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# Emotional Expressivity, Loneliness and Hopelessness Relationship in Adolescents

Zeynep AKKUŞ ÇUTUK<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Trakya University, Department of Educational Sciences, Turkey  0000-0001-8364-4431

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## ABSTRACT

In this study, the model developed to investigate the relationship between emotional expressivity, loneliness and hopelessness was tested in adolescents. The sample of this study consisted of 288 high school students, 180 of whom were women and 108 of whom were men. Data were obtained using the Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (BEQ), The Short-form of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (ULS-8) and the Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the data. The findings obtained in this study showed that there was a negative and meaningful relationship between emotional expression and loneliness and hopelessness in adolescents, emotional expression predicted loneliness and hopelessness, and there was a positive and meaningful relationship between loneliness and hopelessness and loneliness predicts hopelessness.

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## 1. Introduction

Emotional expressivity is generally defined as various behavioral changes (e.g., facial expression and posture), such as laughter, pouting, crying or slamming doors (Gross & John, 1995). This definition emphasizes observable behavioral responses, and the level of emotional expression is determined by the degree of behavioral impulses of individuals (Gross & John, 1995).

Studies show the positive and protective structure of the emotional expression and the harmful effects of lack or suppression of emotional expression (Lavee & Adital, 2004). Emotional suppression is considered to be a negative condition given that it harms the ability of physical and psychological health and cognitive process (Mendes, Reis, Seery, & Blascovich, 2003). Emotional suppression may negatively affect mental health (Patel & Patel, 2019). Emotional suppression prevents the expression of real emotions felt. This situation may lead to a feeling of incompatibility between emotions and behaviors and may cause the person to evaluate their emotions in negative terms. Given that the individual is not open about his/her emotions results in a reduced ability to improve his/her mental state and a weak perception of his/her ability to regulate negative emotions (Gross & John, 2003). Suppression can be a risk factor for social problems, as it prevents the natural expression of emotions from building relationships (Tickle-Degnan & Rosenthal, 1990; Butler et al., 2003). In their study, their findings have shown that emotional suppression reduces communication, closeness, prevents the establishment of relationships and increases stress levels. Emotional suppression causes individuals to constantly think about the situation that reveals the current emotion, increasing the risk of developing negative mood, negative cognitive style and depression symptoms (Nolen-Hoeksema, Morrow, & Fredricson, 1993).

Corresponding author's address: Trakya University, Department of Educational Sciences, Edirne, Turkey

e-mail: [zeynepdr1001@hotmail.com](mailto:zeynepdr1001@hotmail.com)

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Emotional expressivity plays an important role in physical (Fernandez-Ballesteros et al., 1998), psychological well-being (Buck, Goldman, Easton, & Smith, 1998), social relations (Levine & Feldman, 1997) and personality (Abe & Izard, 1999). Individuals with high emotional expression level express their positive and negative emotions clearly (Gross & John, 1995). In a study conducted by Burgin and et al., (2012), individuals with high emotional expression had higher subjective well-being and life satisfaction, be less alone, and had a better social relationship with others.

Loneliness is a complex concept that includes psychological and social aspects (Holmen, Ericsson, & Winblad, 2000). According to Perlman and Peplau (1981), loneliness is an unpleasant feeling that occurs when one's social networks are quantitatively or qualitatively lacking. According to the definition in question, loneliness is caused by the deficiencies in the social relations of the person, it is a subjective phenomenon and an undesired and distressing experience. According to Gierveld (1998), loneliness is an emotion experienced by the individual when his/her existing relationships are less than desired or accepted, or when he/she cannot achieve the desired intimacy in interpersonal relationships.

Although loneliness is a condition that can be felt in every period of life, this feeling is more experienced and quite common during adolescence. Studies showed that 21% to 70% of adolescents felt least sometimes alone (Qualter et al., 2015; Lodder et al., 2016). In this period, the peer environment is becoming more and more important, and establishing close and meaningful friendship relationships constitutes the important developmental task of the adolescent (Meeus & Deković, 1995; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). The biggest supporter of an individual in adolescence are friends with similar problems. In this period, the feeling of belonging to a group and having a voice in that group is a significant need. In adolescence, although the individual wants to be alone, s/he actually wants to be accepted by her/his peers. For this reason, adolescents who do not join a group, are excluded or do not have the ability to make friends, face a sense of loneliness in this period (Eni, 2017, p. 25). Loneliness is a risk factor for many physical and mental illnesses, such as depression, alcoholism, suicidal thoughts, aggressive behavior, social anxiety, obesity and cardiovascular diseases (Cacioppo et al., 2015). In adolescents who have to establish a close relationship in terms of their development, such negativities may be experienced more intensely as a result of loneliness (Çapan & Sarıçalı, 2016: 58). Loneliness is often reinforced with a feeling of hopelessness and increases feelings of worthlessness, helplessness, unhappiness, indecision, failure to act, not to continue their work and guilt (Şahin, 2015).

Hopelessness is a negative effect that occurs at every moment of life, as a result of believing that nothing will be good, that problems will not be solved, seeing the future in the dark, not expecting nothing from the life, thinking that goals will not be reached (Beck, Weissman, Lester, & Trekles, 1974). Synder, Wroblewski, Parenteau, and Berg (2004) described hopelessness as a lack of hopeful thought or lack of goal, path or motivation. Desperate people show some common features cognitively. These people think that bad events will not be prevented and they have no control over these events. Because of their negative lives, they also have negative thoughts about themselves. They may think that they are worthless when they fail an exam. They also believe that a bad event will bring another bad event. For example, they may think that they will never graduate when they fail an exam (Metalsky & Joiner, 1992).

Being able to control changes between feelings of hope and hopelessness is extremely critical for psychological and mental development in adolescents. While adolescents can be hopeful when they master their personality, they become hopeless in case of failure. Desperate adolescents start to focus on the day without expectation of the future, they feel weak, isolated and have no sense of belonging (Vasta, 2015). Kashani, Suarez, Allan, & Reid (1997) stated that adolescents with a high hopelessness score harm themselves and other people, behave socially inappropriately, express their anger openly and aggressively by acting more impulsively, express a series of negative emotions, such as shame, fear, guilt and enmity, and they tend to experience no positive feelings such as interest and joy.

It has been found that in high school student adolescents, the level of hopelessness decreases as the level of emotional expression and sub-dimension positive expression increases (Çelik, 2015). Similar to hopelessness, a negative relationship was found between loneliness and emotional expression (Akın, 2012). In studies that examine the relationships between emotional intelligence and loneliness, it is reported that there is a negative relationship between the two cases and loneliness level decreases as the level of emotional intelligence increases (Mercan, Demirci, Özler, & Oyur, 2015; Lee & Ko, 2018). However, it has been determined that

loneliness and hopelessness levels increase and decrease together and there is a positive relationship between them (Chang, Sanna, Hirsch, & Jeglic, 2010; Girgin, 2009; Kırımoğlu, Filazoğlu Çokluk, & Yıldırım, 2010). Emotional expressivity, loneliness and hopelessness concepts are related in adolescents, but it is believed that a study that is handled together has not been examined enough especially in our country. In this context, the present study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. Is there a significant relationship between emotional expressivity, loneliness and hopelessness in adolescents?
2. Does emotional expressivity predict loneliness and hopelessness?
3. Is there a significant relationship between loneliness and hopelessness in adolescents?
4. Does Loneliness predict hopelessness?

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research Sample**

The study group of this research consisted of 288 high school students, 180 of whom were women and 108 were men, who were selected through convenience sampling. Students were between the ages of 14-19 and their average age was 15.27.

### **2.2. Data Collection Tools**

#### **2.2.1. Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (BEQ)**

BEQ, developed by Gross & John, (1995), was adapted to Turkish by Akın (2010). BEQ consists of 16 items and 3 sub-dimensions (positive expressivity, negative expressivity, and impulse strength). The highest score that can be obtained from BEQ is 112 and the lowest score is 16. The high scores of the individual from each subscale indicate that the individual has the characteristics evaluated by the relevant subscale. In addition, the total emotional expression score is obtained. It was seen that the internal consistency reliability coefficient of BEQ's Cronbach Alpha ranged between .74 and .84 and the test-retest reliability coefficient ranged between .67 and .81. As a result of the analyzes carried out within the scope of this research, the total and sub-dimensions of BEQ's Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient ranged between .71 and .83.

#### **2.2.2. The Short-form of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (ULS-8)**

The adaptation study of ULS-8, developed by Hays & DiMatteo (1987), to Turkish was addressed by Yıldız and Duy (2014). The lowest score to be received from ULS-8, which consists of 7 items, is 7 and the highest score is 28. The low scores indicate the low level of loneliness, while the increase in scores indicates that the intensity of loneliness increases. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of ULS-8 was .74 and test-retest reliability was .84. In this study, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of ULS-8 was .81.

#### **2.2.3. Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS)**

BHS was developed by Beck et al. (1974). The adaptation study to Turkish was first made by Seber (1991). Then, BHS was applied to a larger sample group by Durak and Palabıyıköğlü (1994), and its validity and reliability study was carried out again. BHS consists of 20 items and three sub-scales (feelings about the future, loss of motivation and expectations). The lowest score to be achieved is 0, the highest score is 20. A high score from the subscales and the whole scale indicates that the level of hopelessness is high. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of BHS was .85. As a result of the analyzes conducted in this research, the total and sub-dimensions of BHS Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranged between .73 and .85.

### **2.3. Statistical Analysis**

Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were performed first. Afterwards, structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed. A SEM is a multivariate statistical method based on the definition of observable and unobservable variables in a causal and relational model based on a specific theory (Byrne, 2010). It is recommended to test the model created by variables assumed to be related to each other in SEM in two stages. First, the measurement model, in other words, confirmatory factor analysis was applied. In this model, it was aimed to investigate the relationships between observed and latent variables. Then, a structural model is

applied in which the relationships between internal and external latent variables are tested (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; James, Mulaik, & Brett, 1982; Kline, 2015; Wetson & Gore, 2006). Since the loneliness variable in this study consists of one dimension, it has been made into two dimensions by using the parcel method. In the mentioned method, the items in the scale were divided into two groups according to the item total correlation values and the total score of both groups was included in the model as the observed variable. The parceling method was used because it contributed to the normal distribution of data and provided better fit values (Bandalos & Finney, 2001). Goodness of fit values were examined to investigate whether the model established in SEM was meaningful or not (Schumacher & Lomax, 2004). In this study,  $\chi^2/df$ , CFI, NFI, GFI, AGFI, SRMR and RMSEA were used as goodness of fit values. It is suggested that the goodness of fit values obtained from the model should be  $\chi^2/df \leq 5$ , CFI and NFI  $\geq .90$ , GFI and AGFI  $\geq .85$ , SRMR and RMSEA  $\leq .10$  (Byrne, 2010; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marcoulides & Schumacher, 2001; Maydeu-Olivares, Shi & Rosseel, 2018; Schermelleh-Engel and Moosbrugger, 2003). In this study, SPSS 21.00 for Windows program was used for descriptive statistics and correlation analysis and IBM SPSS AMOS 22.00 program was used for analysis of SEM model.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation

Before the descriptive statistics were calculated, whether the data obtained from the scales showed normal distribution was examined using skewness and kurtosis. Accordingly, the skewness value of BEQ was  $-.39$ , the kurtosis value was  $-.15$ ; the skewness value of ULS-8 was  $-.82$  and the kurtosis value was  $-.13$ . The findings showed that the skewness value of BHS was  $-.44$  and the kurtosis value was  $-.74$ . Huck (2012) stated that kurtosis and skewness values should be less than  $\pm 1$  in a normal distribution, George and Mallery (2010) are excellent for  $\pm 1$  for skewness and kurtosis, but  $\pm 2$  is acceptable for some psychometric measurements, while some researchers reported that univariate normality would be sufficient to be  $\pm 2$  for skewness and  $\pm 7$  and below for kurtosis (Finney & DiStefano, 2006). Accordingly, the values obtained in the present study indicated that there was no significant problem in normal distribution for all variables. The results of the correlation analysis with the descriptive statistics for the variables are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analyses

	Correlation			Descriptive Statistics		
	1	2	3	Mean (SD)	Skewness	Kurtosis
1. BEQ	-			54.57 (14.12)	-.39	-.15
2. ULS-8	-.25**	-		11.26 (4.56)	.82	.13
3. BHS	-.24**	.34**	-	6.07 (4.37)	-.44	-.74

Note. \*\*  $p < 0.01$

The findings showed that there was a negative and significant relationship between BEQ and ULS-8 ( $r = -.25$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and BHS ( $r = -.24$ ,  $p < .01$ ). A positive and significant relationship was between ULS-8 and BHS ( $r = .34$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

#### 3.2. Structural Equation Modeling

##### 3.2.1. Measurement Model

The measurement model expressed the relevant indicators of latent variables or their relationship with the measured variables. It was recommended to test the measurement model before testing the structural model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Three latent variables were used in the structural equation model testing: emotional expressivity (measured by the BEQ), loneliness (measured by the ULS-8) and hopelessness (measured by the BHS). There were eight observed variables that made up these latent variables. Emotional expressivity latent variable positive expressivity, negative expressivity, and impulse strength; loneliness latent variable loneliness1 and loneliness 2; hopelessness latent variable feelings about the future, loss of motivation and expectations were the observed variables. All the road coefficients were significant and factor loadings varied between  $.62$  and  $.90$ . The measurement model appeared to be well fitted; ( $\chi^2 (11) = 29.02$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.63$ ; CFI =  $.98$ ; NFI =  $.96$ ; GFI =  $.97$ ; AGFI =  $.93$ ; SRMR =  $.046$ ; RMSEA =  $.056$ ).

### 3.2.2. Structural Model

In the second stage of SEM, the structural model developed to determine the relationship between emotional expressivity, loneliness and hopelessness was tested in adolescents. Fit index of the model tested in the research ( $\chi^2(17) = 28.65$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 1.68$ ; CFI = .99; NFI = .97; GFI = .98; AGFI = .95; SRMR = .044; RMSEA = .049) and showed that the structural model had a good fit. As a result of the established model, it was determined that emotional expression negatively affected loneliness ( $\beta = -.27$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and hopelessness ( $\beta = -.26$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), and loneliness positively affected hopelessness ( $\beta = .35$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). When the determination coefficients ( $R^2$ ) in the confirmed model were examined, 5% of the variability in loneliness was explained by the emotional expressivity variable; 20% of despair was explained by loneliness and emotional expressivity variables ( $p < 0.01$ ).

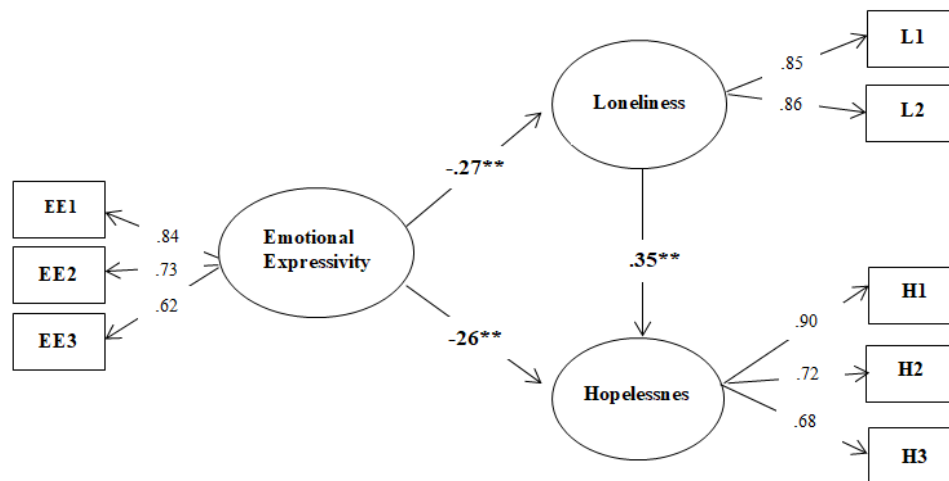


Figure 1. Standardized Values for the Structural Model

Note. \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; EE1 positive expressivity, EE2 negative expressivity, EE3 impulse strength; L1 loneliness parcel1, L2 loneliness parcel2; H1 feelings about the future, H2 loss of motivation, H3 expectations.

### 4. Conclusion, Discussion and Recommendations

In this study, a structural model evaluating the relationship between emotional expressivity, loneliness and hopelessness in adolescents was evaluated. According to the result of the structural model, adolescents have a negative relationship between emotional expression and loneliness and hopelessness and a positive relationship between loneliness and hopelessness. In this regard, it can be said that adolescents with high emotional expression have low levels of loneliness and hopelessness, and an increase in hopelessness as their level of loneliness increases.

Below, the results of the model confirmed in the research are discussed in detail. First, a negative relationship was found between emotional expression and loneliness. It can be seen that this result is consistent with the literature. In a study by conducted Burgin et al. (2012), the findings showed that individuals with high emotional expression had higher subjective well-being and life satisfaction, were less alone and had a better social relationship with others. Similar to this result, there was a negative relationship between emotional expression and loneliness (Akin, 2012). In studies examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and loneliness, it is shown that there is a negative relationship between the two cases and loneliness level decreases as the level of emotional intelligence increases (Merican, Demirci, Özler, & Oyur, 2015; Lee & Ko, 2018; Saklofske, Austin, & Minski, 2003; Özdemir & Tatar, 2019). In a study examining the effect of opening the emotions education on the loneliness level of university students, the loneliness level of the university students participating in this program was lower than the loneliness level of the students who did not participate in this program (Öksüz, 2005). In another study, in which the effect of emotional expression education program on university students' alexithymia and loneliness levels by Koçak, (2005), the findings showed that the levels of alexithymia and loneliness of students participating in emotional expression education group program decreased. Good skills to understand and manage emotions predict a decrease in

loneliness over time, but loneliness also affects a person's ability to understand and manage emotions over time (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009; Wols, Scholte, & Qualter, 2015). Emotional skills can protect against loneliness (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Hawkley, Thisted, & Cacioppo, 2009).

Another result obtained from this study is that there is a negative relationship between emotional expression and hopelessness. This result is consistent with the studies in the related literature. A negative relationship was found between emotional expression and positive expression in high school students and hopelessness, feelings and expectations about the future, and hope levels (Çelik, 2015). It was determined that as emotional intelligence level increased, hopelessness level decreased (Yılmaz, 2019). Young people with high hopelessness tend to express their anger openly and aggressively and display more negative emotions than young people with low hopelessness (Kashani, Suárez, Allan, & Reid, 1997). In addition, it has been found that emotional disturbance predicts hopelessness (Vatan, Lester, & Gunn, 2014).

Another finding obtained from this research is that there is a positive relationship between loneliness and hopelessness and loneliness predicts hopelessness. Many studies have also shown that there is a positive relationship between loneliness and hopelessness levels (Chang, Sanna, Hirsch, & Jeglic, 2010; Girgin, 2009; Kırımoğlu, Filazoğlu Çokluk, & Yıldırım, 2010; Kızılgeçit, 2011; Şahin, 2015; Ruchkin, Eisemann, & Hagglof, 1999; Özkaya, 2017). Hopelessness is a predictor of loneliness and depression (Joiner & Rudd, 1996); it was found that loneliness predicted the possibility of suicide (Batugün, 2005) due to the reasons of experiencing hopelessness. It was concluded that early diagnosis and treatment of loneliness might have the potential to decrease the results on adolescents' hopelessness and emotional health and development (Page, 1991).

This study has some limitations. An SEM was used in this study, which could obtain strong results from quantitative methods. However, due to the nature of the quantitative method and the cross-sectional nature of the sample in this study, the cause-effect link was not established. Thus, longitudinal and experimental studies are needed to fully reveal these causal relationships.

The findings of this study provide significant information about the relationship between emotional expression, loneliness and hopelessness in adolescents. In order for the adolescents to successfully overcome the period they are in, it can be provided to include activities that allow the opening of emotions within the school education programs. Psychoeducation can be given to adolescents who are inadequate and hopeless and feel lonely by their school psychological counselors to improve emotional expression. It is evaluated that the findings of this research can be tested and verified by later researches, recognition of the conditions of loneliness and hopelessness experienced by adolescents during this period, and taking necessary measures may be important for preventive mental health.

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