrast, individuals with insecure attachment styles may struggle to form and maintain intimate relationships, increasing vulnerability to loneliness.

Attachment theory explains romantic loneliness as resulting from unmet attachment needs. Individuals who are unable to establish secure emotional bonds may experience chronic feelings of emotional deprivation, rejection, and isolation. Numerous studies have demonstrated associations between insecure attachment styles and increased loneliness, suggesting that attachment processes play a significant role in shaping experiences of romantic loneliness.

## **Cognitive Discrepancy Theory**

Perlman and Peplau's (1981) Cognitive Discrepancy Theory provides another influential explanation of loneliness. According to this framework, loneliness



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arises when there is a discrepancy between desired and actual interpersonal relationships. The greater the discrepancy, the more intense the experience of loneliness.

Within romantic contexts, individuals often possess expectations regarding intimacy, affection, companionship, and emotional support. When these expectations remain unmet, romantic loneliness emerges. Importantly, the theory emphasizes that loneliness is subjective rather than objective. Two individuals with identical relationship circumstances may experience different levels of loneliness depending on their expectations and interpretations.

This perspective helps explain why some single individuals experience minimal loneliness whereas others experience profound emotional distress. Romantic loneliness is therefore influenced not only by relationship status but also by personal expectations, relational goals, and cognitive evaluations of one's romantic experiences.

## **Social Cognitive Theory**

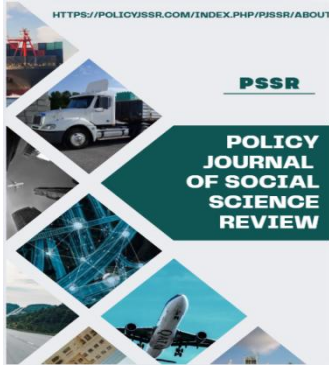
Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory offers an especially relevant framework for understanding the psychological consequences of romantic loneliness. According to the theory, individuals actively interpret experiences and develop beliefs regarding their capabilities to achieve desired outcomes. These self-beliefs, known as self-efficacy beliefs, influence emotional reactions, behavioral choices, motivation, and performance.

Within romantic contexts, repeated experiences of rejection, failed relationships, or prolonged loneliness may undermine relationship self-efficacy. Individuals may begin to doubt their ability to attract partners, maintain relationships, resolve conflicts, or establish emotional intimacy. These diminished self-beliefs may subsequently contribute to increased loneliness, emotional distress, and avoidance of future relationship opportunities.

Social Cognitive Theory is particularly valuable because it identifies a potential mechanism linking romantic loneliness to broader developmental outcomes. Rather than viewing loneliness solely as an emotional state, the theory suggests that loneliness may alter cognitive beliefs regarding personal competence. These altered beliefs can subsequently influence psychological well-being, relationship functioning, and readiness for future commitments.

## **Romantic Loneliness in Contemporary Society**

Modern social and cultural changes have created new challenges and opportunities regarding romantic relationships. Increased educational demands, delayed marriage, economic instability, urbanization, and technological transformation have significantly altered traditional relationship trajectories. While these changes have expanded individual freedom and choice, they have also introduced new sources of uncertainty and relational complexity.



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Digital communication technologies have transformed how individuals initiate and maintain romantic relationships. Social media platforms and dating applications provide unprecedented opportunities for interaction; however, they may also contribute to unrealistic expectations, social comparison, and superficial forms of connection. Some scholars argue that these technologies increase awareness of relational deficits, thereby intensifying feelings of romantic loneliness among vulnerable individuals.

Furthermore, changing cultural norms regarding relationships have prolonged the period between adolescence and marriage. Emerging adults increasingly delay long-term commitments while pursuing educational and career goals. Although this delay may offer developmental advantages, it may simultaneously increase exposure to prolonged periods of romantic uncertainty and loneliness.

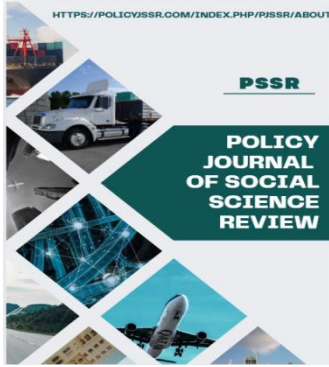
Within collectivistic societies, including Pakistan, additional sociocultural factors influence experiences of romantic loneliness. Cultural expectations regarding marriage, family involvement in partner selection, gender roles, and relationship boundaries shape how individuals perceive and respond to romantic experiences. Consequently, romantic loneliness may have unique implications within such contexts, particularly regarding perceptions of marital readiness and future relationship opportunities.

## Romantic Loneliness as a Developmental Risk Factor

Accumulating evidence suggests that romantic loneliness should be conceptualized as a significant developmental risk factor rather than merely a temporary emotional state. Persistent romantic loneliness has been associated with increased depressive symptoms, anxiety, reduced self-esteem, lower life satisfaction, impaired social functioning, and diminished psychological well-being (Cacioppo et al., 2006; Tu & Zhang, 2015). Moreover, loneliness may interfere with the development of interpersonal competencies necessary for successful adult relationships.

The developmental consequences of romantic loneliness extend beyond immediate emotional distress. Experiences of loneliness may shape future relationship expectations, influence self-perceptions, and alter beliefs regarding personal competence in intimate relationships. These effects may have important implications for relationship self-efficacy, marital readiness, and longterm psychological adjustment.

Consequently, understanding romantic loneliness requires a multidimensional perspective that incorporates developmental, cognitive, interpersonal, and cultural influences. Such an approach provides the conceptual foundation for examining how romantic loneliness affects psychological well-being and marital readiness and why relationship self-efficacy may serve as a



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critical mediating mechanism in these relationships.

## **Romantic Loneliness and Psychological Well-Being**

### **The Relationship between Romantic Loneliness and Psychological Well-Being**

Psychological well-being represents one of the most widely studied indicators of positive mental health and successful psychological functioning. Ryff (1989) conceptualized psychological well-being as a multidimensional construct encompassing self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. These dimensions collectively reflect an individual's ability to function effectively, maintain satisfying relationships, and pursue meaningful life goals. Given the centrality of intimate relationships during emerging adulthood, experiences of romantic loneliness may significantly influence multiple aspects of psychological well-being.

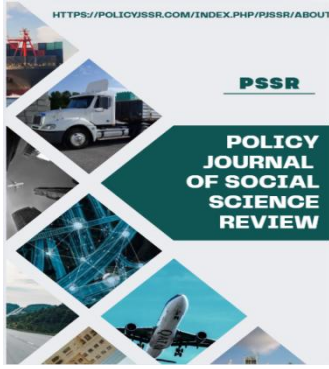
The relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being has received substantial empirical support across disciplines including psychology, sociology, public health, and developmental science. Research consistently demonstrates that loneliness is associated with lower levels of life satisfaction, reduced self-esteem, increased depressive symptoms, anxiety, emotional dysregulation, and diminished overall well-being (Cacioppo et al., 2006). However, recent scholarship suggests that romantic loneliness may have particularly profound implications because it directly

concerns unmet needs for intimacy, attachment, and emotional connectedness.

Unlike social loneliness, which involves dissatisfaction with broader social networks, romantic loneliness reflects perceived deficiencies within intimate relationship domains. This distinction is important because intimate relationships fulfill unique psychological needs that cannot always be replaced by friendships or family relationships. Individuals experiencing romantic loneliness often report feelings of incompleteness, emotional emptiness, rejection, and longing despite maintaining adequate social support systems. Consequently, romantic loneliness may exert a stronger influence on psychological well-being than other forms of loneliness during emerging adulthood.

### **International Evidence Linking Romantic Loneliness and Well-Being**

International research consistently demonstrates a negative association between loneliness and psychological well-being. One of the most influential studies in this area was conducted by Cacioppo et al. (2006), (Lim et al., 2020), who found that loneliness significantly predicted psychological distress, physiological stress responses, and poorer health outcomes. Their findings suggested that loneliness operates not merely as a subjective emotional experience but as a significant risk factor affecting multiple domains of functioning.



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Similarly, Tu and Zhang (2015) examined the relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being among Chinese university students. Their findings indicated that loneliness was negatively associated with life satisfaction and positive affect while positively associated with emotional distress. Importantly, loneliness emerged as a significant predictor of reduced well-being even after controlling for demographic factors. These findings support the argument that loneliness exerts a direct influence on psychological adjustment among young adults. (Li et al., 2024)

Weisskirch (2018) further investigated psychosocial functioning among emerging adults and found that loneliness was associated with lower psychological well-being, reduced self-esteem, and poorer social adjustment. Participants reporting higher loneliness demonstrated greater emotional difficulties and reduced satisfaction with interpersonal relationships. The study emphasized that loneliness may undermine individuals' perceptions of belongingness and social competence, thereby contributing to broader psychological difficulties.

Research examining romantic relationships specifically has yielded similar conclusions. Kansky (2018) , (Adamczyk & Segrin, 2022) , argued that romantic relationships play a crucial role in promoting psychological well-being during emerging adulthood. Individuals reporting satisfying romantic relationships generally demonstrate

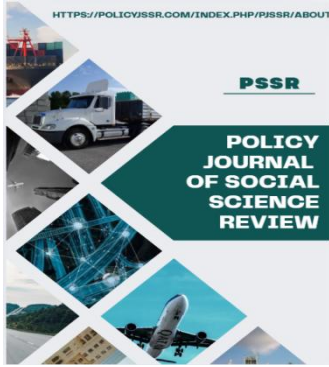
greater happiness, emotional stability, and life satisfaction. Conversely, those experiencing difficulties within romantic domains frequently report increased loneliness and reduced well-being. Kansky's work highlights the unique contribution of romantic experiences to psychological functioning beyond general social support.

Recent studies continue to reinforce these findings. Li (2024) reported that loneliness among emerging adults significantly predicted lower social and psychological well-being. Participants experiencing loneliness demonstrated higher levels of emotional distress and lower perceptions of life quality. Likewise, Omac Genç (2025) found that loneliness was strongly associated with diminished psychological well-being and increased vulnerability to emotional difficulties among young adults. (Li et al., 2024; Omac Genç, 2025)

Collectively, international evidence consistently suggests that loneliness constitutes a significant psychological risk factor. Although studies differ in methodology, cultural context, and measurement approaches, the overall pattern remains remarkably consistent: individuals experiencing greater loneliness report poorer psychological functioning across multiple dimensions of well-being.

## **Romantic Loneliness and Emotional Functioning**

One explanation for the relationship between romantic loneliness and well-being involves emotional regulation



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processes. Intimate relationships provide emotional support, validation, affection, and opportunities for interpersonal connection. These experiences facilitate emotional regulation by helping individuals manage stress, cope with adversity, and maintain positive affect.

When romantic intimacy is absent or perceived as inadequate, individuals may lose access to important emotional resources. Consequently, they may experience increased emotional instability, negative affect, and psychological distress. Romantic loneliness may therefore contribute to emotional difficulties by limiting opportunities for emotional expression, support seeking, and interpersonal reassurance.

Research demonstrates that lonely individuals often exhibit heightened sensitivity to social threats and rejection cues. Cacioppo and Hawkley (2009) proposed that loneliness activates hypervigilance toward potential interpersonal threats, leading individuals to interpret social situations more negatively (Loades et al., 2020). Over time, such cognitive biases may reinforce loneliness and contribute to declining psychological well-being.

Moreover, romantic loneliness has been associated with increased rumination and self-focused attention. Individuals experiencing loneliness frequently engage in repetitive negative thinking regarding their relationships, attractiveness, and interpersonal competence. Such cognitive

patterns may exacerbate emotional distress and reduce overall well-being.

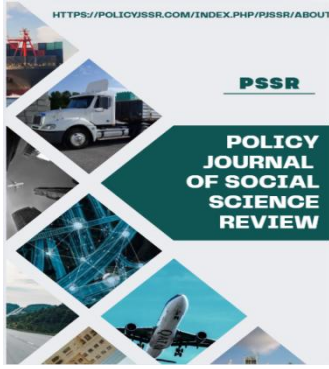
## **Self-Esteem, Identity Development, and Well-Being**

Another mechanism linking romantic loneliness and psychological well-being involves self-esteem and identity development. Emerging adulthood is characterized by extensive identity exploration, particularly regarding interpersonal relationships. During this period, romantic experiences often become integrated into broader self-concepts and perceptions of personal competence.

The absence of satisfying romantic relationships may negatively affect self-esteem by fostering perceptions of inadequacy, rejection, or social undesirability. Individuals experiencing romantic loneliness may interpret their relationship status as evidence of personal deficiencies.

Such interpretations can undermine self-worth and contribute to reduced psychological well-being. (Buecker et al., 2021)

Research consistently supports associations between loneliness and lower self-esteem. Individuals reporting higher loneliness frequently demonstrate more negative self-evaluations and diminished confidence in social situations. These effects may be especially pronounced in romantic contexts where societal expectations emphasize relationship formation as an indicator of adulthood and personal success.



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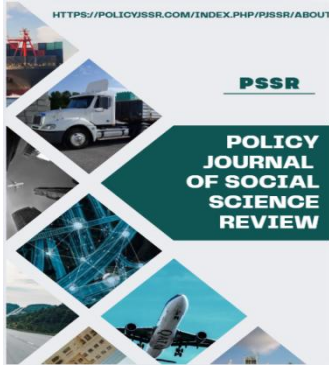
Furthermore, romantic loneliness may interfere with identity development by limiting opportunities for interpersonal exploration and self-discovery. Romantic relationships often provide contexts in which individuals learn about emotional

intimacy, commitment, communication, and conflict resolution. Consequently, prolonged romantic loneliness may delay or complicate developmental processes associated with relationship formation and adult identity development.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Empirical Studies Examining Loneliness and Psychological Well-Being*

Author(s)	Country	Sample	Measure(s)	Key Findings
Cacioppo et al. (2006)	USA	Adults	UCLA Loneliness Scale	Loneliness was associated with increased psychological distress, poorer emotional adjustment, and reduced well-being.
Tu & Zhang (2015)	China	550 University Students	Loneliness Subjective Being Scale	Loneliness Well-negatively predicted subjective wellbeing; self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship.
Weisskirch (2018)	USA	Emerging Adults	Loneliness Measures; Psychosocial Adjustment Indicators	Higher loneliness was associated with poorer psychosocial adjustment and lower life satisfaction.
Kansky (2018)	USA	Young Adults	Relationship Quality and Well-Being Measures	Satisfying romantic relationships contributed positively to psychological well-being and life satisfaction.

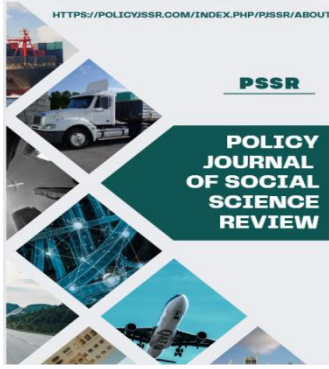


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Loades et al. (2020)	United Kingdom	Adolescents and Young Adults	Systematic Review of Loneliness Studies	Loneliness consistently associated with depression, anxiety, and reduced psychological functioning.
Buecker et al. (2021)	Germany	Young Adults	Loneliness Mental Health Measures	Loneliness demonstrated strong negative associations with self-esteem and psychological well-being.
Adamczyk & Segrin (2022)	Poland	Emerging Adults	Loneliness Relationship Satisfaction Measures	Individuals experiencing loneliness reported lower emotional well-being and relationship satisfaction.
Lim et al. (2023)	International Sample	Young Adults	Loneliness Mental Health Indicators	Persistent loneliness predicted poorer psychological health and emotional adjustment.
Li et al. (2024)	China	University Students	Loneliness Well-Being Scales	Romantic loneliness was significantly associated with reduced life satisfaction and lower psychological well-being.



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Omaç (2025)	GençTürkiye	Young Adults	Loneliness Well-Being Measures	andLoneliness emerged as a significant predictor of emotional distress and lower psychological well-being.
Husain et al. (2025)	Pakistan	University Students	Romantic Loneliness (RomLon)	Romantic loneliness Scalewas identified as a distinct psychological construct associated with emotional difficulties and reduced well-being.

*Note:* This table summarizes key studies examining the relationship between loneliness, romantic loneliness, and psychological well-being across diverse cultural contexts.

### The Pakistani Context

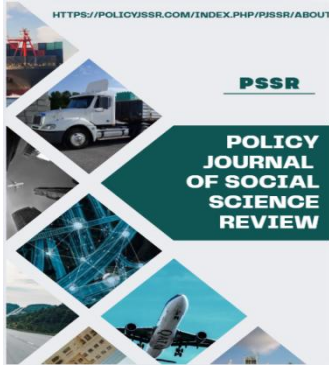
Despite growing international literature, relatively limited research has examined romantic loneliness and psychological well-being within Pakistan. This gap is noteworthy because cultural factors significantly influence experiences of intimacy, relationships, and loneliness.

Pakistani society is generally characterized by collectivistic values emphasizing family interconnectedness, social obligations, and marriage as an important developmental milestone. Within such contexts, romantic relationships often operate under different social expectations than those observed in Western societies. Family involvement in

relationship decisions, cultural norms regarding dating, and societal expectations concerning marriage may influence how romantic loneliness is experienced and interpreted.

Existing Pakistani studies suggest that loneliness remains a significant concern among university students and young adults. Majeed et al. (2018) found that maladaptive romantic beliefs and unrealistic relationship expectations contributed to interpersonal difficulties among university students. Although their study did not directly focus on loneliness, the findings suggest that romantic cognitions may influence emotional well-being and relationship functioning.

More recently, Husain et al. (2025) developed the Romantic Loneliness Scale (RomLon), providing an important contribution to the assessment of



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romantic loneliness. Their work demonstrated that romantic loneliness can be conceptualized and measured as a distinct psychological construct. The development of culturally relevant measurement tools is particularly important because experiences of romantic loneliness may vary across cultural contexts.

The limited availability of indigenous research underscores the need for further investigation. Understanding how romantic loneliness affects psychological well-being within Pakistan may provide valuable insights for counseling services, educational institutions, and mental health interventions targeting emerging adults.

### **Contradictions and Inconsistencies in the Literature**

Although evidence generally supports a negative relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being, several inconsistencies warrant consideration. First, some studies report stronger effects than others, suggesting that contextual factors may moderate the relationship. Variables such as gender, culture, personality traits, attachment styles, and social support networks may influence how loneliness affects psychological functioning.

Second, the majority of existing studies employ cross-sectional designs, limiting causal interpretations. Although loneliness is consistently associated with reduced well-being, it remains unclear whether loneliness causes psychological difficulties or whether individuals

experiencing poor well-being become more vulnerable to loneliness. Longitudinal research is needed to clarify the directionality of these relationships.

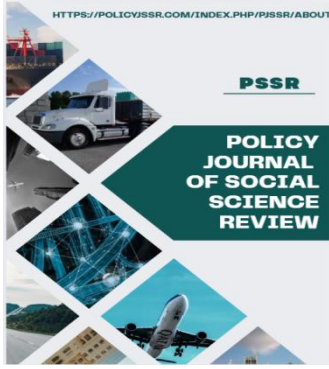
Third, measurement variability presents an ongoing challenge. Different studies utilize distinct loneliness scales, well-being measures, and operational definitions. Such methodological differences complicate direct comparisons and may contribute to inconsistencies across findings.

Finally, much of the existing literature focuses on general loneliness rather than romantic loneliness specifically. Consequently, it remains uncertain whether findings obtained from general loneliness measures accurately reflect the unique experiences associated with romantic loneliness.

### **Theoretical Integration**

From a theoretical perspective, the association between romantic loneliness and psychological well-being can be understood through multiple complementary frameworks. Attachment Theory suggests that unmet attachment needs contribute to emotional distress and reduced well-being. Cognitive Discrepancy Theory proposes that loneliness emerges from discrepancies between desired and actual relationships, resulting in dissatisfaction and psychological discomfort. Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes the role of cognitive beliefs and self-efficacy in shaping responses to loneliness.

Among these perspectives, Social Cognitive Theory provides particularly



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strong explanatory power because it identifies potential psychological mechanisms through which loneliness affects well-being. Specifically, loneliness may undermine confidence in one's interpersonal abilities, thereby contributing to reduce psychological functioning. This proposition forms the foundation for examining relationship self-efficacy as a mediating variable in subsequent sections of this review.

Overall, existing evidence strongly supports the conclusion that romantic loneliness constitutes a significant threat to psychological well-being during emerging adulthood. Nevertheless, substantial gaps remain regarding the mechanisms underlying this relationship and the factors that may buffer or exacerbate its effects. Addressing these gaps represents an important direction for future research and provides the rationale for examining relationship self-efficacy as a potential mediating mechanism.

## **Romantic Loneliness and Marital Readiness Understanding Marital Readiness**

Marriage represents one of the most significant developmental transitions during adulthood. Although definitions vary across disciplines, marital readiness generally refers to an individual's psychological, emotional, interpersonal, financial, and social preparedness to enter and sustain a marital relationship (Ningrum et al., 2021), (Ranta et al., 2023). Rather than merely reflecting chronological age, marital readiness

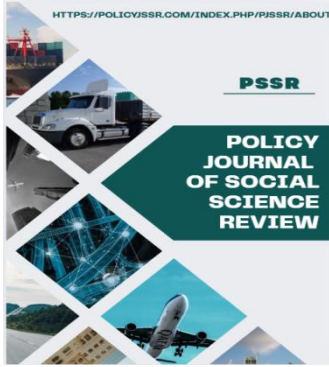
encompasses a range of competencies and attitudes that facilitate successful adaptation to marital roles and responsibilities.

Researchers increasingly emphasize that readiness for marriage is multidimensional. It includes emotional maturity, interpersonal competence, communication skills, conflict-resolution abilities, commitment, responsibility, and realistic expectations regarding marital life. Individuals who perceive themselves as prepared for marriage typically demonstrate greater confidence in managing relational challenges and fulfilling marital obligations. Conversely, individuals who perceive deficiencies in these areas often report uncertainty regarding future marital commitments.

The concept of marital readiness is particularly relevant during emerging adulthood because this developmental period serves as a transitional stage between adolescence and adulthood. During these years, individuals actively explore romantic relationships, career paths, personal identities, and future family roles. Experiences occurring during this period can significantly influence attitudes toward marriage and perceptions of preparedness for long-term commitment.

## **Emerging Adulthood and Preparation for Marriage**

Arnett (2004) proposed that emerging adulthood represents a period of exploration in love, work, and worldview. Romantic experiences during this stage contribute substantially to the



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development of interpersonal competencies necessary for future marital relationships. Through dating, emotional intimacy, communication, and conflict management experiences, individuals acquire knowledge and skills that facilitate future relationship success.

The developmental significance of romantic experiences has been highlighted by numerous scholars. Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development suggests that successful resolution of intimacy-related challenges promotes healthy adult relationships. Individuals who successfully establish meaningful emotional bonds develop greater confidence in their ability to engage in longterm commitments. In contrast, difficulties in forming intimate relationships may contribute to uncertainty regarding future relational roles.

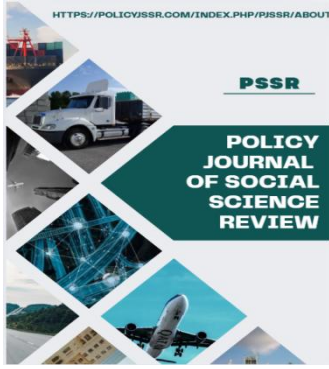
Consequently, emerging adulthood may be viewed as a preparatory period during which individuals develop the relational competencies required for marriage. Romantic loneliness may disrupt this developmental process by limiting opportunities for interpersonal learning and reducing confidence in relationship-related abilities. Therefore, understanding the relationship between romantic loneliness and marital readiness is essential for understanding developmental trajectories during young adulthood.

## Romantic Loneliness as a Barrier to Marital Readiness

Romantic loneliness may influence marital readiness through several interconnected mechanisms. First, loneliness often affects individuals' perceptions of their own relational competence. Individuals who repeatedly experience difficulties establishing or maintaining romantic relationships may begin to question their attractiveness, communication abilities, and capacity to sustain intimate connections. Such self-doubt may undermine confidence regarding future marital roles.

Second, romantic loneliness may contribute to negative expectations regarding intimate relationships. Repeated experiences of rejection, disappointment, or relational dissatisfaction can foster pessimistic beliefs about future romantic outcomes. Individuals may develop concerns regarding trust, commitment, emotional vulnerability, or relationship stability. These concerns may reduce enthusiasm toward marriage and contribute to perceptions of inadequate preparedness.

Third, loneliness may limit opportunities for acquiring practical relationship skills. Successful romantic relationships provide valuable learning experiences involving communication, emotional regulation, compromise, empathy, and conflict resolution. Individuals experiencing prolonged romantic loneliness may have fewer opportunities to develop these competencies, potentially affecting their



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readiness for future marital responsibilities.

Furthermore, loneliness may influence emotional maturity, which constitutes a core component of marital readiness. Persistent loneliness is associated with increased emotional distress, anxiety, rumination, and reduced self-esteem (Cacioppo et al., 2006). These psychological difficulties may interfere with the development of emotional stability and resilience necessary for healthy marital functioning.

### **Empirical Evidence Linking Relationship Experiences and Marital Readiness**

Although direct investigations of romantic loneliness and marital readiness remain limited, existing literature provides substantial indirect support for their association. Studies examining relationship competence, interpersonal functioning, and self-perceived relational abilities consistently demonstrate significant associations with readiness for marriage.

Bonner (2018) found that individuals possessing greater confidence in their romantic relationship abilities reported higher levels of marital readiness. Participants who perceived themselves as capable of managing relationship challenges expressed stronger intentions toward long-term commitment and greater confidence regarding future marital roles. These findings suggest that perceptions of relational competence play a critical role in shaping readiness for marriage.

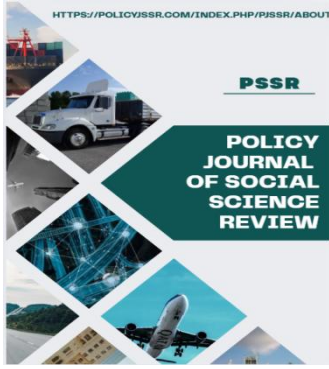
Similarly, Ningrum et al. (2021) identified emotional maturity, communication skills, and interpersonal competence as significant predictors of marital readiness among university students. Participants who demonstrated stronger relational capacities reported greater preparedness for marital responsibilities. The study emphasized that readiness for marriage extends beyond age or educational attainment and is strongly influenced by interpersonal development.

Additional evidence comes from research examining romantic beliefs and relationship expectations. Majeed et al. (2018) demonstrated that maladaptive romantic beliefs are associated with poorer relationship functioning and unrealistic expectations regarding intimacy. Such beliefs may contribute to difficulties in relationship formation and maintenance, indirectly influencing perceptions of marital preparedness.

Collectively, these findings suggest that experiences influencing relational competence may substantially affect readiness for marriage. Given that romantic loneliness frequently undermines confidence and relationship functioning, it is reasonable to expect a negative association between loneliness and marital readiness.

### **Psychological Mechanisms Connecting Loneliness and Marital Readiness**

Several psychological mechanisms may explain how romantic loneliness influences readiness for marriage. One particularly important mechanism



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involves self-perception. Individuals experiencing loneliness often engage in negative self-evaluation and may attribute relationship difficulties to personal inadequacies. Such perceptions can reduce confidence regarding future relationship success and marital competence.

Another mechanism involves attachment processes. Attachment theory suggests that individuals develop internal working models regarding intimacy and relationships based on interpersonal experiences (Bowlby, 1969). Experiences of romantic loneliness may reinforce insecure attachment beliefs, leading individuals to perceive relationships as unpredictable, threatening, or unlikely to satisfy emotional needs. These perceptions may reduce readiness for long-term commitments.

Cognitive expectations also play a significant role. Individuals who experience repeated romantic disappointments may develop negative expectations regarding marriage. Such expectations may include concerns regarding trust, emotional intimacy, conflict management, or relationship stability. These cognitive patterns may decrease perceived readiness by increasing uncertainty and apprehension regarding future commitments.

Emotional functioning represents another important mechanism. Persistent loneliness may contribute to anxiety, depressive symptoms, and reduced emotional regulation capacities. Since emotional stability is widely recognized as

a key component of marital readiness, psychological difficulties associated with loneliness may indirectly affect preparedness for marriage.

## **Marital Readiness in the Pakistani Context Understanding Marital Readiness**

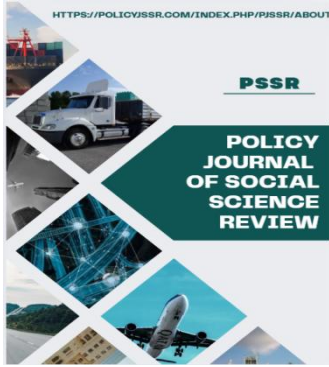
Marital readiness refers to an individual's overall preparedness to enter and maintain a successful marital relationship. Contemporary researchers conceptualize marital readiness as a multidimensional construct encompassing psychological, emotional, interpersonal, social, and financial preparedness (Ningrum et al., 2021). Rather than reflecting age alone, readiness for marriage involves the development of competencies and attitudes necessary for effective marital functioning.

### **Psychological Readiness**

Psychological readiness refers to an individual's cognitive maturity, self-awareness, emotional stability, and realistic understanding of marital roles and responsibilities. Individuals who are psychologically prepared for marriage typically demonstrate greater resilience, adaptability, and commitment to long-term relationship goals.

### **Emotional Readiness**

Emotional readiness involves the ability to regulate emotions, express affection appropriately, manage stress, and provide emotional support within intimate relationships. Emotional maturity has consistently been identified as a key predictor of successful marital adjustment.



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## **Interpersonal Readiness**

Interpersonal readiness encompasses communication skills, empathy, trust-building abilities, conflict management, and relationship maintenance competencies. Individuals possessing stronger interpersonal skills generally report greater confidence regarding future marital relationships.

## **Financial Readiness**

Although marriage is primarily a relational commitment, financial preparedness remains an important consideration. Perceived financial stability contributes to confidence regarding future family responsibilities and marital functioning.

## **Premarital Development and Relationship Experiences**

Emerging adulthood represents a developmental period during which individuals acquire experiences and competencies that contribute to future marital success. Romantic relationships serve as important contexts for learning interpersonal skills and developing relationship confidence.

Research suggests that previous relationship experiences influence perceptions of marital readiness through several mechanisms:

### **Commitment Development**

Experiences within romantic relationships help individuals develop attitudes regarding commitment, loyalty, and long-term relationship investment. Positive relationship experiences often strengthen commitment readiness, whereas repeated disappointments may

foster uncertainty regarding future commitments.

### **Communication Skills**

Effective communication is consistently identified as one of the strongest predictors of marital satisfaction. Through romantic experiences, individuals learn to express emotions, negotiate disagreements, and provide emotional support.

### **Conflict Resolution**

Romantic relationships provide opportunities to develop conflict management strategies. Individuals who successfully navigate interpersonal disagreements often report greater confidence regarding future marital responsibilities.

### **Marriage Attitudes and Relationship Confidence**

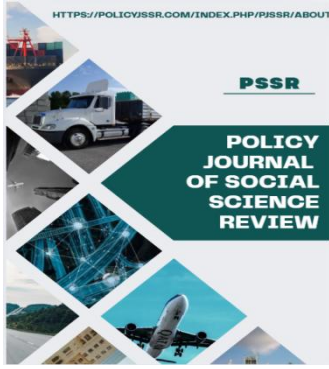
Attitudes toward marriage play a significant role in perceptions of marital readiness. Individuals who hold positive expectations regarding marriage generally report stronger intentions toward future commitment and greater preparedness for marital roles.

### **Fear of Commitment**

Research indicates that uncertainty regarding intimacy and commitment may reduce readiness for marriage. Individuals experiencing romantic loneliness may become hesitant to pursue long-term commitments due to fears of rejection, relationship failure, or emotional vulnerability.

### **Marriage Expectations**

Perceptions of marriage are shaped by family experiences, cultural values, and



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previous relationship experiences. Unrealistic expectations may interfere with readiness, whereas realistic expectations contribute to healthier attitudes toward marital commitment.

### **Relationship Confidence**

Relationship confidence refers to beliefs regarding one's ability to establish and maintain successful intimate relationships. Greater relationship confidence is associated with stronger perceptions of marital readiness and more positive attitudes toward future marriage.

### **Pakistani Context of Marital Readiness**

Understanding marital readiness within Pakistan requires consideration of sociocultural influences that shape relationship development and marriage expectations.

### **Family Expectations and Social Pressure**

In Pakistani society, marriage is often viewed as a major developmental milestone and an important marker of adulthood. Emerging adults frequently experience explicit and implicit expectations from family members regarding future marriage. Such expectations may influence perceptions of readiness and contribute to concerns regarding relationship competence.

### **Collectivistic Cultural Values**

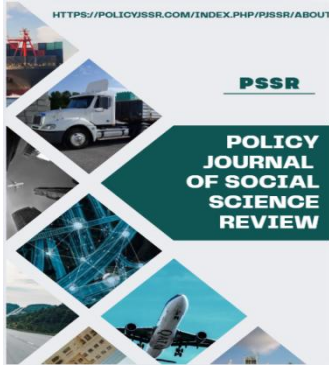
Pakistan is generally characterized as a collectivistic society in which family interconnectedness, social obligations, and communal values play significant roles in relationship decisions. Consequently, marital readiness may involve not only personal preparedness but also perceived readiness to fulfill family and social responsibilities.

### **Arranged and Semi-Arranged Marriage Contexts**

Unlike many Western societies, partner selection in Pakistan frequently involves varying degrees of family participation. Experiences of romantic loneliness may therefore influence attitudes toward both love-based and family-assisted marital arrangements. Concerns regarding interpersonal competence and relationship success may shape perceptions of preparedness regardless of the specific pathway to marriage.

### **Emerging Trends among Pakistani Youth**

Recent social changes, increasing educational attainment, urbanization, and greater exposure to global media have contributed to evolving attitudes toward relationships and marriage among Pakistani emerging adults. These changes highlight the importance of examining how romantic experiences and loneliness influence contemporary perceptions of marital readiness.



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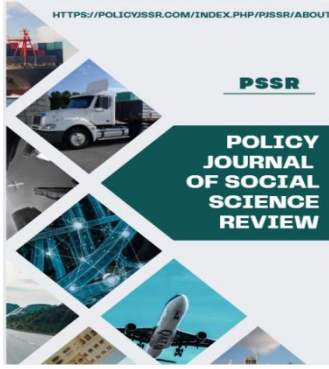
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**Table 2.**

*Summary of Studies Examining Marital Readiness and Related Constructs*

Author(s)	Country	Sample	Variables Examined	Key Findings
Ningrum.et.al. (2021)	Indonesia	University Students	Emotional-Maturity, Marital Readiness	Emotional maturity significantly predicted marital readiness.
Bonner (2018)	USA	Emerging Adults	Relationship Confidence, Marital Readiness	Greater relationship confidence was associated with higher marital readiness.
Majeed et al. (2018)	Pakistan	University Students	Relationship Beliefs, Psychological Adjustment	Maladaptive relationship beliefs negatively influenced relational functioning.
Willoughby et al. (2015)	USA	Young Adults	Commitment Readiness, Marriage Attitudes	Positive commitment attitudes predicted stronger readiness for marriage.
Carroll et al. (2007)	USA	Emerging Adults	Marital Expectations, Relationship Attitudes	Realistic marital expectations contributed to relationship preparedness.
Setiawan & Tentama (2022)	Indonesia	Young Adults	Interpersonal Competence, Marital Readiness	Strong interpersonal skills were associated with greater readiness for marriage.



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Aulia & PratiwiIndonesia University Relationship Relationship confidence  
(2024) Students Confidence, positively predicted  
Marriage Readiness marital readiness.

*Note:* The reviewed literature suggests that emotional maturity, interpersonal competence, commitment readiness, and relationship confidence are among the most consistent predictors of marital readiness among emerging adults.

The relationship between romantic loneliness and marital readiness may be particularly important within Pakistan due to the cultural significance of marriage. Pakistani society generally emphasizes marriage as a central developmental milestone associated with adulthood, family formation, and social responsibility. Consequently, attitudes toward marriage are often influenced by cultural expectations, family values, and religious beliefs.

Within collectivistic cultures, marriage frequently involves not only the union of two individuals but also the integration of families and social networks. As a result, readiness for marriage encompasses broader considerations including family obligations, social responsibilities, and cultural expectations. Emerging adults often experience considerable pressure regarding future marital roles, making perceptions of readiness particularly salient.

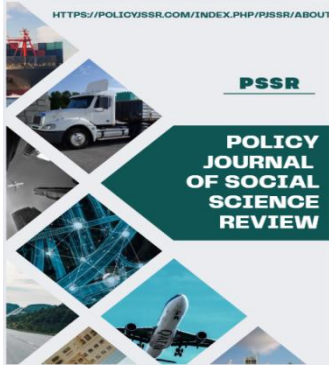
Romantic loneliness may have unique implications within this cultural context. Young adults experiencing loneliness may

perceive themselves as falling behind socially prescribed developmental expectations. Concerns regarding relationship competence, partner selection, and future marital prospects may become particularly pronounced. Consequently, loneliness may influence not only emotional well-being but also broader perceptions regarding adulthood and life progression.

Despite the importance of these issues, empirical research examining romantic loneliness and marital readiness within Pakistan remains scarce. Existing studies have primarily focused on marital satisfaction, relationship beliefs, and family dynamics rather than premarital psychological processes. This gap highlights the need for further research investigating how loneliness influences preparedness for future marital commitments among Pakistani emerging adults.

## **Contradictions and Gaps in Existing Literature**

Although available evidence generally suggests a relationship between relational experiences and marital readiness, several limitations characterize the existing literature. First, most studies examine marital readiness independently of loneliness, making direct conclusions difficult. Researchers frequently focus on predictors such as emotional maturity,



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financial preparedness, or relationship skills without considering loneliness as a potential antecedent.

Second, the majority of studies employ cross-sectional designs. Consequently, causal pathways remain unclear. It is possible that individuals with lower marital readiness become more vulnerable to loneliness rather than loneliness leading to reduced readiness. Longitudinal investigations are necessary to clarify these developmental processes.

Third, cultural variation remains insufficiently explored. Most research originates from Western contexts where dating practices, relationship norms, and marriage expectations differ substantially from those observed in collectivistic societies. Greater attention to cultural influences is necessary for understanding how loneliness affects marital readiness across diverse populations.

Finally, limited research has investigated potential mediating mechanisms. Although evidence suggests that relational competence influences marital readiness, the specific psychological processes connecting loneliness and readiness remain poorly understood. This limitation highlights the importance of examining relationship self-efficacy as a potential explanatory variable.

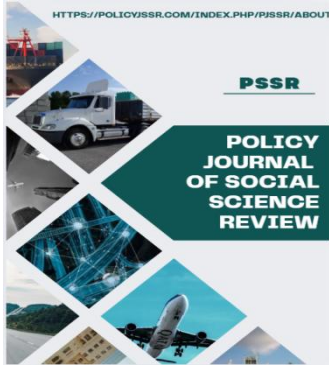
## **Theoretical Integration**

From a theoretical perspective, the relationship between romantic loneliness and marital readiness can be understood through Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997). According to this framework, individuals develop beliefs

regarding their capabilities through personal experiences, observations, and social feedback. Repeated experiences of loneliness may weaken beliefs regarding relationship competence, reducing confidence in one's ability to manage future marital responsibilities.

Attachment theory similarly suggests that loneliness may influence internal representations of relationships, affecting expectations regarding intimacy and commitment. Individuals experiencing chronic romantic loneliness may develop negative assumptions regarding relationship success, thereby reducing perceived readiness for marriage.

Taken together, theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that romantic loneliness represents a significant developmental challenge with implications extending beyond immediate emotional distress. By influencing self-perceptions, relationship expectations, emotional functioning, and interpersonal competence, loneliness may undermine preparedness for future marital commitments. However, the precise mechanisms underlying this relationship remain insufficiently understood. The next section therefore examines relationship self-efficacy as a potential mediating factor that may explain how experiences of romantic loneliness influence both psychological well-being and marital readiness among emerging adults.



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## Relationship Self-Efficacy as a Mediating Mechanism Definition of Relationship Self-Efficacy

Relationship self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully initiate, maintain, and manage romantic relationships. Derived from Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, relationship self-efficacy reflects confidence in performing behaviors necessary for establishing healthy and satisfying intimate relationships. Individuals with higher relationship self-efficacy generally perceive themselves as capable of handling interpersonal challenges, communicating effectively, and maintaining emotional closeness with romantic partners.

Riggio et al. (2011) conceptualized relationship self-efficacy as a domain-specific form of self-efficacy that influences relationship attitudes, relationship functioning, and interpersonal adjustment. According to Social Cognitive Theory, efficacy beliefs affect emotional reactions, behavioral persistence, goal attainment, and coping strategies. Consequently, relationship self-efficacy may play a crucial role in determining how individuals respond to experiences of romantic loneliness and interpersonal difficulties.

## Measurement of Relationship Self-Efficacy

One of the most frequently used measures of relationship self-efficacy is the **Self-Efficacy in Romantic Relationships (SERR) Scale** developed to assess confidence in managing various aspects

of romantic relationships. The scale evaluates individuals' beliefs regarding their ability to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, express emotions, establish trust, and maintain satisfying intimate relationships.

## Dimensions of the SERR Scale

The SERR Scale generally assesses several relationship competencies, including:

- Communication confidence
- Conflict resolution abilities
- Emotional expression
- Relationship maintenance
- Trust-building capacity
- Intimacy management

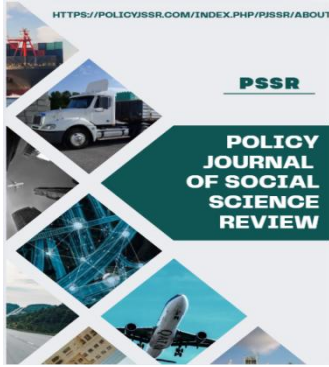
## Psychometric Properties

Previous studies have reported satisfactory reliability and validity for measures of relationship self-efficacy. Internal consistency coefficients have generally exceeded acceptable standards (Cronbach's  $\alpha > .80$ ), supporting the reliability of the construct. Evidence of construct validity has also been demonstrated through associations with relationship satisfaction, interpersonal competence, attachment security, and psychological well-being.

The availability of psychometrically sound measures has facilitated growing research examining the role of relationship self-efficacy in romantic functioning and psychological adjustment.

## Relationship Self-Efficacy and Relationship Functioning

Relationship self-efficacy influences multiple aspects of romantic relationship functioning. Individuals who possess strong confidence in their relational



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abilities are generally more likely to engage in adaptive interpersonal behaviors and maintain healthier relationships.

### **Communication**

Communication represents one of the most important predictors of relationship success. Individuals with higher relationship self-efficacy report greater confidence in expressing emotions, discussing concerns, and communicating relationship needs. Effective communication facilitates emotional understanding and reduces interpersonal misunderstandings.

### **Conflict Resolution**

Conflict is an inevitable component of intimate relationships. Relationship self-efficacy influences individuals' confidence in addressing disagreements constructively. Highly efficacious individuals are more likely to utilize problem-solving strategies and collaborative approaches when resolving conflicts.

### **Trust Development**

Trust serves as a foundation for relationship stability and satisfaction. Individuals with strong relationship self-efficacy generally demonstrate greater confidence in establishing and maintaining trusting relationships. Conversely, low self-efficacy may contribute to insecurity, fear of rejection, and difficulties forming emotional bonds.

### **Intimacy and Emotional Closeness**

Relationship self-efficacy also influences the development of intimacy. Individuals who believe in their ability to navigate

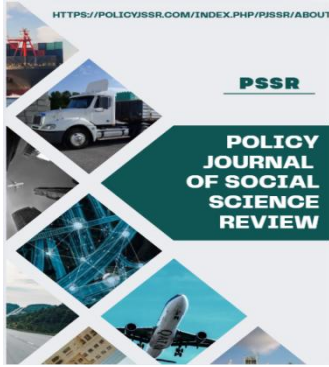
emotional vulnerability are more likely to establish meaningful emotional connections with romantic partners. Such experiences contribute to relationship satisfaction and psychological well-being.

### **Relationship Self-Efficacy and Psychological Well-Being**

A substantial body of literature indicates that self-efficacy contributes significantly to psychological well-being. According to Bandura (1997), efficacy beliefs influence emotional functioning by affecting how individuals perceive and respond to challenges. Individuals with strong efficacy beliefs tend to experience lower stress, greater resilience, and more adaptive coping strategies.

Research suggests that relationship self-efficacy functions as a protective psychological resource. Tu and Zhang (2015) demonstrated that self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being among university students. Participants with stronger efficacy beliefs reported higher levels of life satisfaction and psychological adjustment despite experiencing loneliness.

Similarly, Kaya and Odacı (2024) found that self-efficacy buffered the negative effects of loneliness on well-being. Individuals possessing greater confidence in their interpersonal abilities demonstrated higher emotional resilience and lower psychological distress. These findings suggest that relationship self-efficacy may protect against the adverse



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emotional consequences of romantic loneliness.

Furthermore, studies examining emerging adults indicate that confidence in relationship abilities contributes to self-esteem, emotional stability, and overall life satisfaction. Relationship self-efficacy may therefore serve as a key psychological mechanism linking interpersonal experiences with broader indicators of psychological well-being.

### **Relationship Self-Efficacy and Marital Readiness**

Relationship self-efficacy may also play a critical role in shaping perceptions of marital readiness. Marriage requires a range of interpersonal competencies including communication, emotional support, trust, commitment, and conflict management. Individuals who believe they possess these competencies are more likely to perceive themselves as prepared for marriage.

### **Confidence in Future Relationships**

Relationship self-efficacy contributes to optimism regarding future intimate relationships. Individuals who believe they can successfully navigate relationship challenges are more likely to approach marriage with confidence and positive expectations.

### **Commitment Readiness**

Self-efficacy influences willingness to invest in long-term relationships. Individuals with greater relationship confidence often report stronger commitment intentions and greater preparedness for long-term relational responsibilities.

### **Relationship Success Expectations**

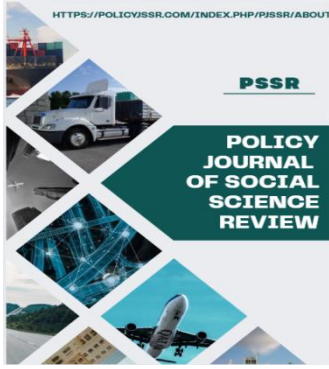
Perceptions of relationship success represent another important component of marital readiness. Individuals who believe they can establish satisfying and stable relationships generally report stronger readiness for future marital commitments.

Collectively, these findings suggest that relationship self-efficacy may function as a developmental resource that facilitates successful transitions into long-term intimate relationships and marriage.

### **Relationship Self-Efficacy as a Mediating Mechanism**

The present review proposes relationship self-efficacy as a central mediating mechanism linking romantic loneliness to psychological well-being and marital readiness. Experiences of romantic loneliness may undermine confidence in one's ability to establish and maintain satisfying relationships. Reduced relationship self-efficacy may subsequently contribute to poorer psychological adjustment and lower perceptions of marital readiness.

This mediation framework is consistent with Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes the role of cognitive beliefs in shaping emotional and behavioral outcomes. Rather than exerting influence solely through direct pathways, romantic loneliness may affect developmental outcomes through its impact on self-perceptions and relationship-related confidence.



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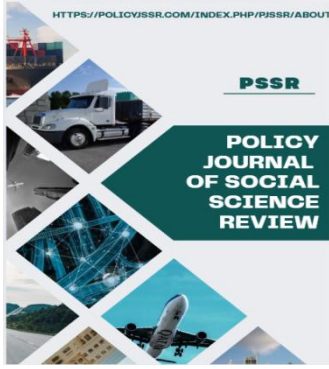
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**Table 3.**

*Summary of Studies Examining Self-Efficacy, Relationship Functioning, Well-Being, and Marital Readiness*

Author(s)	Country	Sample	Variables Examined	Key Findings
Bandura (1997)	USA	Theoretical	Work Self-Efficacy	Self-efficacy influences emotional functioning, resilience, and behavioral outcomes.
Riggio et al. (2011)	USA	Adults Romantic Relationships	Relationship Efficacy, Relationship Functioning	Self-Relationship self-efficacy positively predicted relationship satisfaction and interpersonal adjustment.
Tu Zhang (2015)	&China	University Students	Loneliness, Efficacy, Well-Being	Self-Self-efficacy mediated the relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being.
Bonner (2018)	USA	Emerging Adults	Relationship Confidence, Marital Readiness	Greater relationship confidence predicted stronger marital readiness.
Kaya Odacı (2024)	&Türkiye	University Students	Loneliness, Efficacy, Well-Being	Self-Self-efficacy buffered the negative effects of loneliness on



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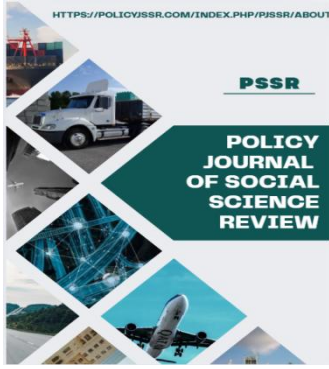
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<b>Li et al. (2024)</b>	China	Young Adults	Relationship Self-Efficacy, Emotional Adjustment	Relationship self- efficacy was associated with better emotional functioning and resilience.
<b>Charani a (2025)</b>	International Sample	University Students	Self-Efficacy, Psychological Well-Being	Higher self-efficacy predicted greater psychological wellbeing and emotional adjustment.
<b>Ningrum et al. (2021)</b>	Indonesia	University Students	Interpersonal Competence, Marital Readiness	Relationship competence and emotional maturity positively predicted marital readiness.

*Note:* Evidence across studies suggests that relationship self-efficacy functions as an important psychological resource associated with healthier relationship functioning, greater psychological well-being.

### Why Relationship Self-Efficacy Serves as a Mediating Mechanism

Understanding the relationship between romantic loneliness, psychological well-being, and marital readiness requires examination of the psychological



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processes through which loneliness exerts its influence. While previous research has consistently demonstrated that loneliness is associated with poorer mental health and relationship outcomes, the mechanisms underlying these associations remain insufficiently understood. Relationship self-efficacy provides a theoretically meaningful explanation for how experiences of romantic loneliness translate into both psychological and developmental consequences.

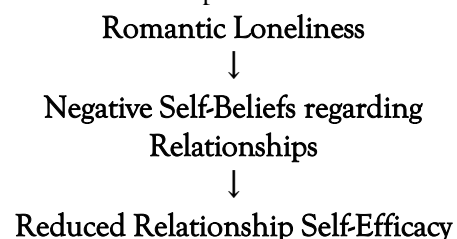
According to Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, individuals develop beliefs regarding their abilities through personal experiences, social interactions, and environmental feedback. These efficacy beliefs influence emotional responses, coping strategies, motivation, and behavioral outcomes. Within romantic contexts, relationship self-efficacy reflects confidence in one's ability to establish, maintain, and effectively manage intimate relationships. Experiences of romantic loneliness may gradually undermine these efficacy beliefs. Individuals who repeatedly experience unmet intimacy needs, relationship dissatisfaction, rejection, or prolonged absence of romantic involvement may begin to develop negative self-perceptions regarding their interpersonal competence. Such individuals may question their attractiveness, communication abilities, emotional worth, and capacity to maintain successful romantic relationships. These negative self-beliefs

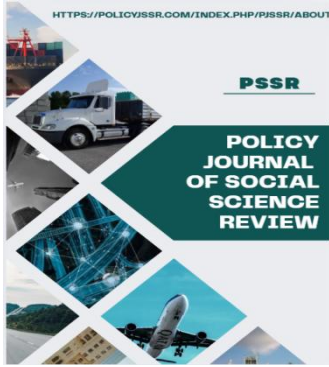
contribute to reductions in relationship self-efficacy.

Reduced relationship self-efficacy may subsequently influence psychological well-being. Individuals who lack confidence in their relationship abilities often experience greater emotional distress, self-doubt, anxiety, and hopelessness regarding future relationships. These cognitive and emotional responses may contribute to lower life satisfaction, diminished self-esteem, and poorer overall psychological functioning. Thus, relationship self-efficacy provides an important explanatory pathway through which romantic loneliness affects well-being.

Similarly, relationship self-efficacy may influence perceptions of marital readiness. Marriage requires confidence in one's ability to communicate effectively, manage conflict, establish trust, and maintain emotional intimacy. Individuals who perceive themselves as incapable of fulfilling these relational responsibilities may feel less prepared for future marital commitments. Consequently, romantic loneliness may reduce marital readiness indirectly by weakening confidence in relationship-related competencies.

The proposed mediation process can therefore be conceptualized as follows:





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## Lower Psychological Well-Being and Lower Marital Readiness

This mediation framework helps explain why individuals experiencing similar levels of romantic loneliness may demonstrate different psychological and relational outcomes. Some individuals maintain strong efficacy beliefs despite experiencing loneliness and therefore exhibit greater resilience, whereas others experience substantial declines in well-being and relationship confidence. Relationship self-efficacy thus serves as a critical psychological mechanism linking experiences of romantic loneliness with both present psychological adjustment and future relational preparedness.

Existing evidence supports this proposition. Studies have demonstrated that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being (Tu & Zhang, 2015), while other research indicates that relationship confidence contributes significantly to relationship functioning and marital preparedness (Bonner, 2018; Kaya & Odacı, 2024). Collectively, these findings provide theoretical and empirical justification for positioning relationship self-efficacy as a mediating variable within the proposed conceptual framework.

## Relationship Self-Efficacy and Romantic Loneliness

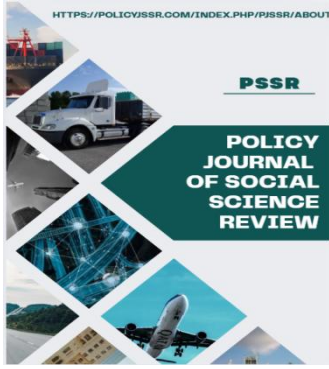
The relationship between romantic loneliness and relationship self-efficacy appears bidirectional. On one hand, low relationship self-efficacy may increase vulnerability to loneliness because

individuals who doubt their relational abilities may avoid social opportunities, withdraw from potential partners, or struggle to maintain satisfying relationships. On the other hand, persistent loneliness may further erode relationship self-efficacy through repeated experiences of perceived rejection and unmet relational needs.

Individuals experiencing romantic loneliness frequently engage in negative self-appraisals concerning their attractiveness, desirability, and interpersonal competence. They may attribute relationship difficulties to personal inadequacies rather than situational factors. Over time, these cognitive patterns contribute to declining confidence in relational abilities. (Setiawan & Tentama, 2022)

Research suggests that loneliness is associated with negative interpersonal expectations and increased sensitivity to rejection. Lonely individuals often anticipate negative social outcomes and may perceive interpersonal interactions more pessimistically than non-lonely individuals. Such expectations can create self-fulfilling cycles whereby reduced confidence leads to avoidance behaviors that further reinforce loneliness. (Aulia & Pratiwi, 2024)

Riggio et al. (2011) demonstrated that relationship self-efficacy significantly predicts relationship satisfaction, relationship confidence, and interpersonal adjustment. Individuals reporting stronger efficacy beliefs exhibited greater confidence in managing



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relationship challenges and maintaining emotional intimacy. These findings suggest that relationship self-efficacy may represent a crucial psychological resource protecting against the adverse effects of loneliness.

## **Relationship Self-Efficacy and Psychological Well-Being**

The association between self-efficacy and psychological well-being is among the most extensively supported findings within social cognitive research. Numerous studies indicate that individuals possessing strong efficacy beliefs demonstrate greater emotional stability, resilience, life satisfaction, and psychological adjustment (Bandura, 1997).

Self-efficacy influences psychological well-being through several mechanisms. First, it affects how individuals interpret challenges and stressors. Highly efficacious individuals tend to view difficulties as manageable, whereas those with low efficacy often perceive them as overwhelming. This difference influences emotional reactions and coping behaviors.

Second, self-efficacy contributes to motivation and persistence. Individuals who believe in their abilities are more likely to pursue goals, remain engaged during adversity, and recover from setbacks. Such adaptive behaviors contribute to enhance psychological functioning.

Third, self-efficacy affects emotional regulation. Individuals with stronger efficacy beliefs generally experience lower

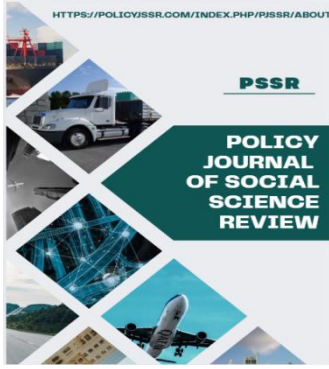
anxiety and greater emotional control. Consequently, self-efficacy serves as a protective factor against psychological distress.

Tu and Zhang (2015) provided important empirical evidence supporting these mechanisms. Their study demonstrated that self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being among university students. Loneliness negatively predicted self-efficacy, which in turn predicted lower levels of well-being. These findings suggest that loneliness affects psychological adjustment not only directly but also indirectly through changes in self-beliefs. (Kaya & Odacı, 2024)

Similarly, Kaya and Odacı (2024) found that self-efficacy buffered the negative impact of loneliness on subjective well-being. Participants possessing stronger efficacy beliefs exhibited greater psychological resilience despite experiencing loneliness. These findings highlight the protective role of self-efficacy in promoting emotional adaptation.

More recent work by Charania (2025) further demonstrated that self-efficacy contributes significantly to psychological well-being among students. Individuals reporting stronger confidence in their abilities demonstrated greater emotional adjustment, lower distress, and higher levels of positive functioning. (Charania, 2025)

Collectively, these studies support the proposition that relationship self-efficacy may explain why some individuals



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experiencing romantic loneliness maintain relatively high levels of psychological well-being while others experience substantial emotional difficulties.

## **Relationship Self-Efficacy and Marital Readiness**

In addition to influencing psychological well-being, relationship self-efficacy may play a critical role in shaping marital readiness. Marriage requires a range of interpersonal competencies including communication, emotional support, conflict management, trust, and commitment. Individuals who perceive themselves as capable of performing these functions are more likely to feel prepared for marital responsibilities.

Bonner (2018) provided strong empirical support for this proposition. The study demonstrated that relationship self-efficacy significantly predicted marital readiness and relationship confidence. Participants reporting greater confidence in their ability to manage romantic relationships also reported greater preparedness for marriage.

These findings are consistent with Social Cognitive Theory. Individuals who believe they possess the skills necessary for successful relationship functioning are more likely to approach marriage with confidence and optimism. Conversely, individuals with low relationship self-efficacy may doubt their capacity to manage marital challenges, reducing perceptions of readiness.

Relationship self-efficacy may influence marital readiness through multiple

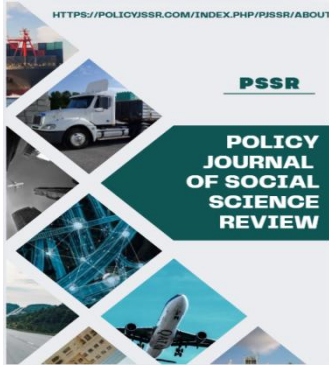
pathways. First, it promotes confidence regarding future relationship success. Second, it facilitates the development of interpersonal competencies necessary for marital functioning. Third, it enhances emotional resilience and problem-solving abilities. Together, these factors contribute to greater preparedness for long-term commitment.

## **The Mediating Role of Relationship Self-Efficacy**

The concept of mediation provides a useful framework for understanding how romantic loneliness influences psychological well-being and marital readiness. A mediating variable explains the process through which one variable affects another. In the present conceptual model, relationship self-efficacy serves as the psychological mechanism linking romantic loneliness to both outcomes.

Specifically, romantic loneliness may undermine relationship self-efficacy by fostering negative self-evaluations, relationship doubts, and perceptions of interpersonal incompetence. Reduced self-efficacy subsequently contributes to lower psychological well-being through increased emotional distress and diminished coping resources. Simultaneously, weakened relationship self-efficacy may reduce marital readiness by undermining confidence in one's ability to sustain successful intimate relationships.

This mediation model is theoretically compelling because it integrates emotional experiences with cognitive processes. Rather than viewing loneliness



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solely as a direct predictor of outcomes, the model acknowledges that individuals interpret and respond to loneliness in ways that influence subsequent functioning.

Furthermore, the model helps explain individual differences in responses to loneliness. Not all lonely individuals experience equivalent levels of distress or developmental difficulty. Those maintaining strong relationship self-efficacy may remain psychologically resilient despite experiencing loneliness. In contrast, individuals whose efficacy beliefs are severely compromised may experience greater emotional and relational difficulties.

### **Evidence Supporting Mediation Models**

Growing evidence supports mediation frameworks involving loneliness, self-efficacy, and psychological outcomes. Tu and Zhang (2015) demonstrated that self-efficacy mediated the relationship between loneliness and subjective well-being among university students. Similarly, Kaya and Odacı (2024) identified indirect pathways linking loneliness and well-being through efficacy-related processes.

Although direct investigations involving romantic loneliness, relationship self-efficacy, and marital readiness remain limited, existing evidence strongly suggests the plausibility of such pathways. The convergence of findings from loneliness, self-efficacy, relationship functioning, and marital readiness research provides a robust theoretical basis for proposing relationship self-

efficacy as a mediating mechanism. (Kaya & Odacı, 2024; Li et al., 2024)

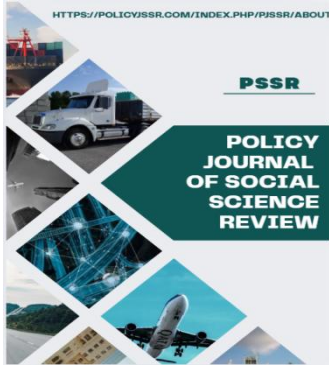
### **Implications for Research and Practice**

Understanding relationship self-efficacy as a mediating mechanism has important implications for intervention and prevention efforts. Traditional approaches addressing loneliness often focus primarily on increasing social interaction. While such strategies may be beneficial, they may overlook cognitive factors influencing how individuals interpret and respond to relationship experiences.

Interventions targeting relationship self-efficacy may provide a more comprehensive approach. Programs designed to strengthen communication skills, emotional regulation, conflict management, and relationship confidence may help reduce the adverse effects of loneliness while simultaneously promoting psychological well-being and marital readiness.

Within university settings, relationship-focused counseling interventions may be particularly beneficial for emerging adults experiencing loneliness. By enhancing relationship self-efficacy, such programs may improve both immediate psychological functioning and future relationship outcomes.

In conclusion, relationship self-efficacy represents a theoretically and empirically supported mechanism linking romantic loneliness to psychological well-being and marital readiness. Grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory,



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the construct provides a comprehensive explanation of how loneliness influences emotional and developmental outcomes during emerging adulthood. The evidence reviewed in this section strongly supports the inclusion of relationship self-efficacy as a central mediating variable within the proposed conceptual model.

## **Integrated Conceptual Model, Literature Gaps, Future Research Directions, and Conclusion Integrated Conceptual Model**

The literature reviewed throughout this article suggests that romantic loneliness represents a significant developmental and psychological challenge during emerging adulthood. Existing evidence consistently demonstrates that loneliness is associated with reduced psychological wellbeing, impaired interpersonal functioning, and difficulties in future relationship development. However, the reviewed literature further indicates that these relationships cannot be fully understood through direct associations alone. Rather, cognitive and relational processes appear to play a crucial role in explaining how romantic loneliness influences individual outcomes.

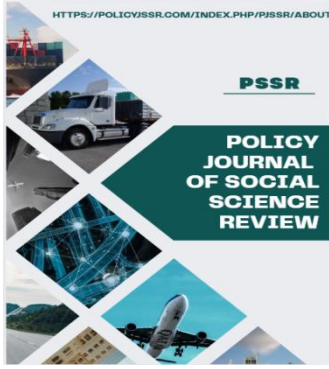
The present review proposes an integrated conceptual model grounded in Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory. Within this model, romantic loneliness functions as the primary antecedent variable influencing two important developmental outcomes: psychological well-being and marital readiness.

Relationship self-efficacy serves as the central mediating mechanism explaining how experiences of loneliness translate into emotional and relational consequences.

The proposed model suggests that individuals experiencing romantic loneliness often encounter repeated relational disappointments, unmet intimacy needs, and perceptions of emotional isolation. These experiences may contribute to negative self-evaluations regarding interpersonal competence and relationship capabilities. As a result, loneliness gradually weakens relationship self-efficacy, reducing confidence in one's ability to establish, maintain, and successfully manage intimate relationships.

Reduced relationship self-efficacy subsequently affects psychological well-being through multiple pathways. Individuals who doubt their relational abilities may experience increased anxiety, emotional distress, self-criticism, and hopelessness regarding future relationships. These psychological reactions contribute to lower levels of life satisfaction, reduced self-esteem, and diminished overall well-being.

Simultaneously, relationship self-efficacy influences marital readiness. Confidence in relationship skills is essential for perceptions of preparedness regarding future marital commitments. Individuals who believe they possess the interpersonal competencies necessary for successful relationships are more likely to perceive themselves as ready for marriage.



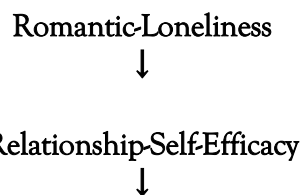
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Conversely, diminished relationship self-efficacy may contribute to uncertainty, avoidance, and doubts regarding one's ability to fulfill marital responsibilities. The integrated model therefore proposes both direct and indirect pathways linking romantic loneliness to developmental outcomes. Although loneliness may directly influence psychological well-being and marital readiness, a substantial portion of its influence may operate through relationship self-efficacy. This framework provides a theoretically coherent explanation for individual differences in responses to loneliness and offers a foundation for future empirical investigations.

### Proposed Conceptual Pathway



### Psychological Well-Being Marital Readiness

This framework integrates emotional experiences, cognitive processes, and developmental outcomes within a single explanatory model, thereby addressing limitations of previous research that examined these variables independently.

### Synthesis of Major Findings

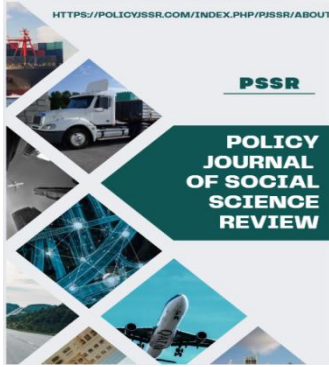
The literature reviewed in this article highlights several important themes. First, romantic loneliness emerges as a distinct and meaningful psychological construct rather than merely a subset of general

loneliness. Emerging adults frequently experience loneliness specifically within romantic domains despite possessing adequate social support systems. This distinction is particularly important because romantic relationships fulfill unique emotional needs that cannot always be satisfied through friendships or family relationships.

Second, evidence consistently demonstrates that romantic loneliness negatively affects psychological well-being. Individuals experiencing loneliness report lower life satisfaction, diminished self-esteem, increased emotional distress, and poorer overall psychological functioning. Although the majority of studies focus on general loneliness, findings suggest that romantic loneliness may exert particularly strong effects because it directly concerns unmet intimacy needs.

Third, available evidence indicates that romantic loneliness may negatively influence marital readiness. While research directly examining this relationship remains limited, studies consistently demonstrate that relational competence, interpersonal confidence, and relationship experiences contribute significantly to perceptions of marital preparedness. Consequently, persistent loneliness may interfere with developmental processes necessary for successful marital functioning.

Fourth, relationship self-efficacy appears to function as an important psychological resource promoting resilience and adaptive functioning. Individuals



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possessing stronger efficacy beliefs demonstrate greater psychological well-being, relationship satisfaction, and confidence regarding future commitments. These findings support the proposition that self-efficacy may explain why some lonely individuals experience severe psychological difficulties whereas others remain relatively resilient.

Finally, Social Cognitive Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding these relationships. By emphasizing the role of cognitive beliefs in shaping emotional and behavioral outcomes, the theory explains how experiences of loneliness may influence future functioning through changes in self-perceptions and efficacy beliefs.

## Literature Gaps

Despite the growing body of literature examining loneliness, psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and relationship functioning, several important gaps remain evident. These limitations restrict a comprehensive understanding of how romantic loneliness influences both current psychological functioning and future relational development among emerging adults.

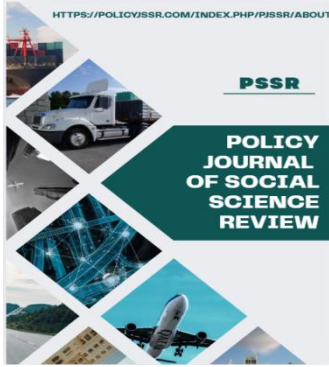
### Gap 1: Limited Research Linking Romantic Loneliness and Marital Readiness

One of the most significant gaps in the literature concerns the absence of studies directly examining the relationship between romantic loneliness and marital readiness. Although previous research has investigated loneliness in relation to

psychological distress, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and interpersonal functioning, few studies have explored how experiences of romantic loneliness influence perceptions of preparedness for marriage. Existing marital readiness research primarily focuses on emotional maturity, financial stability, relationship skills, and commitment attitudes, while the potential contribution of romantic loneliness remains largely overlooked. Consequently, little is known about whether unmet intimacy needs and prolonged romantic disconnection affect emerging adults' confidence regarding future marital commitments.

### Gap 2: Absence of an Integrated Conceptual Framework

Current literature tends to examine romantic loneliness, psychological well-being, marital readiness, and relationship self-efficacy as separate constructs. Studies frequently focus on direct relationships between two variables without considering broader developmental processes linking these experiences. As a result, the literature remains fragmented and lacks a comprehensive framework capable of explaining how romantic loneliness influences both psychological and relational outcomes. To date, no review has integrated these variables within a unified Social Cognitive Theory framework that explains the mechanisms connecting loneliness with well-being and marital readiness.



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### Gap 3: Limited Examination of Mediating Mechanisms

Although loneliness has consistently been associated with negative psychological outcomes, relatively little research has investigated the psychological mechanisms responsible for these effects. Existing studies often report direct associations between loneliness and well-being without examining how cognitive variables influence these relationships. Relationship self-efficacy, in particular, has received limited attention as a potential mediator. Understanding whether loneliness influences outcomes through changes in confidence, relationship competence, and interpersonal self-beliefs would provide a more nuanced understanding of the processes underlying psychological adjustment and relational preparedness.

### Gap 4: Scarcity of Research in the Pakistani Context

Research examining romantic loneliness within Pakistan remains extremely limited. Existing local studies have primarily focused on marital satisfaction, family relationships, attachment patterns, and relationship beliefs, with comparatively little attention devoted to romantic loneliness as an independent psychological construct. Furthermore, no known studies have simultaneously examined romantic loneliness, relationship self-efficacy, psychological well-being, and marital readiness among Pakistani emerging adults. Given the cultural significance of marriage, family involvement in relationship decisions,

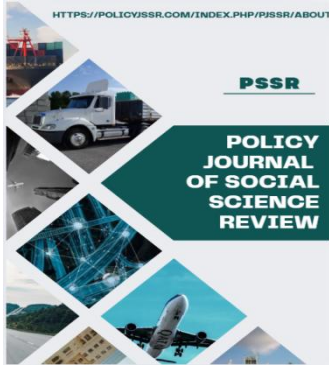
and collectivistic social values, findings derived from Western contexts may not fully explain relationship experiences within Pakistani society.

### Gap 5: Predominance of Cross-Sectional Research Designs

The majority of existing studies investigating loneliness, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being employ cross-sectional research designs. While such studies provide valuable information regarding associations among variables, they do not permit conclusions regarding causality or developmental processes. Consequently, it remains unclear whether romantic loneliness leads to reduced psychological well-being and marital readiness or whether individuals with poorer psychological adjustment are more likely to experience loneliness. Longitudinal research is needed to clarify causal pathways and developmental trajectories across emerging adulthood.

### Gap 6: Overreliance on Western Samples

A substantial proportion of loneliness research has been conducted within North American and European populations. Although these studies have contributed significantly to theoretical development, cultural differences may influence how loneliness is experienced, interpreted, and managed. Relationship norms, marriage expectations, family involvement, and social values differ considerably across cultures. Therefore, findings obtained from Western samples may not generalize to collectivistic societies where interpersonal relationships and marital expectations



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operate within different social frameworks. Greater attention to culturally diverse populations is necessary to establish the universality and cultural specificity of existing theories.

### **Summary of the Literature Gap**

Collectively, these gaps highlight the need for a more comprehensive understanding of romantic loneliness and its developmental consequences. Specifically, there is a need for research that integrates romantic loneliness, relationship self-efficacy, psychological well-being, and marital readiness within a unified theoretical framework. Addressing these limitations may contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of the psychological and relational challenges faced by emerging adults and inform the development of culturally sensitive interventions aimed at promoting healthy relationship development and psychological adjustment.

### **Lack of Integrated Models**

One of the most significant limitations of existing literature is the tendency to examine romantic loneliness, psychological well-being, marital readiness, and self-efficacy independently. Few studies have investigated these constructs simultaneously within a unified conceptual framework. Consequently, the mechanisms connecting loneliness with developmental outcomes remain insufficiently understood. (Li et al., 2024)

### **Limited Focus on Romantic Loneliness**

Most loneliness research focuses on general loneliness rather than romantic loneliness specifically. While these constructs are related, they are conceptually distinct and may have different psychological consequences. Greater attention to romantic loneliness is necessary to understand the unique challenges associated with unmet intimacy needs during emerging adulthood. (Husain et al., 2025)

### **Insufficient Examination of Marital Readiness**

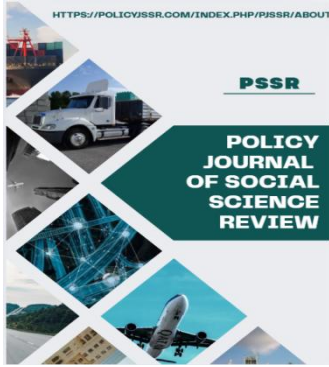
Compared to psychological well-being, marital readiness remains relatively underexplored within loneliness research. Existing studies frequently focus on relationship satisfaction, dating experiences, or commitment without considering preparedness for future marital roles. As a result, the developmental implications of loneliness for future intimate commitments remain unclear.

### **Scarcity of Mediation Research**

Although self-efficacy has been linked independently to loneliness, psychological well-being, and relationship functioning, few studies have directly examined relationship self-efficacy as a mediator. The absence of mediation-focused investigations limits understanding of the psychological processes through which loneliness influences developmental outcomes.

### **Cultural Limitations**

A substantial proportion of existing evidence originates from North America, Europe, and East Asia. Consequently,



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findings may not generalize to collectivistic societies where cultural norms surrounding intimacy, relationships, and marriage differ substantially. Greater attention to culturally diverse populations is needed.

### Limited Indigenous Research

Within Pakistan, research examining romantic loneliness remains extremely limited. Although studies have explored relationship beliefs, family dynamics, and marital functioning, few have investigated loneliness as a distinct predictor of psychological and relational outcomes. This gap is particularly important given the central role of marriage and family within Pakistani society. (Husain et al., 2025)

### Methodological Limitations

Most studies employ cross-sectional designs, restricting causal interpretation. Longitudinal research is necessary to determine whether loneliness predicts subsequent declines in well-being and marital readiness or whether these relationships operate in alternative directions. Furthermore, reliance on self-report measures may introduce response biases that influence findings.

### Future Research Directions

Addressing these limitations presents several opportunities for future research. First, researchers should investigate integrated mediation models incorporating romantic loneliness, relationship self-efficacy, psychological well-being, and marital readiness simultaneously. Such studies would provide stronger evidence regarding the

mechanisms underlying observed relationships. (Lim et al., 2023)

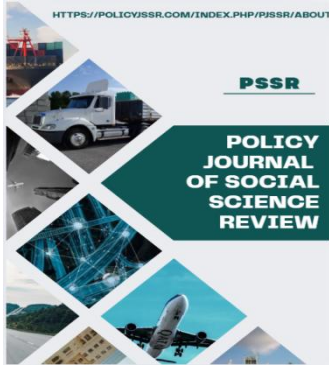
Second, longitudinal research designs should be employed to examine developmental trajectories over time. Longitudinal investigations would allow researchers to assess causal relationships and identify factors contributing to resilience or vulnerability.

Third, future studies should expand beyond university samples to include diverse populations of emerging adults. Such efforts would enhance the generalizability of findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of romantic loneliness across contexts.

Fourth, researchers should examine potential moderating variables including gender, attachment style, social support, emotional intelligence, and cultural values. These factors may influence the strength and direction of relationships among the variables examined in this review.

Fifth, greater emphasis should be placed on culturally sensitive investigations. Research conducted within collectivistic societies such as Pakistan may reveal unique patterns reflecting cultural norms surrounding intimacy, family involvement, and marital expectations.

Finally, intervention studies are needed to determine whether strengthening relationship self-efficacy can reduce the adverse effects of romantic loneliness. Such investigations would provide practical guidance for counseling and prevention programs targeting emerging adults.



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## Practical Implications

The findings reviewed in this article have important implications for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers.

University counseling centers should recognize romantic loneliness as a significant psychological concern rather than a normal developmental inconvenience. Early identification and intervention may prevent loneliness from contributing to more severe emotional difficulties.

Counseling interventions should incorporate strategies designed to enhance relationship self-efficacy. Programs focusing on communication skills, emotional regulation, conflict management, and interpersonal confidence may help emerging adults develop competencies necessary for healthy relationships.

Premarital education programs may also benefit from addressing loneliness and relationship self-efficacy. Strengthening confidence in relationship abilities may improve perceptions of marital readiness and promote healthier future relationships.

Additionally, mental health awareness initiatives should acknowledge the importance of romantic experiences in psychological functioning. Such efforts may reduce stigma associated with loneliness and encourage help-seeking among vulnerable individuals.

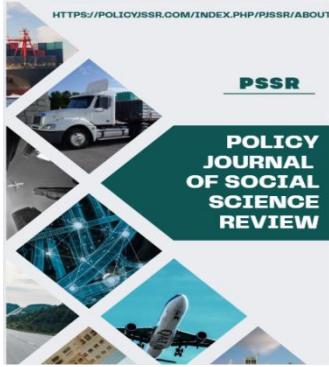
## Conclusion

The present review examined romantic loneliness as a predictor of psychological well-being and marital readiness among emerging adults, with relationship self-efficacy proposed as a mediating mechanism. The reviewed literature demonstrates that romantic loneliness represents a significant developmental challenge associated with emotional distress, reduced psychological well-being, and potential difficulties in preparing for future marital commitments.

Grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the proposed framework suggests that relationship self-efficacy plays a central role in explaining how loneliness influences both psychological and relational outcomes. Experiences of romantic loneliness may undermine confidence in relationship capabilities, which subsequently contributes to diminished well-being and reduced marital readiness.

Despite growing scholarly interest in loneliness and relationship functioning, substantial gaps remain regarding the integration of these constructs within comprehensive explanatory models. Future research should prioritize longitudinal, culturally diverse, and mediation-focused investigations to clarify underlying mechanisms and developmental pathways.

Ultimately, understanding romantic loneliness through the lens of relationship self-efficacy provides both theoretical and practical value. By identifying relationship self-efficacy as a potential protective factor, the present



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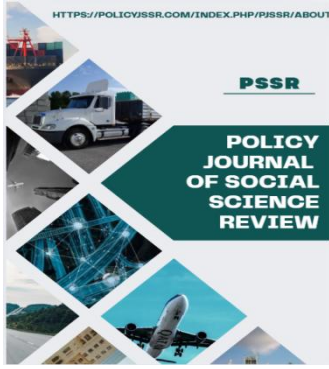
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review offers a promising direction for future research, counseling interventions, and preventive efforts aimed at promoting psychological well-being and healthy relationship development among emerging adults.

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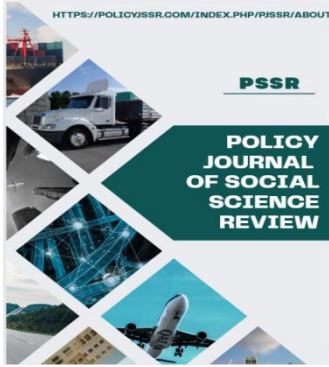


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