

**Culture and Grief: The concepts of social support and loneliness among bereaved
individuals from collectivistic and individualistic cultures**

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Universiteit Utrecht

Student: Styliani Kostikidou
Student number: 6521487

Supervisor: Dr. Henk Schut

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Abstract

Numerous studies have highlighted the benefits of social support for well-being, especially during bereavement, which is linked to intense feelings of loneliness. As part of a larger project of Utrecht University, this study examined patterns of social support, specifically support seeking, and the experience of social and emotional loneliness among bereaved from different cultures. It was predicted that participants from collectivistic cultures will report lower levels of support seeking and higher levels of emotional loneliness than participants from individualistic cultures. Additionally, support seeking was expected to have a negative relationship to social loneliness and present no relationship to emotional loneliness. The sample consisted of 268 bereaved participants from Greece and Turkey (collectivistic cultures), Ireland and Lithuania (individualistic cultures), according to Hofstede's categorization (1980;1983). Brief Cope Inventory was used to measure social support seeking. The two types of loneliness were measured by SELSA-S. The results showed no difference between the two groups in support seeking. Social loneliness was positively correlated to support seeking for both cultures. As expected, results showed no significant relationship between social support seeking and emotional loneliness for both groups. Lastly, emotional loneliness was higher among collectivists. To provide implications for further research and enrich the knowledge of clinical practice concerning grief patterns, longitudinal designs should be applied to address causal relationships and underlying mechanisms that might have indirect effect on social support and loneliness.

Keywords: individualism, collectivism, bereavement, grief, social support (seeking), social loneliness, emotional, loneliness

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Death comes across all the living species as the final stage of life (Slaughter, 2005). It is inevitable, universal, and one of the most pervasive experiences in a person's life, with long-term impact on daily routine (Einav & Margalit, 2020). Inasmuch as death is universal, grief, the primarily emotional reaction to a significant loss is also encountered across the species (Stroebe & Schut, 1998). Grief is accompanied by intense feelings of loneliness, which is influenced by the personal and sociocultural context (Lykes & Kemmelmeier, 2014).

Cultures pattern the context of loss (Cleiren, 1993; Robben, 2004). For instance, individuals from all cultures grieve when they lose a loved one, but cultures' expectations regarding loss reactions are different and this is reflected in what people say and do (Harris, 2010; Rosenblatt, 1988; Rothaupt & Becker, 2007). For example, a part of Americans tends to psychologize their emotional pain as opposed to other cultures who somatise it (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1985).

This research aims to investigate the support sought by the bereaved along with the experience of social and emotional loneliness in each culture. Moreover, the possible impact of support seeking on loneliness and its difference between cultures will be explored. First and foremost, it is important to refer to social support and loneliness regardless of culture.

Loneliness

Studying loneliness is of great importance, as it is an alert for concern (Tang & Chow, 2017). Loneliness is linked to poor mental health, as shown by cross-sectional studies on susceptible older adults (De Koning, Stathi & Richards, 2017; Djukanović,

Sorjonen & Peterson, 2015). As defined by Perlman and Peplau, (1984, p. 15), “loneliness is the incongruence between actual and desired levels of social interaction”. Weiss (1973) gave loneliness a multidimensional meaning (Dykstra & Fokkema, 2007; Moroń, 2014; Perlman, 2004), acknowledging two types of loneliness: the emotional, which is caused by the lack of a close personal relationship (Cecen, 2007; Van Baarsen, 2002), and social loneliness, which refers to the absence of an acceptable social network (Peerenboom, Collard, Naarding & Comijs, 2015).

Social support

Social support is essential in bereavement, with a positive effect on psychological and physiological wellbeing (Allan, 2006; Bastani, 2007; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1993; Stroebe, Zech, Stroebe & Abakoumkin, 2005; Vanderwerker & Prigerson, 2004). Social support is defined as the perception or experience that one is loved and cared for, esteemed and valued, and part of a social network of mutual assistance and obligations (Jiang, Drolet & Kim, 2018). According to the theory of mental incongruity, support from closed ones could compensate for the support the bereaved lost, after the death of a loved one (Van Baarsen, 2002). Favouring this, Cohen and Wills’s (1985) stress theory marks that social support can reduce stress and serve as a buffer for the bereaved. Furthermore, social support has been suggested as a protective factor against loneliness (Giles, Glonek, Luszcz & Andrews, 2005; Utz, Swenson, Caserta, Lund & deVries 2014), because the individual feels that he or she can turn to someone for help in the future (Stroebe et al., 2005). Yet, this presupposition is not extensively studied, and the current results remain inconclusive (Stroebe, Stroebe, Abakoumkin & Schut, 1996).

Social support and loneliness

As opposed to both mental incongruity and stress theories, attachment (Bowlby, 1969) and relational (Weiss, 1973) theories state that social support does not buffer against emotional loneliness, the feeling of complete aloneness and desolation, even in the presence of others (Dykstra, 2009). Social support cannot counterbalance the loss of an attachment figure (Bowlby, 1969), for this one was unique, creating specific feelings and psychophysiological reactions to the individual (Stroebe et al., 2005). Emotional loneliness could only be treated by building new emotional ties with a new attachment figure (Weiss, 1973). No one of course questions the benefits of social support. Yet, it could still be effective for social loneliness, for this one emerges through the absence of social contacts (Santini, Koyanagi, Tyrovolas, Mason & Haro, 2015). Social support should be readily offered (Utz et al., 2014) and perceived as helpful by the bereaved (Kaunonen, Tarkka, Paunonen & Laippala, 1999; Rosenblatt, 1988) to enhance their wellbeing, and avoid causing them additional stress (Bolger, Zuckerman & Kessler, 2000; Kim, Sherman, Ko & Taylor, 2006). Supporting these facts, research has presented the lack of social support as an important risk factor for complicated grief (Stroebe, Stroebe & Schut, 2001).

Culture and bereavement: Collectivism and Individualism

Hofstede (2011, p.3) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others”. He introduced collectivism and individualism as cultural patterns, when (1980;1983) he mapped fifty countries and three regions according to their scores in different dimensions. Collectivism is defined by closely linked individuals, who prioritize their needs and desires based on the group’s willing (Hui & Triandis, 1986; Triandis, 1994;

Yeh, Arora & Wu, 2006). People in individualistic cultures create loose ties and conceive themselves as a unique and separate entity of the group. Their beliefs and behaviours accord with their personal interests and volition (Lykes & Kimmelmeier, 2014). This does not mean, though, that collectivists do not count their personal traits and volition as unique, but these are not the most significant to determine their attitude (Cross, 1995).

Markus and Kitayama, based on Hofstede's (1983) cultural division, introduced the theory of self-construals in their review (1991), proposing that individualism and collectivism can influence the way people view themselves, their motivation, emotion and cognition. They attributed the independent self-construal to individualism and the interdependent to collectivism. Nevertheless, both patterns can be viewed across the world and within the same culture (Gardner, Gabriel & Lee, 1999; Lykes & Kimmelmeier, 2014). Comparative studies have also used this division as a way to understand the social structuring of relationships (Dion & Dion, 1993; Triandis, 1995) and explain patterns of social support (Goodwin & Plaza, 2000) and loneliness (Dykstra, 2009).

Support(seeking) among cultures

Dykstra's review (2009) of empirical studies on loneliness among older adults along with cross-cultural research (Cortina & Wasti, 2005) suggest that collectivists receive and seek relatively more social support than individualists, probably due to collectivists' interconnectedness with the in-group (Hui & Triandis, 1986; Yeh et al., 2006). On the other hand, substantial literature on support transactions in individualism and collectivism found that individualists are more likely to seek others' support (Kim et al., 2006) and share their feelings (Mortenson, Burlison, Feng

& Liu, 2009), comparing to collectivists. This stems from the fact that collectivists are concerned about losing face (Kim, Deci & Zuckerman, 2002; Ting-Toomey, 2005) and getting criticized (Taylor, Sherman, Kim, Jarcho, Takagi & Dunagan, 2004), in case they need help. Another extensively investigated reason is forbearance, which is considered as collectivistic coping (Moore & Constantine, 2005). Forbearance signifies that people in these cultures may suppress or conceal their needs and concerns, since they do not want to disturb the harmony of the group (Lin, 2015).

These suggestions are consistent with the findings of the comparative study of Wrzus, Hänel, Wagner & Neyer (2013), according to which individualists reported greater social networks than collectivists. However, collectivists are deemed to seek support and comfort mainly from their family, the major support source for them that buffers against stress (Yeh et al., 2006). Viewed geographically, though, forbearance is an element mostly existent in Eastern cultures (Lin, 2015).

Culture and loneliness

Previous research suggested that people living in predominantly individualistic cultures are likely to feel lonelier, as Dykstra mentions (2009). Her findings, though, showed that older adults from Southern Europe, linked to the construct of collectivism, tend to feel lonelier than those from Northern countries, predominantly considered as individualistic. Particularly, the comparative study by Lykes and Kimmelmeier (2014) provided evidence that collectivists are more susceptible to loneliness in the event of living alone, because it does not accord with their normative cultural attributes. In fact, interacting with their families appeared to decrease their loneliness. In contrast, individualists reported relatively higher levels of loneliness if their situation required daily assistance from others (Lykes & Kimmelmeier, 2014).

That is because they view self-dependence and autonomy as the most important (Dykstra 2009). These findings are also reported in other studies which compared collectivism to individualism predominantly from a geographical than cultural point, the 'North-South effect' (Kalmijn & Saraceno, 2008). However, it is unclear whether the term loneliness in these studies refers to emotional or social loneliness.

Hypotheses

Considering the theoretical background, *support seeking is predicted to be higher among the bereaved from individualistic cultures*, who are more in control of getting what they need (Kim et al., 2006).

A negative correlation between support seeking and social loneliness is expected for both types of culture, because social loneliness could be positively affected by social support. *No correlation will be found between support seeking and emotional loneliness for both groups*, as this one cannot be mitigated by support.

A significant loss is usually followed by identity impairment (Rosenblatt, 1988), which can have a negative impact on emotional loneliness (Weiss, 1973; Van Baarsen, 2002). Part of collectivists' self-identity derives from their relationships (Triandis, 1995). Therefore, *a minor difference is expected with more emotional loneliness reported by the bereaved from collectivistic cultures*.

Methods

Design

The present research was part of a larger cross-cultural study conducted at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. Aim was to clarify the experience of social support and loneliness and their in-between relationship among bereaved individuals. Four countries were included, Greece and Turkey as primarily collectivistic and Ireland and Lithuania as individualistic cultures, according to Hofstede's (1980, 1983) cultural dimensionality studies. The questionnaire was based on cross-sectional design, measuring basic demographic variables, the level of social support seeking and the level of social and emotional loneliness for both groups.

Procedure

The call for participation was held via posts on social media platforms and lasted from January to April 2019. Participation was voluntary, anonymous and confidential with a right for withdrawal, only during the questionnaires' completion, which were filled out through a link from the Thesis tools platform. The procedure typically lasted from 30 to 60 minutes.

Participants

Individuals participated on condition that they had suffered a loss in the past four years, had reached adulthood and came from the investigated countries. Therefore, a total sample of 268 participants (aged between 18 and 82 years), Lithuanian ($n=87$, 32.5%), Greek ($n=78$, 29.1%), Irish ($n=52$, 19.4%) and Turkish ($n=51$, 19%), entered the study [$M(\text{age})=35.42$, $SD=13.56$; 228 females (85.1%); 40

males (14.9%)]. The most frequently observed time since loss was two years ($n = 38$, 14%) with $M = 24.65$ ($SD = 15.17$).

Cross-cultural comparisons

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS 25. Independent samples t-test and chi-square of independence were conducted to examine background differences. Bereaved from individualistic cultures were older than collectivists. Comparing to individualists, collectivists mostly lived in cities and were more likely to be unemployed.

Deceased from collectivistic cultures were older than individualists and, more frequently, died due to natural causes. Most of the individualists lost a parent whereas collectivists primarily lost a grandparent. Most of the participants had suffered multiple losses, but individualists had experienced more losses than collectivists. All other comparisons failed to present significance ($p > .001$). Table 1 includes further information.

Table 1*Cross-cultural Comparison for Socio-demographics and Loss Characteristics*

		Individualistic n=139	Collectivistic n=129	Statistic – Significance
		N (%)	N (%)	
Age (M ± SD)		38.2 ± 14.0	32.4 ± 12.4	t(266)=3.60***
Education (M ± SD)		4.0 ± 1.0	3.9 ± 0.9	
Employment	Employed	102 (73.4%)	60 (46.6%)	X ² (1)=20.20***
	Unemployed	37 (26.6%)	69 (53.4%)	
Residence	Urban	93 (66.9%)	112 (86.8%)	X ² (2)=14.86**
	Suburban	24 (17.3%)	8 (6.2%)	
	Rural	22 (15.8%)	9 (7.0%)	
	Not religious	39 (28.1%)	31 (24.0%)	
Multiple losses	Yes	110 (79.1%)	69 (53.5%)	X ² (1)=19.84***
	No	29 (20.9%)	60 (46.5%)	
Age of the deceased (M ± SD)		58.0 ± 26.8	67.3 ± 20.0	t(251)=-3.21**
Type of relationship	Spouse	5 (3.6%)	2 (1.6%)	X ² (7)=22.26**
	Partner	1 (0.7%)	1 (0.8%)	
	Ex-spouse	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	
	Parent/ Step parent	21 (15.1%)	6 (4.7%)	
	Child/ Step child	33 (23.7%)	33 (25.6%)	
	Sibling/ Step sibling	6 (4.3%)	2 (1.6%)	
	Friend	25 (18.0%)	13 (10.1%)	
	Other	25 (18.0%)	27 (20.9%)	
Cause of death	Grandchild	23 (16.5%)	45 (34.9%)	X ² (3)=11.31*
	Accident	15 (10.8%)	10 (7.8%)	
	Homicide & Suicide	19 (13.6%)	4 (3.1%)	
	Natural deaths	87 (62.6%)	99 (76.7%)	
Other		18 (12.9%)	16 (12.4%)	
Social Support (M ± SD)		19.4 ± 5.3	21.2 ± 5.4	t(266)=-2.79**
Emotional Loneliness (M ± SD)		47.5 ± 13.8	51.5 ± 11.5	t(262.772)=-2.61*
Social Loneliness (M ± SD)		26.4 ± 5.9	26.7 ± 6.4	

N=number of participants, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Instruments

Socio-demographic and loss relevant questions were asked. All questionnaires were translated from English (original) to the languages of the investigated countries (target). Forward and backward translations were employed by independent bilingual translators (Kim & Lim, 1999), aiming to reassure translation's effectiveness and quality (Sireci, Yang, Harter & Ehrlich, 2006).

Brief-Cope Inventory Scale

Brief-Cope Inventory Scale (Carver, 1997) is an abbreviated version of the full Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced (COPE) Inventory (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989), which assesses the coping strategies used in response to stress. For the present study, social support seeking was measured. Brief Cope incorporates 28 items, measured on a 4-point Likert-type scale (0=I have not been doing this at all to 4=I have been doing this a lot). Two 4-item subscales were used in this study, the emotional (e.g., "I discuss my feelings with someone") and instrumental support (e.g., "I try to get advice from someone about what to do").

Carver and colleagues (1989) propose that, despite being different theoretically, social and emotional support usually appear together, in practice. Thus, in the present study, they were clustered into social support seeking (ranging from 8 to 32). Higher scores indicate higher levels of support sought by the bereaved. Social support seeking has obtained good reliability, $\alpha=.84$ (Snell, Siegert, Hay-Smith & Surgenor, 2011). Cronbach's alpha for this study was $\alpha=.85$. Brief-Cope has a good psychometric value (Yusoff, 2010), with adequate construct, convergent and discriminant validity of the abbreviated scales (Baumstarck, Alessandrini, Hamidou, Auquier, Leroy & Boyer, 2017; Clark, Bormann, Cropanzano & James, 1995).

Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale-Short (SELSA-S)

Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults-Short Form (SELSA-S) (DiTommaso, Brannen & Best, 2004) is the short version of a multidimensional loneliness measure (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993). It includes 15, 7-point Likert type scale (1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). DiTommaso and Spinner (1993, 1997) noted that emotional loneliness appeared to consist of family and romantic emotional loneliness (range=10-70), and social loneliness incorporated friends' subscale (possible range =5-35). Higher scores in one of the subscales indicate higher levels of emotional or social loneliness. The reliability coefficients were $\alpha=.85$ and $\alpha=.84$ for emotional and social loneliness, respectively. Selsa-S is a reliable measure of loneliness with good construct validity versus several criteria (DiTommaso, Brannen & Burgess, 2005).

Statistical analysis

All the dependent variables were continuous (support seeking, social and emotional loneliness). In all analyses, the variable of culture (categorical with two levels) was used as independent. To control for the effects of the age of bereaved and deceased, residential area, employment status, relationship with the deceased, death cause and multiple losses were used as covariates in all analyses. All the nominal variables were coded into dummy variables to be analysed as covariates.

The analyses were executed using SPSS 25.0. Before running the analyses, the DV and covariates were checked for ANCOVA assumptions. The normality and linearity were violated for age covariates, even after performing square root transformations (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). However, ANCOVA is robust against a moderate deviation from the normality (Glass, Peckham & Sanders, 1972; Olejnik &

Algina, 1984), in the presence of large and equal sample sizes (Harwell, & Serlin, 1988). Additionally, logarithmic transformations were performed for non-normal scale variables, in order to check their partial correlations.

To examine possible differences in levels of support seeking and emotional loneliness for both groups (first and fourth hypotheses), two Analyses of covariances were conducted. To investigate the second and third hypotheses concerning the relationship between support seeking and social and emotional loneliness, partial correlations were run for both cultures. Further, two Fisher's Z tests were conducted in Excel to compare the two correlations coefficients for both groups. The above-mentioned significant variables were used as covariates in all analyses.

Results

To test whether individualists seek more support (DV) than collectivists, one-way ANCOVA was performed, using cultural type as IV. After covariates' adjustment, the main effect was statistically insignificant, with individualists reporting almost the same levels of support seeking [$M(SE)= 20.27 (0.97)$] as collectivists [$M(SE)=21.13 (1.01)$], $F (1,248) = 1.309$, $p=.254$, $partial \eta^2 = .005$. Therefore, the first hypothesis was disconfirmed due to the absence of difference in support seeking between the two groups (Table 2).

Table 2

Adjusted Means and Variability for Cross-cultural Social Support Seeking

Social		Adjusted	
Support Seeking	N	M	SE
Individualistic	139	20.27	0.97
Collectivistic	129	21.13	1.01

N=number of participants, *M*=Mean, *SE*=Standard Error

A possible negative relationship between support seeking (IV) and social loneliness (DV) was tested, performing a partial correlation separately for each cultural group (IV). The same analysis was conducted to test the relationship between support seeking (IV) and emotional loneliness (DV) for both cultures (IV). A moderate positive relationship was revealed between support seeking and social loneliness both for individualists $r(139) = .448, p < .001$, and collectivists $r(129) = .378, p < .001$, indicating that the hypothesis regarding the negative relation of support seeking to social loneliness was disconfirmed.

The second partial correlation showed a weak positive relationship between support seeking and emotional loneliness for individualists $r(139) = .255, p < .01$, and insignificant results for collectivists $r(129) = .103, p = .260$. As hypothesized, support seeking was no related to emotional loneliness for both groups. For partial correlations see Table 3.

After the correlations, the two Fisher's Z tests showed statistically significant difference between the two correlations for the variable of social loneliness $z = 0.678, p < 0.05$ and emotional loneliness $z = 1.263, p < 0.05$. This designates that the relation of help-seeking to both types of loneliness was stronger for the individualistic group.

Table 3

Partial Correlations for Social Support Seeking, Social Loneliness and Emotional Loneliness by Cultural Group

	SSS
Individualistic	
	SL 0.448***
	EL 0.255**
Collectivistic	
	SL 0.378***
	EL 0.103

Note: SL= Social Loneliness, EL= Emotional Loneliness, SSS=Social Support Seeking

** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

To determine the levels of emotional loneliness (DV) among bereaved from both groups (IV), an ANCOVA was run. Collectivists reported significantly higher levels of emotional loneliness [$M(SE) = 49.17 (2.43)$] than individualists [$M(SE) = 44.13 (2.32)$]. The main effect of the culture type was significant $F(1, 248) = 7.82, p < .01, partial \eta^2 = .031$, meaning that the hypothesis was confirmed, and emotional loneliness was more frequently reported by bereaved from collectivistic cultures. The adjusted means and SEs are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Adjusted and Variability for Cross-cultural Emotional Loneliness

Emotional Loneliness	N	Adjusted	
		M	SE
Individualistic	139	44.13	2.32
Collectivistic	129	49.17	2.43

N=number of participants, *M*=Mean, *SE*=Standard Error

Discussion

This study aimed to examine cross-cultural differences in support seeking and emotional loneliness and clarify the relationship between support seeking and the two concepts of loneliness. These patterns were studied among bereaved members of individualistic and collectivistic cultures, a cultural division, introduced by Hofstede (1980).

Support seeking among cultures

In line with cross-cultural research on support seeking (Kim et al., 2006; Mortenson, Burleson, Feng & Liu, 2009; Taylor et al., 2004), it was predicted that bereaved from individualistic cultures would be more willing to seek support than those from collectivistic cultures. More specifically, Kim, Sherman and Taylor (2008), in their review of studies on support seeking, report that people from collectivistic cultures, such as in many parts of Asia, might refrain from support seeking mainly due to relational concerns. They furthermore mention that collectivists might not seek support, because this is already given from their close network, as they form mutually caring relationships. Additionally, they anticipate that the others will understand their need for help before they explicitly seek it (Kim et al., 2008), because their relationships entail a greater sense of obligation to others (Adams & Plaut, 2003). Unexpectedly, the present findings revealed no difference between the two groups regarding support seeking.

The fact that members of both groups did not differ in their attempts to seek support could indicate the presence of other factors that influence their support seeking behaviour. For instance, in individualism, self-reliance and autonomy are of

great importance. It could be that bereaved from the individualistic group were more reluctant than collectivists to depend on others' help (Lykes & Kemmelmeier, 2014) or report that they did it. It is important, though, to consider that the vast majority of studies on support seeking and forbearance have been conducted among Americans (individualistic) and Asians (collectivistic). In fact, forbearance and unwillingness to seek support are mostly observed among different subgroups of Asians (Kim et al., 2008; Lin, 2015). However, our sample consisted of Europeans. Having that on mind, our findings could reflect variations of collectivist and individualist attitudes across and within nations and individuals (Green, Deschamps & Paez, 2005).

Support seeking and social loneliness

According to literature and clinical practice, social support could mitigate social loneliness, as the latter emerges from the absence of social contacts (Santini et al., 2015). Cacioppo, Cacioppo, Cole, Capitanio, Goossens and Boomsma (2015) viewed loneliness, as a body function, like hunger and physical pain. They suggested that loneliness serves as an aversive signal that encourages humans to prevent further damage on their social body. That is social loneliness might motivate people to seek support. Yet, in the present research, the participants of both groups, despite asking for support, felt lonelier socially. Results relevant to social support's 'buffering effect' against loneliness are equivocal and further investigation is needed (Stroebe et al., 1996; Stroebe et al., 2005).

Before interpreting results relevant to support transactions, though, it should not be overlooked that social support is a large multidimensional construct (Laireiter & Baumann, 1992) with different patterns and sources (Hombrados-Mendieta, García-Martín & Gómez-Jacinto, 2013). In fact, explicit help-seeking might cause

further distress and burden on the bereaved (Taylor et al., 2004) and is not equal to the actual support receipt (Thoits, 1986). Active help-seeking could affect relationships in a negative way, especially when the individual expects that support should be provided without asking (Kim et al., 2006). If peoples' expectations of support are not met (Wethington & Kessler, 1986), it is probable that they will experience additional frustration (Negron, Martin, Almog, Balbierz & Howell, 2013) and loneliness (Cohen & McKay, 1984; Van Baarsen, 2002).

Support seeking and emotional loneliness

As expected, emotional loneliness showed no relation to support seeking for the bereaved from collectivistic cultures and a weak one for the individualists. That is, social support cannot mitigate emotional loneliness, the utter aloneness (Rothaupt & Becker, 2007), as this one emerges after the loss of a significant person and can only be treated by building new ties or developing a new self-concept (Weiss, 1973). This could explain how somebody feels lonely despite being with others (Lykes & Kimmelmeier, 2014). Apart from the nature of emotional loneliness, other factors which were not investigated in the present research are suggested to mediate the relationship between social support and loneliness. For instance, loneliness is more common among people with low self-esteem (Lasgaard, 2007; Mahon, Yarcheski, Yarcheski, Cannella & Hanks, 2006). Van Baarsen's longitudinal study (2002) also highlights that self-esteem plays a key role on identity change, which according to Weiss (1973) is essential so that the bereaved can move on. Moreover, she found that the bereaved with lowered self-esteem could underestimate the support they received.

Both types of loneliness had a significantly stronger relationship to support seeking for the individualistic group, indicating cross-cultural differences in the

relationship of these constructs. It could be the case that, although, individualists are benefitted by self-disclosure to a confidant, they are likely to feel lonelier, when they need others' help comparing to collectivists who did not show an increase in loneliness in that case, based on cross-cultural research (Lykes & Kimmelmeier, 2014). That could happen, because individualists consider self-reliance and autonomy as the most significant values.

Emotional loneliness among cultures

In line with the fourth hypothesis and studies on loneliness among cultures (Dykstra, 2009; Lykes & Kimmelmeier, 2014), bereaved from Turkey and Greece reported higher levels of emotional loneliness than Irish and Lithuanians. It could be the case that collectivists are probable to feel lonelier, when living alone, as this does not accord with their cultural norms (Lykes & Kimmelmeier, 2014), indicating that their feeling of loneliness might not reflect actual absence of support.

Emotional loneliness is linked to the loss of an attachment figure (Weiss, 1973). Apart from the attachment to the deceased, the identity of self is a key element in adjustment to loss (Papa and Lancaster, 2016). Along with the deceased, the bereaved loses a part of their identity (Rosenblatt, 1988) and this can have a negative impact on emotional loneliness (Weiss, 1973; Van Baarsen, 2002). The development of a new self-concept and establishment of new ties are essential to mitigate emotional loneliness (Weiss, 1973).

Therefore, collectivists may find it more difficult to resolve their ties with the deceased and build new ones, because part of their self-identity derives from personal relationships (Triandis, 1995). Papa and Lancaster, (2016) examined identity based on

identity continuity and attachment theories of grief and its relation to adjustment to loss. They showed that dependency of oneself to their relationships was related to increased grief symptoms, which is also suggested by attachment theory. In that case even the increased social resources could not buffer identity disruption related to the loss of a loved one. That argument does not intend to undermine the experience of loneliness among individualists, as this is unique for each person (Tiilikainen & Seppänen, 2017). It proposed that a more independent self-construal focuses on personal attributes and trait (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and, thus, it might be less affected by the event of loss (Papa & Lancaster, 2016).

Concluding, cultural norms and expectations affect patterns of social support, loneliness and bereavement. Nevertheless, to avoid overgeneralization and categorization of personal experiences, it should be mentioned that individualist-collectivist attitudes and independent-interdependent self-construals are not mutually exclusive (Green et al., 2005; Triandis, 1995), but might coexist within each person (Singelis, 1994), indicating that each country is different (e.g., customs, norms) (Dykstra, 2009).

Limitations and future research

To provide direction for further research, several limitations should be mentioned. First, the social support seeking was measured clustering the instrumental and emotional support, which could possibly lead to the oversight of significant findings. Furthermore, the definition of loneliness (Lykes & Kimmelmeier, 2014) and social support (Kim et al., 2006) might slightly differ within cultures and languages. Lastly, making conclusions based on attitudes of cultures, grouping different nations and countries might create issues relevant to personal and cultural biases. However,

all participants were European, most of them women (85.1%), living in urban areas (76.5%), making the sample representative of European bereaved individuals, which contributes to the validity of our conclusions.

Future studies should clarify the effect of source, type and quality of support to clarify if social support buffers against loneliness, as both consist of several factors which might overlap and create misconceptions. This might explain why the ‘buffering effect’ of social support on loneliness remains inconclusive, despite its extensive investigation. It is advisable to provide a better understanding of social support and its effect both on emotional and social loneliness from mediating mechanisms’ perspective (self-esteem, self-disclosure), considering cultural background as a factor. Lastly, it is essential that future implications explore whether the self-report answers in the present research could reflect real-life conditions.

Conclusion

The current research examined potential differences in the concepts of social support seeking and loneliness among bereaved from different cultures. The cultural division was based on the collectivistic-individualistic dimension (Hofstede, 1980). Collectivists were as probable as individualists to seek social support, yet, felt lonelier emotionally. Furthermore, support seeking was shown to have a significant positive relationship with social loneliness, while no significant relationship was revealed with emotional loneliness. The importance of clarifying these patterns is highlighted. The variability of the individualism-collectivism dimension across and within humans, cultures and nations is discussed. Notwithstanding the methodological shortcomings, these results are noteworthy and could indicate cross-cultural differences and

similarities in terms of social support and loneliness and increase the understanding of their in-between relationships.

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