Systematic Review: The Hidden Impact of Workplace Loneliness and Its Organizational Remedies

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Article Info

ABSTRAK

Kesepian di tempat kerja (*workplace loneliness*) merupakan isu penting yang berdampak pada kesejahteraan dan kinerja karyawan. Penelitian ini bertujuan meninjau secara sistematis literatur empiris terbaru terkait *workplace loneliness*. Dengan menggunakan metode *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) berbasis PRISMA 2020, diperoleh 530 artikel dari *Scopus* dan *Google Scholar*, dan delapan artikel memenuhi kriteria inklusi. Hasil menunjukkan *workplace loneliness* menurunkan keterikatan kerja, komitmen organisasi, serta kepuasan kerja, dan meningkatkan kelelahan emosional. Namun, dukungan atasan, pertukaran rekan kerja, kepemimpinan empatik, dan resiliensi terbukti memitigasi dampaknya. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada sintesis literatur terkini 2020–2024, dengan implikasi praktis bagi pengembangan kebijakan SDM yang inklusif.

ABSTRACT

Workplace loneliness has emerged as a significant issue affecting employees' well-being and organizational performance. This study systematically reviews recent empirical literature on workplace loneliness. Using a PRISMA 2020-based Systematic Literature Review (SLR), 530 articles were retrieved from Scopus and Google Scholar, and eight met the inclusion criteria. Results indicate that workplace loneliness reduces work engagement, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction while increasing emotional exhaustion. However, supervisor support, coworker exchange, empathic leadership, and resilience mitigate its negative impact. The novelty of this study lies in synthesizing recent studies (2020–2024), offering practical implications for developing inclusive human resource policies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace loneliness has increasingly attracted scholarly attention in industrial and organizational psychology. This phenomenon arises when employees perceive a lack of meaningful social or emotional connections within their work environment, despite being physically surrounded by colleagues or supervisors. Such experiences not only impair employees' psychological well-being but also disrupt the overall effectiveness of organizations (Wright & Silard., 2021). In the broader

literature of social psychology, loneliness is conceptualized as a discrepancy between individuals' need for social connectedness and the reality of their interpersonal interactions. When this need remains unfulfilled, employees may experience emotional distress that diminishes their motivation, engagement, and productivity (Hodgins et al., 2023). Consequently, workplace loneliness has become a critical issue in human resource management that requires systematic academic exploration.

The emergence of remote and hybrid work arrangements, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, has intensified this challenge. As opportunities for face-to-face interactions become increasingly limited, the risk of experiencing workplace loneliness has grown significantly (Du et al., 2022). This shift highlights the necessity of designing inclusive organizational climates that foster genuine social connections in modern work settings. Workplace loneliness carries profound consequences. Prior studies have documented that lonely employees are more likely to suffer from emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, and heightened turnover intentions (Basit & Nauman., 2023). These outcomes jeopardize organizational stability, as the loss of talented employees entails substantial financial and non-financial costs.

Beyond individual well-being, workplace loneliness also undermines organizational behaviors. Empirical evidence shows that loneliness at work reduces work engagement, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Jung et al., 2021; Tian et al., 2021). These negative effects are systemic, eroding team performance and organizational effectiveness in the long run. Despite growing awareness, existing solutions remain limited and often partial. Strategies such as enhancing peer support, promoting empathic communication, and organizing social activities have shown benefits, yet they do not fully address the core dynamics of loneliness (Jin & Ikeda., 2024). Thus, more comprehensive frameworks are required to identify protective mechanisms that strengthen employees' resilience against loneliness.

One major limitation of prior studies is their predominant focus on the outcomes of workplace loneliness, while neglecting mediating and moderating variables that could attenuate its detrimental impact. Resilience, supervisory support, and empathic leadership styles, for instance, hold potential to buffer employees against loneliness, yet these factors remain underexplored in the literature (Ahsan & Anwar ul Haq., 2022). Another shortcoming lies in the geographical and cultural scope of existing research. Much of the evidence stems from Western contexts or specific industries, limiting its generalizability to other cultural settings. Since cultural norms strongly influence how individuals build relationships and interpret loneliness, exploring workplace loneliness in collectivist cultures, including Indonesia, is imperative.

A systematic literature review (SLR) is therefore essential to synthesize existing empirical findings, identify recurring patterns, and highlight research gaps. Unlike narrative reviews, SLRs follow rigorous and transparent procedures, offering a more reliable foundation for theory building and practical recommendations (Triandini et al., 2019). The present study aims to address critical questions: How has workplace loneliness been examined in recent literature (2020–2024)? Which outcomes, mediators, and moderators have been identified? And how can these findings advance both theoretical discourse and managerial practice in organizational settings?

Previous reviews of workplace loneliness often relied on narrative approaches and lacked methodological rigor. Consequently, their conclusions were less robust. By employing the PRISMA 2020 framework, this study strengthens methodological credibility, ensuring transparent and systematic processes in article selection and synthesis (Page et al., 2021). Recent scholarship has advanced our understanding of workplace loneliness. For example, D'Oliveira & Persico., (2023) demonstrated that task interdependence and supportive behaviors mitigate loneliness, while Jung et al., (2022) revealed its association with emotional exhaustion among hotel employees. Nevertheless, these studies face contextual limitations, underscoring the need for broader and more integrative analyses.

Similarly, Üstün & Üstün., (2022) found that perceived overqualification exacerbates workplace loneliness but can be moderated by supervisory support. This finding is particularly

relevant for collectivist cultures, where hierarchical relationships play a central role, yet remains largely unexplored in such contexts. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to fill existing gaps by synthesizing recent literature, identifying protective variables that are underrepresented, and developing a conceptual framework tailored to the Indonesian context. In doing so, this study contributes to both theoretical enrichment and practical strategies for managing workplace loneliness.

The primary objectives of this research are threefold: first, to systematically review literature on workplace loneliness published between 2020 and 2024 in Scopus-indexed journals (Q1–Q3); second, to classify major themes, outcomes, mediators, moderators, and protective variables; and third, to propose a future research agenda relevant to Indonesian organizational contexts. The anticipated contributions of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it integrates and extends existing knowledge on workplace loneliness, offering clearer insights into its mechanisms and boundary conditions. Practically, it provides evidence-based guidance for human resource practitioners and organizational leaders in designing interventions to reduce loneliness at work.

This article is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines the methodology employed in this SLR, including search strategies, inclusion criteria, and synthesis procedures. Section 3 presents the findings of the review, highlighting major themes and variables. Section 4 discusses key contributions, limitations, and future research directions. Finally, Section 5 concludes with theoretical and practical implications as well as recommendations for subsequent studies.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) design to synthesize and critically analyze previous empirical findings on workplace loneliness. The SLR method was selected because it enables researchers to provide a comprehensive overview of the state of knowledge on a given topic through transparent, structured, and replicable procedures (Page et al., 2021; Triandini et al., 2019).

2.2 Subjects of Research

The "subjects" in this review were empirical articles published in peer-reviewed journals. Articles were eligible if they specifically addressed workplace loneliness as a central variable, either as an independent, dependent, mediating, or moderating construct. To ensure relevance, the review included studies published between 2020 and 2024. Only journal articles indexed in Scopus (Q1–Q3) were retained, while conference papers, book chapters, and non-peer-reviewed works were excluded.

2.3 Instruments

The main instrument of this study was a review protocol designed based on the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses* (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The protocol defined the eligibility criteria, databases, search strategies, screening steps, and quality assessment procedures. The use of a protocol minimized bias and increased the transparency and reproducibility of the review process.

2.4 Data Sources and Search Strategy

Data were obtained from two primary academic databases: *Scopus* and *Google Scholar*. A systematic search was conducted on September 30, 2025, using the following keywords and Boolean combinations: *"workplace loneliness" OR "loneliness at work" AND ("job satisfaction" OR "work engagement" OR "employee well-being" OR "organizational commitment"*). Manual search of reference

lists from selected articles was also conducted to capture additional relevant studies. The initial search yielded 530 records.

2.5 Screening and Eligibility Criteria

Screening was carried out in several stages. First, duplicate records were removed using Mendeley Reference Manager (version 2.126.0). Second, articles published outside the 2020–2024 timeframe were excluded. Third, titles and abstracts were screened for relevance to the research topic. Fourth, full-text screening was performed to confirm eligibility. The inclusion criteria were: (1) empirical studies focusing on workplace loneliness; (2) articles written in English; (3) studies published in peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus; and (4) availability of full text. The exclusion criteria included: (1) conceptual or theoretical papers without empirical data; (2) studies not directly addressing workplace loneliness; and (3) non-open access papers that could not be retrieved.

2.6 Quality Assessment

To ensure methodological rigor, the quality of included studies was assessed using a standardized checklist adapted from the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) critical appraisal tool (Moola et al., 2020). Each article was evaluated on criteria such as clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of research design, adequacy of sampling, validity of measurement instruments, and transparency of analysis. Only articles meeting at least 70% of the quality indicators were included in the final synthesis.

2.7 Data Analysis

The analysis employed a narrative synthesis approach, which allowed the integration of findings across heterogeneous studies (Popay et al., 2006). Data extracted from eligible articles included author(s), year of publication, research context, sample characteristics, variables examined, study design, and key findings. Thematic analysis was then conducted to identify dominant trends, recurring patterns, and conceptual gaps.

2.8 Research Procedure

The research procedure followed four main steps:
1. *Identification* – Collection of articles from Scopus and Google Scholar using the specified keywords.
2. *Screening* – Removal of duplicates and irrelevant records.
3. *Eligibility* – Full-text review of potentially relevant articles based on inclusion and exclusion criteria.
4. *Inclusion* – Final selection of eligible studies and synthesis of their findings.

This process was documented using the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram to enhance transparency and replicability.

2.9 Limitations and Strengths of Method

The main difficulty encountered was the limited access to some high-quality articles that were not open access. However, this was addressed by focusing on accessible Scopus-indexed journals and conducting manual searches. The strength of this method lies in its systematic, replicable approach, which minimizes researcher bias and provides a structured synthesis of existing knowledge. Compared to narrative reviews, the SLR design offers a more rigorous, transparent, and evidence-based foundation for both theoretical development and managerial practice (Page et al., 2021).

3. RESULTS

3.1 Subjects of Research

        The systematic search across *Scopus* and *Google Scholar* initially yielded 530 articles related to workplace loneliness. After removing duplicates and excluding works published outside 2020–2024 (n = 220), 310 articles were retained for further screening. Among these, 134 were excluded because they were not open access, and 116 were removed for failing to meet journal quality criteria. Following full-text assessment of 127 articles, 8 studies met all eligibility criteria and were included in the final review. These steps are fully documented in the PRISMA 2020 flowchart presented earlier in the Methods section.
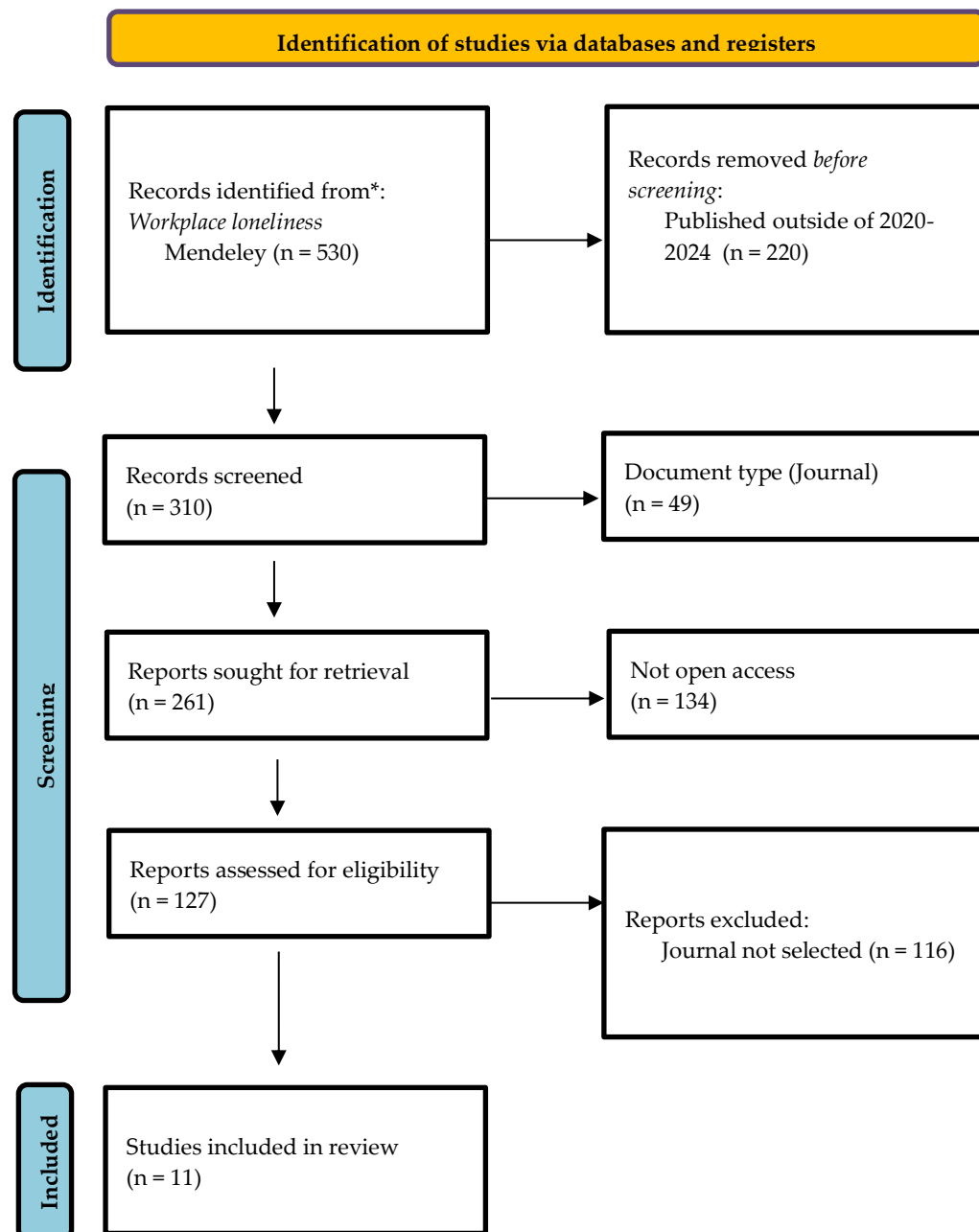

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

3.2 Descriptive Characteristics of Included Studies

The eight included studies varied in terms of publication year, research context, and methodology. Most studies were published in high-impact journals indexed in Scopus Q1 (n = 5), with the remainder in Q2 (n = 2) and Q3 (n = 1). The majority of samples were drawn from Asia (China, Pakistan, South Korea, Japan) and Europe, with industries ranging from hospitality and education to banking and technology. Quantitative survey methods dominated (n = 7), while one study applied a predictive correlational design.

Tabel 1. Distribution of Included Studies by Year and Indexing

No	Title (Author, Year)	Sample	Indexing	Key Findings
1	Workplace Isolation, Loneliness and Wellbeing at Work: the Mediating Role of Task Interdependence and Supportive Behaviours (D'Oliveira & Persico., 2023)	385 employees in the European service sector, with varying levels of task interdependence	Scopus Q1 (Applied Ergonomics)	Workplace isolation was significantly associated with loneliness and reduced well-being. However, task interdependence and supportive behaviors mediated these negative effects. Higher team support and stronger task interdependence were linked to lower loneliness and sustained workplace well-being.
2	Unravelling the Antecedents of Loneliness in the Workplace (Wright & Silard., 2021)	472 employees from various organizations in North America, across public and private sectors	Scopus Q1 (Human Relations)	Workplace loneliness was influenced by both individual factors (e.g., introverted personality) and contextual factors (e.g., unsupportive organizational culture). Social support and high-quality coworker relationships were identified as key protective factors.
3	How Workplace Loneliness Harms Employee Well-Being: A Moderated Mediational Model (Basit & Nauman., 2023)	410 employees in a technology company, Pakistan	Scopus Q2 (Frontiers in Psychology)	Workplace loneliness negatively affected employee well-being through increased job stress, mediated by reduced satisfaction with workplace social relationships. Organizational support moderated and weakened this negative effect.
4	The Effects of Workplace Loneliness on Work Engagement and Organizational Commitment: Moderating Roles of Leader-Member Exchange and Coworker Exchange (Jung et al., 2021)	323 hospitality industry employees, South Korea	Scopus Q1 (Sustainability, Switzerland)	Workplace loneliness reduced work engagement and organizational commitment. However, high-quality leader–member and coworker exchanges moderated the relationship, mitigating negative effects.
5	The Role of Empathic Communication in the Relationship between Servant Leadership and Workplace	278 employees in multinational corporations, Japan	Scopus Q2 (Behavioral Sciences)	Servant leadership reduced workplace loneliness through empathic communication, which sequentially increased trust and team connectedness.

No	Title (Author, Year)	Sample	Indexing	Key Findings
	Loneliness: A Serial Mediation Model (Jin & Ikeda., 2024)			This highlights the importance of empathy-oriented leadership in minimizing loneliness and strengthening workplace relationships.
6	The Effects of Workplace Loneliness on the Psychological Detachment and Emotional Exhaustion of Hotel Employees (Jung et al., 2022)	335 hotel employees, South Korea	Scopus Q1 (International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health)	Workplace loneliness increased emotional exhaustion and hindered psychological detachment after work, with stronger effects among employees with heavy workloads. This underscores the need for organizational interventions to reduce loneliness and protect mental health.
7	Gender Differences In the Effect of Workplace Loneliness on Organizational Citizenship Behaviors Mediated by Work Engagement (Tian et al., 2021)	428 manufacturing sector employees, China	Scopus Q1 (Psychology Research and Behavior Management)	Workplace loneliness reduced organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) via lower work engagement. The negative effect was stronger among female employees, highlighting the importance of considering gender in HR strategies.
8	The Effect of Workplace Loneliness on Silence Behavior (Guo., 2020)	296 employees in the education and public service sectors, China	Scopus Q3 (Psychology)	Workplace loneliness positively predicted silence behavior. Lonely employees were more likely to withhold ideas, opinions, or feedback, undermining organizational communication and innovation.
9	Perceived Organizational Support, Workplace Loneliness, and Creativity: Mediating Role of Workplace Loneliness, and Moderating Role of Proactive Personality (Ahsan et al., 2022)	402 banking sector employees, Pakistan	Scopus Q1 (Review of Management Science)	Perceived organizational support enhanced employee creativity by reducing workplace loneliness. Proactive personality moderated this relationship, with highly proactive individuals better maintaining creativity despite loneliness.
10	The Moderating Role of Supervisor Support in the Effect of Perceived Overqualification on Workplace Loneliness (Üstün et al., 2022)	357 employees across multiple industries, Turkey	Scopus Q1 (Review of Management Science)	Perceived overqualification increased workplace loneliness. However, strong supervisor support significantly weakened this effect, highlighting the importance of inclusive supervisory practices.
11	Forgiveness among Public Sector Workers: A Predictive Study of Employee Resilience, Emotional Intelligence and Loneliness at	310 public sector employees, Nigeria	Scopus Q3 (Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences)	Employee resilience and emotional intelligence significantly reduced workplace loneliness and predicted forgiveness in the workplace. Individuals with higher resilience and emotional

No	Title (Author, Year)	Sample	Indexing	Key Findings
	Work (Matthew et al., 2021)			intelligence were better able to manage loneliness and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships.

3.3 Thematic Findings

Analysis of the eight studies revealed three dominant themes:

1. *Negative Outcomes of Workplace Loneliness*

Workplace loneliness consistently predicted lower well-being, emotional exhaustion, reduced work engagement, and diminished organizational commitment (Basit & Nauman., 2023; Jung et al., 2021). In some cases, it also increased silence behavior, where employees refrained from sharing ideas or feedback (Guo, 2020).

2. *Moderating and Mediating Mechanisms*

Several studies highlighted protective mechanisms. Leader–member exchange and coworker exchange buffered the negative effects of loneliness on work engagement and commitment (Jung et al., 2021). Supervisor support weakened the association between overqualification and workplace loneliness (Üstün & Üstün., 2022). Similarly, empathic communication mediated the relationship between servant leadership and reduced loneliness (Jin & Ikeda., 2024).

3. *Individual and Organizational Factors*

Personality and resilience emerged as important individual resources. Employees with proactive personalities were less affected by workplace loneliness, even in low-support environments (Ahsan & Anwar ul Haq., 2022). At the organizational level, perceived support increased creativity by reducing loneliness, underscoring the centrality of supportive climates.

Tabel 2. Summary of Key Findings from Included Studies

No	Authors (Year)	Context	Main Findings
1	Basit & Nauman (2023)	Technology sector, Pakistan	Loneliness increased stress and reduced well-being; moderated by organizational support.
2	Jung et al. (2021)	Hospitality, South Korea	Loneliness reduced engagement and commitment; moderated by leader–member and coworker exchange.
3	Jin & Ikeda (2024)	Multinational firms, Japan	Servant leadership reduced loneliness via empathic communication
4	Üstün & Üstün (2022)	Multi-industry, Turkey	Overqualification increased loneliness; mitigated by supervisor support.
5	Guo (2020)	Education/public sector, China	Loneliness increased silence behavior, limiting innovation.
6	D'Oliveira & Persico (2023)	Service sector, Europe	Task interdependence and supportive behaviors mediated the link between isolation and loneliness.
7	Tian et al. (2021)	Manufacturing, China	Loneliness reduced OCB via decreased engagement; stronger effect on female employees.
8	Ahsan & Anwar ul Haq (2022)	Banking, Pakistan	Organizational support reduced loneliness, enhancing creativity; proactive personality acted as moderator

3.3 Unexpected Findings

Two unexpected findings emerged. First, gender differences were observed, with female employees more negatively affected by workplace loneliness than their male counterparts (Tian et al., 2021). Second, overqualification was found to significantly predict loneliness, suggesting that mismatch between employees' skills and job demands can trigger feelings of isolation (Üstün &

Üstün., 2022). These findings broaden the scope of workplace loneliness research beyond traditional focus areas such as well-being and engagement.

3.4 Synthesis of Results

Overall, the review confirms that workplace loneliness is a multifaceted construct with robust negative consequences for employees and organizations. However, the presence of mediating and moderating mechanisms demonstrates that its impact is not deterministic. Supportive leadership, organizational climate, and individual resilience can substantially buffer or redirect its effects. At the same time, gaps remain in exploring contextual variations particularly in collectivist cultures such as Indonesia where relational norms differ significantly from Western contexts.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic review confirm that workplace loneliness exerts significant negative consequences on both employees and organizations, while also revealing protective mechanisms that can buffer its impact. This duality highlights workplace loneliness not as an unavoidable outcome of organizational life but rather as a dynamic phenomenon shaped by contextual and individual factors. First, the consistent evidence that workplace loneliness predicts reduced well-being, work engagement, and organizational commitment supports prior theoretical assumptions rooted in the need-to-belong framework (Baumeister & Leary., 1995). When interpersonal needs are unmet, employees disengage, leading to lower satisfaction and organizational loyalty. These findings reinforce earlier studies that established loneliness as a critical psychosocial risk factor at work (Hodgins et al., 2023).

Second, several included studies identified moderating and mediating mechanisms that provide practical pathways for intervention. For example, leader member exchange and coworker exchange buffered the negative effects of loneliness (Jung et al., 2021), consistent with social exchange theory (Blau., 1964). Similarly, empathic communication served as a mediating factor linking servant leadership to reduced loneliness (Jin & Ikeda., 2024). These findings suggest that relational resources within organizations can effectively mitigate loneliness, supporting prior arguments that supportive leadership and interpersonal quality are central to organizational resilience (Dirks & Ferrin., 2002).

Third, unexpected findings broadened the scope of workplace loneliness research. Gender differences, where women reported stronger negative effects, suggest that social roles and expectations influence how loneliness is experienced (Tian et al., 2021). This aligns with prior research indicating that women may rely more heavily on social bonds in professional contexts (Belle., 1991). Moreover, the association between perceived overqualification and loneliness Üstün & Üstün., (2022) extends the discourse by linking structural job-person mismatches with relational isolation, echoing theories of person–job fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

Fourth, the protective role of proactive personality and resilience (Ahsan & Anwar ul Haq., 2022) resonates with the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll., 1989). Employees with higher internal resources are better positioned to cope with the psychological strain of loneliness. This indicates that interventions should not only target organizational structures but also enhance individual coping capacities. From a theoretical standpoint, these findings contribute to integrating diverse perspectives social exchange theory, COR theory, and need-to-belong frameworks into a more comprehensive understanding of workplace loneliness. This review underscores that loneliness is not merely an individual deficiency but an interactional outcome shaped by both organizational design and personal characteristics.

From a practical perspective, organizations should prioritize strategies that foster high-quality relationships, such as mentorship programs, peer-support initiatives, and leadership training focused on empathy. Moreover, HR practices that address overqualification—such as skill development programs and job redesign—may indirectly reduce workplace loneliness. Special

attention should also be paid to gender dynamics, ensuring inclusive practices that address differential experiences of loneliness across employee groups. The strength of this review lies in its systematic and transparent methodology, which synthesized recent high-quality studies from 2020–2024. By focusing exclusively on Scopus-indexed journals, the study ensures methodological rigor and academic credibility. Furthermore, the integration of diverse contexts—across industries and cultures—enriches the generalizability of the findings.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the review was limited to open-access articles, potentially excluding relevant studies behind paywalls. Second, the reliance on quantitative survey-based research in most included studies restricts the depth of understanding regarding employees' subjective experiences of loneliness. Third, most studies were conducted outside of Indonesia, limiting direct applicability to local cultural and organizational contexts.

Despite these limitations, the review provides valuable contributions by synthesizing emerging patterns, identifying protective mechanisms, and suggesting future research directions. Specifically, further studies should investigate workplace loneliness in collectivist cultural settings, employ longitudinal designs to establish causality, and incorporate qualitative methods to capture lived experiences. In conclusion, the findings not only corroborate prior evidence on the detrimental effects of workplace loneliness but also expand current understanding by identifying novel antecedents and protective mechanisms. By acknowledging both risks and resources, this review offers a more balanced and actionable framework for scholars and practitioners seeking to address workplace loneliness in contemporary organizations.

5. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review highlights that workplace loneliness consistently exerts detrimental effects on employee outcomes, including reduced well-being, job satisfaction, work engagement, and organizational commitment. At the same time, the findings emphasize the significance of protective mechanisms such as leader–member exchange, coworker support, empathic leadership, resilience, and proactive personality in mitigating these negative impacts. By synthesizing evidence from eight empirical studies published between 2020 and 2024 in Scopus-indexed journals, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of workplace loneliness as a multifaceted construct shaped by both organizational and individual factors.

Despite its contributions, this review acknowledges several limitations. The reliance on open-access articles may have excluded relevant studies, and the predominance of quantitative survey designs limited the depth of insights into employees' lived experiences. Furthermore, the scarcity of research conducted in collectivist contexts, including Indonesia, constrains the generalizability of findings across cultures. Future research should therefore adopt longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to strengthen causal inferences, while also expanding investigations into diverse cultural and industrial settings. Addressing these gaps will not only enrich theoretical development but also inform practical strategies for creating inclusive and supportive workplaces.

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