Emotional Support, Loneliness, and Physical Health during COVID-19

We ran a study to see if the isolating circumstances of COVID-19 impacted people's health, and if degree of emotion support buffers the negative consequences. We hypothesized that loneliness could predict reported illness symptoms, and that this relationship was moderated by emotional support. We gathered a sample of MTURK participants (N = 574) between April and June 2020. Loneliness was tested through a series of questions such as “I felt alone and apart from others,” using a 5-point likert scale ranging from never to always (PROMIS, 2020). Emotional support was tested in the same manner, and loneliness was reported via a 13-item illness symptoms checklist (Elliot & Sheldon, 1998). The overall model was significant as loneliness significantly predicted illness symptoms. Emotional support did not significantly predict illness symptoms. However, there was a significant interaction between illness symptoms and emotion support. A simple slopes analysis revealed that the relationship between loneliness and illness symptoms was greatest at high levels of emotion support. The implications of this study are that those with high levels of emotion support may also be suffering the most from lack of sociality, thus reporting high loneliness and illness symptoms.