

## **The Influence Of Social Self-Efficacy And Learned Resourcefulness On Loneliness**

Atilgan Erozkkan and Sabahattin Deniz<sup>8</sup>

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there are significant relationships among social self-efficacy, learned resourcefulness and loneliness. Descriptive method was used in this study. The study group is composed of 473 (247 females, 226 males) randomly selected high school students studying in different high schools in Mugla, Turkey. The data collection tools used in this study included the Social Self-Efficacy Expectation Scale for Adolescents (Bilgin, 1999), Rosenbaum's Learned Resourcefulness Scale (Rosenbaum, 1980) and University of California Los Angeles Loneliness Scale-R (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980). Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis were employed. Social self-efficacy and learned resourcefulness were found to be significantly correlated to loneliness. A significant relationship was also found between social self-efficacy and learned resourcefulness. A significant effect of social self-efficacy and learned resourcefulness on loneliness was detected.

**Keywords:** adolescents, learned resourcefulness, loneliness, social self-efficacy

### **Introduction**

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<sup>8</sup> Atilgan Erozkkan, and Sabahattin Deniz, PhD, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, Mugla University, Campus Mugla, Turkey.

Please correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Atilgan Erozkkan, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education Sciences (Counseling and Guidance), Mugla University, Campus Mugla, Turkey. Phone: +90 252 211 1825-1832; Fax: +90 252 223 8491; Email: [erzkan@yahoo.com](mailto:erzkan@yahoo.com)

Social self-efficacy is a specific application of self-efficacy theory. Perceived self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1997; Wood & Olivier, 2004). Perceived social self-efficacy is an individual's confidence in his/her ability to engage in the social interactional tasks necessary to initiate and maintain interpersonal relationships (Smith & Betz, 2000). This includes behaviors such as negotiating interpersonal conflict, meeting new people, displaying assertiveness in social situations, cultivating romantic relationships, developing friendships, and interacting in group settings. Sherer *et al.* (1982) defines social self-efficacy as personal efficacy expectancies in social situations. According to Gecas (1989) social self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs that they are capable of initiating social contact and developing new friendships.

Interpersonal competence is a significant element of personal success. In social situations, individuals have varying perceptions of their ability to successfully interact with others. In regards to social interactions, Bandura (1986) postulated that it is not an individual's behavior that makes him or her effective. Instead, it is his or her self-belief about their ability to perform the necessary social interactions that ultimately prevent or allow the behavior. In other words, their self-efficacy belief reflect their level of social confidence. In contrast, those with low social self-efficacy may be more inclined to avoid certain types of interactions because they are viewed as threats. Social self-efficacy has been widely applied to psychological adjustment and mental health, with relationships being present with self-esteem, learned resourcefulness, social anxiety, loneliness, and depressive symptomatology (Smith & Betz, 2000, 2002).

Studies have found a significant positive relationship between learned resourcefulness and self-efficacy (Lewinsohn & Alexander, 1990; Rosenbaum & Ben-Ari Simira, 1986). Learned resourcefulness has been defined as an acquired repertoire of behaviors and skills (mostly cognitive) by which a person self-regulates internal responses (such as emotions and cognitions) that interferes with the smooth execution of a target behavior (Rosenbaum & Jaffe, 1983). Learned resourcefulness is a repertoire of well-learned behaviors and cognitive skills that individuals acquire throughout their lives to cope effectively with stressful life events and to successfully execute self-control behaviors (Rosenbaum, 1983, 1990).

Learned resourcefulness integrates concepts from several self-regulation models and is unique in that it is a cognitive-behavioural repertoire that corresponds not to change strategies

per se, but rather to one's ability to access and apply these strategies in an appropriate manner. Learned resourcefulness does not influence an individual's perceived stress level, but it does influence an individual's self-efficacy expectancy (Rosenbaum, 1990). The concept of self-efficacy expectancy refers to a person's beliefs about whether he or she can cope with a situation effectively (Bandura, 1977). According to Rosenbaum (1983, 1990), learned resourcefulness is acquired through experience, modeling, and formal or informal instruction throughout life in one's environment and encompasses the ability to engage in positive thinking, to solve problems, and to be confident in one's ability to deal with adversity. Rosenbaum (1990, 2000) believes that all human behavior is goal-directed, and that individuals engage in self-control behavior when disruptions arise. Individuals' general repertoire of learned resourcefulness skills is a key component of his theory on successful goal attainment.

Highly resourceful people more adept at are: (a) using cognitions to control their emotions and physiological responses; (b) applying effective problem-solving strategies; (c) postponing the need for instant gratification; and, are more (d) convinced of their abilities to self-regulate (i.e. perceived self-efficacy for coping involves belief in the effectiveness of one's own coping skills when faced with stressful situations) (Rosenbaum & Ben-Ari, 1985).

Results of more recent studies carried out with adolescents also indicated that high resourcefulness was related to fewer depressive symptoms (Huang, Sousa, Tu, & Hwang, 2005), better coping with life stressors (Antonovsky, 1990), better engagement in academic self-control behaviors (Kenneth & Keefer, 2006), better ability to deal effectively with academic stress (Akgun & Ciarrochi, 2003). All these studies suggested that high-resourceful adolescents, as compared to low-resourceful adolescents, are better at dealing with challenging or threatening situations by using a broader range of coping skills. According to McWhirter (1997) learned resourcefulness has been related to loneliness.

Loneliness is most commonly defined as an unpleasant experience which emerges when an individual perceives deficiency in the quality and quantity of his or her social relationships. In other words, loneliness is the subjective discrepancy between one's actual and aspired level of social relationships (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). Loneliness, has also been defined as the perceived lack of a desired amount or quality of social interaction, has been identified as a negative correlate of social confidence (Cheng & Furnham, 2002; Ponzetti, 1990).

If the need to belong is not satisfied, negative feelings are generated, including loneliness and social isolation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bester & Budhal, 2001). Weiss (1973) distinguishes emotional loneliness and social loneliness. Loneliness results from the absence of either intimate personal ties or social ties and social integration of a less intimate kind. Emotional loneliness results from the loss of or the lack of a truly intimate tie such as that with a spouse, lover, parent, or child. It is characterized by anxiety and apprehension. Social loneliness is a lack of an engaging social network with peers who share or partly share one's concerns or view of the world. Osterman (2001) remarks that being rejected, excluded or ignored often leads to intense negative feelings of anxiety, depression, grief, and loneliness. De Jong-Gierveld (1987) states that the lonely person faces an unpleasant or inadmissible lack of required social relationships.

Loneliness has generally been associated with negative feelings about interpersonal relationships. Lonely people have been judged to be less interpersonally competent than people who are not lonely (Spitzberg & Canary, 1985), and research has consistently shown a negative correlation between social skills and loneliness (DiTommaso, Brennen-McNulty, Ross, & Burgess, 2003; Riggio, 1986; Riggio, Waring, & Throckmorton, 1993; Segrin, 1993). The relationship between social self-efficacy and psychological adjustment has implications for the treatment of mental health issues because it suggests that an increase in social self-efficacy can increase levels of self-esteem and reduce levels of depression and loneliness (Betz & Schifano, 2000).

Although loneliness may be experienced in any period of life, adolescents are more susceptible to loneliness (Brennan, 1982). Among adolescents and adults, lower social self-efficacy or social competence has emerged as a risk factor for depressive symptoms, social phobias, low self-esteem, and loneliness (Bell-Dolan, Reaven, & Peterson, 1993; Jenkins, Goodness, & Buhrmester, 2002; Muris, 2002; Riggio, Throckmorton, & DePaola, 1990). In summary, the aim of the current study was to investigate whether there are significant relationships among social self-efficacy, learned resourcefulness, and loneliness in adolescents.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

This study was a descriptive research aiming to describe social self-efficacy and learned resourcefulness in relation to loneliness in adolescents. Participants in the study comprise the students in 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th classes of state schools in Mugla, Turkey. Using random

sampling method, 4 schools were selected for the study and 473 students (247 females and 226 males;  $M=16.45$  years,  $SD=1.35$ ), were chosen randomly from these schools.

## **Instruments**

### **Social Self-Efficacy Expectation Scale for Adolescents (SSES-A)**

This scale, developed by Bilgin (1999), was used to measure adolescents' level of social self-efficacy expectancy. It is a five-point Likert scale consisting of 40 statements. The participants indicated their responses as Always, Usually, Often, Sometimes, Never (For example: "I can help my friends to prepare their assignments"). For the convergent validity of the SSES-A, the correlation between SSES-A and the Self-Acceptance Inventory (SAI; Temuge, 1987) was .18, the Offer Identity Image scale (Inanc, 1988) was .51, the Inventory of Parent Attachment was .40, and the Inventory of Peer Attachment was .44 (Akkapulu, 2005; Bilgin, 1999). The factor analysis revealed that the total factor load of 40 items ranged from .31 to .70, based on 5 factors (Bilgin, 1999). In two different studies, as a result of using the split-half method, the reliability coefficients were .86, and .90. The internal consistency coefficients for the whole scale were .93, and .82 regarding the Cronbach alpha equivalence. The item-total score correlations of the scale ranged from .43 to .56, and .23 and .55 (Akkapulu, 2005; Bilgin, 1999). In this study, Cronbach's alpha for the scale was calculated .89.

### **Rosenbaum's Learned Resourcefulness Scale (RLRS)**

The scale developed by Rosenbaum (1980) aims to measure to what extent an individual can make use of cognitive strategies when s/he comes across a stressful situation and to measure self-control skills. Composed of 36 items, the scale is scored using a 5-point Likert scale to generate a score between 0 and 180. The highest scores taken from the scale means that the adolescent has good self-control skills (e.g., "I can't stand thinking about the mistakes I have made before") (Savasir & Sahin, 1997). The test-retest correlation over 4 weeks indicates that scale scores are stable (.86; Rosenbaum, 1980). Alpha coefficients between .78 and .84 have been reported, indicating satisfactory internal consistency (Rosenbaum, 1980). Construct validity of the scale also has been supported through correlations with other measures, although correlation values were not reported (Redden, Tucker, & Young, 1983; Rosenbaum & Rolnick, 1983). Studies conducted in Turkey revealed that Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was .78. Correlations between items were in the range of .11 and .51 and all

correlations were significant. Furthermore, the study on the criterion-related validity of the scale found a significant relation (-.29) between the scale and Rotter's Internal/External Locus of Control Scale (Dag, 1991). In this study, Cronbach's alpha for the scale was calculated .83.

### **University of California Los Angeles Loneliness Scale (UCLA-R)**

The UCLA-R Loneliness Scale developed by Russell, Peplau, and Ferguson (1978), revised by Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona (1980), and adapted to Turkish participants by Demir (1990) was used to measure the loneliness levels of students. The scale consists of 20 items measured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*often*). Examples of items include "I am no longer close to anyone" and "I lack companionship". The scale has high internal consistency with an alpha coefficient of .94. All items on the scale have an inter-item correlation above .50 (Russell, 1982). Criterion-related validity was reported at  $r = .74$  (Solano, 1980) and  $r = .72$  (Ellison & Paloutzian, 1979) in comparison with other loneliness measures, as well as correlation coefficients of  $r = .72$  and  $r = .79$  with self-reported statements of loneliness for a nonstudent population (Russell, 1982). Discriminant validity is also supported (Russell, 1982; Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980). Factor analyses of the scale (Austin, 1983; Hojat, 1982; McWhirter, 1990) suggest the presence of distinct subscales relevant to intimate and social dimensions of loneliness. The parallel form validity of the scale was tested with the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979) and the correlation coefficient was found to be .77 (Demir, 1990). In this study, Cronbach's alpha for the scale was calculated .90.

### **Procedure**

The schools in the study were determined from the high schools in Mugla, Turkey. One class was randomly selected from each grade level in these high schools and the volunteer students in these classes formed the study group of this study. Self-report measures were administered to students in the classroom environment by researcher. Participation was voluntary and prior to completing the measures, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Students were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Instruments took approximately 40 min to complete.

### **Results**

In this study, the analysis of relationships among social self-efficacy, learned resourcefulness, and loneliness was performed by Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. The data were investigated from the point of erroneous or

missing values, outlier values, and multicollinearity in data analysis. The values considered to be entered erroneously were corrected in the erroneous values analysis. In the missing values analysis, randomly remaining very few blank items were assigned values by Expectation-Maximization algorithm. In the outlier analysis, 19 observations, which have Mahalanobis (1936) distance value greater than the  $\chi^2_{12;.001}=32.90$  table value, were excluded from the data set. The low level bivariate correlation values show that there is no multicollinearity among the independent variables. It has been seen that Variance Inflation Factor value is less than 5, the tolerance value is greater than .20, the condition index is less than 30, and consequently 473 observations remain in the data set. Results are given below.

### **Correlations among Social Self-Efficacy, Learned Resourcefulness, and Loneliness**

The relationship among social self-efficacy, learned resourcefulness, and loneliness level of high schools students was tested by using Pearson's correlation analysis techniques and results are given in Table 1.

**Table 1** Correlations among Social Self-Efficacy, Learned Resourcefulness, and Loneliness

	Social self-efficacy	Learned resourcefulness
Loneliness	-.45**	-.40**
Social self-fficacy	-	.53**

\*\* $p < .01$ 

As shown in Table 1, there are significant negative relationship between loneliness and social self-efficacy ( $r = -.45, p < .01$ ); loneliness and learned resourcefulness ( $r = -.40, p < .01$ ). In addition, there is significant positive relationship between social self-efficacy and learned resourcefulness ( $r = .53, p < .01$ ).

### The Prediction of Loneliness by Social Self-Efficacy and Learned Resourcefulness

A multiple regression analysis was performed to predict loneliness by social self-efficacy and learned resourcefulness and the results are given in Table 2.

**Table 2** Prediction of Loneliness by Social Self-Efficacy and Learned Resourcefulness

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>	<i>t</i>
First Block				
Social self-efficacy	.54	0.291	35.932***	-4.689***
Second Block				
Learned resourcefulness	.49	0.240	31.344***	-4.297***

\*\*\* $p < .001$ 

Table 2 shows that loneliness is significantly predicted by social self-efficacy ( $R = .54, R^2 = .29, F = 35.932, p < .001$ ) and learned resourcefulness ( $R = .49, R^2 = .24, F = 31.344, p < .001$ ). Social self-efficacy and learned resourcefulness explained 29.1% and 24% of the total variance in loneliness respectively. According to results of a *t* test, it was found that social self-efficacy

( $t=-4.689$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and learned resourcefulness ( $t=-4.297$ ,  $p<.001$ ) were significant predictors of loneliness.

### **Discussion**

Results of the study indicated that there was a negative relationship between loneliness and social self-efficacy, and loneliness and learned resourcefulness; while there was a positive relationship between social self-efficacy and learned resourcefulness. These results indicated that effective communication skills, such as cognitive, affective, and behavioral communication skills decreased, social self-efficacy decreased as well. And effective problem-solving skills and coping increased, social self-efficacy increased as well. It can be concluded from the research findings that adolescents' poor communication skills may be an antecedent to lower social self-efficacy expectancy; effective problem-solving skills and coping may be an antecedent to higher social self-efficacy expectancy.

Personal beliefs both determine and mediate the social systems. Those students with lower social self-efficacy are less likely to interact even if they know how to do so because they do not believe that they can employ the skills they possess (Hill, 1989). Social self-efficacy is a key in establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial friendships which help with the transition through the difficulties of adolescence (Connolly, 1989; Leary & Atherton, 1986). Dussault and Deaudeilin (2001) found a negative correlation between self-efficacy and loneliness. Galanaki and Kalantzi-Azizi (1999) reported that children with lower levels of social self-efficacy had significantly higher levels of loneliness. It can be concluded that social self-perceptions may influence interaction frequency and other social behaviors. Connolly (1989) suggested that adolescents who report more frequent social contact were more socially competent and displayed a greater sense of social self-efficacy. On the other hand, students who spent more time alone had lower social self-efficacy. Pooput (1994) found that social self-efficacy had a significant negative relationship to loneliness and depression. As further support for these findings, Cheng and Furnham (2002) reported moderate, negative correlations between a general confidence and loneliness. To further support the predictive relationship between self-efficacy and loneliness, these authors tested a path model that also included personality, social, and academic variables. Even with the inclusion of these other variables, self-confidence uniquely predicted loneliness. These findings suggest that higher levels of self-efficacy or self-

confidence may protect against loneliness. In light of these findings, social self-efficacy appears to be significantly related to and a possible predictor of loneliness.

As a cognitive construct, learned resourcefulness has been studied in conjunction with a variety of other variables, but the literature provides no data on the relationship between this variable and loneliness. This is especially pertinent because loneliness emerges not only from the nature of the social milieu but also from the lonely person's perception, evaluation, and internal and external responses to their interpersonal reality (Cuffel & Akamatsu, 1989; Jones, 1982). Because the cognitive skills associated with learned resourcefulness may predict and mediate the degree as well as the type of loneliness that people experience, clarifying this relationship could be important for identifying appropriate prevention and counseling interventions (McWhirter, 1997). According to Rosenbaum (1990) high learned resourcefulness may help individuals regulate the disruptive effects of negative events such as loneliness, depression and anxiety, negative cognition, phobic reactions, and physical pain.

McWhirter (1997) reported that learned resourcefulness is negatively correlated with loneliness. According to McWhirter it could be that the skills of delaying gratification, use of problem-solving strategies, and belief in one's ability to regulate internal events may directly affect activities that help with loneliness and with getting to know a variety of other people. On the other hand, the cognitive skills of learned resourcefulness may help socially lonely people deal with their negative internal messages more effectively so that it is not as bothersome to them; thus, they can more effectively avoid the negative effects of their social isolation. Many rapid psychosocial changes that occur in adolescence, separation from parents, efforts to form an identity and increasing need for intimacy are reported as developmental factors which contribute to loneliness in adolescents (Brennan, 1982; Mijuskovic, 1986). Screening for loneliness in adolescents and preventing the negative consequences of loneliness are very important at school. Many researchers have used Rosenbaum's learned resourcefulness theory (1980) as a framework for studying behavioral changes (Jarrett, Giles, Gullion, & Rush, 1991; Karoly & Lecci, 1993).

Learned resourcefulness is related to self-efficacy (Rosenbaum, 1980). Rosenbaum and Ben-Ari Simira (1986) reported that high resourcefulness was positively correlated with self-efficacy expectancy. Akgun (2004) and Rosenbaum (1990) stated that individuals with learned resourcefulness perceive themselves as more efficient people. Gintner, West, and Zarski (1989) suggested that learned resourcefulness is an adaptive characteristic among individuals, in which

people are better able to control the internal demands of emotions, sensations, and cognitions, in order to effectively and efficiently carry out goal-oriented tasks. Vandeleur, Ankiewicz, de Swardt, & Gross (2001) emphasized that positive outcomes of high resourcefulness may include the initiation of more efficacious coping strategies. According to Akkapulu (2005) learned resourcefulness was significant predictor of the social self-efficacy. The learned resourcefulness skill set, as defined by Rosenbaum (1990), falls along three dimensions: reformative self-control, redressive self-control, and perceived self-efficacy for coping. On the basis of Rosenbaum's (1980) theory of learned resourcefulness, it was expected that highly resourceful people would perceive themselves to be more capable of coping with stressful situations. Results of this study provided support for this hypothesis, revealing a significant positive relationship between social self-efficacy and learned resourcefulness. The findings here are also consistent with previous research, which shows that learned resourcefulness can be helpful in dealing with a variety of issues, such as managing physical discomfort, pain, and depression (Benedito & Botella, 1991; Burns *et al.*, 1994; Rosenbaum, 1990).

Some limitations of the present study should be noted. First, the study group was composed of adolescents living in one city in Turkey, which limits the generalizability of the study findings. For this reason, studies which will examine the relationships between social self-efficacy, learned resourcefulness, and loneliness in adolescents in different cultures and populations may help generalize the findings of this study. Further research is needed with larger random samples of adolescents from diverse backgrounds. Second, because of this study's cross-sectional design, no direct causal relationships can be inferred among social self-efficacy, learned resourcefulness, and loneliness. Future longitudinal or experimental studies will facilitate more causal evaluations. Longitudinal studies are also warranted to determine whether the factors involved in adolescent loneliness change over time. Third, the present study was limited to self-report data, which raises the potential problem of mono-method bias. Self-report data are based on one's own subjective experience, which may differ from other methods of assessment such as observational data, reports from other individuals such as family members or close friends. Despite these limitations, this study was important and warrants further consideration in the design of future studies.

As for future research, it is important that researchers and practitioners move forward together to achieve a better understanding of the factors that contribute to loneliness among

adolescents with lower levels of social self-efficacy and low learned resourcefulness, since decrease in the level of loneliness might reduce interpersonal difficulties, in addition to improving the individual's general health and quality of life.

It may be that improving social self-efficacy will help alleviate suffering from loneliness, and that increasing the cognitive skills associated with learned resourcefulness may be an effective intervention for adolescents suffering from loneliness. The interventions related to building learned resourcefulness, such as developing better coping strategies, learning positive attributions about the causes and consequences of loneliness, and improving internal mechanisms for dealing with the stress of unwanted isolation, may be helpful for mediating the negative effects of loneliness among adolescents. According to Beck, Rush, Shaw, and Emery (1979), cognitive therapy is an effective approach to treatment; adolescents can be encouraged to modify dysfunctional beliefs and self-defeating thought patterns. Interventions should also foster social support as well as feelings of self-confidence and competency in social interaction and problem solving. Stokes (1985) contends that adolescents with a supportive network tend to be less lonely, because such networks provide a sense of community and belonging. Counselors, educators, and health care professionals should collaborate to design programs on interpersonal problem solving and social skills training to help adolescents learn how to obtain support from one another and family members.

Stressors such as lower levels of social self-efficacy, low learned resourcefulness, poor peer relationships, and negative feelings about interpersonal relationships are important factors in the development of loneliness in adolescents. Also, learned resourcefulness appears to be a coping strategy that prevents loneliness. Future studies must examine other factors such as family relationships, stressful life events, and social support. Learned resourcefulness has been found to be useful in adult studies, but less is known about its relation to loneliness in adolescents. Investigations of learned resourcefulness among adolescents in Turkey are needed.

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