

A STUDY ON SOCIAL-CONNECTEDNESS IN ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate social-connectedness in adolescents. A total of 300 adolescents (127 males and 173 females) from two high schools in the Yangon Region participated in this study. The descriptive survey research method was applied and quantitative data analysis was executed in this study. As the instrument, the Student Sense of Connectedness Scale (SSCS) questionnaire was used. Adolescents' social-connectedness was significantly different by gender and school. There was no statistically significant difference in the sense of belonging with peers by gender. There was a statistically significant difference in teacher support, fairness and respect and engagement in community by gender at 0.05 level. There was a statistically significant difference in relatedness of self with school and academic engagement by gender at 0.001 level. There was no statistically significant difference in engagement in community and academic engagement by school. There was a statistically significant difference in teacher support, the sense of belongingness with peer and relatedness of self with school by school at 0.01 level. There was statistically significant difference in fairness and respect by school at 0.001 level. It can be concluded that adolescents are close, cared for and connected to others.

Keywords: Connectedness, Social-connectedness, Adolescents

Introduction

Having satisfactory relationships with others is a basic need for most of the people. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), the need to be socially connected to others is “a fundamental human motivation”. Feeling lonely, isolated, unrelated to others, alienated from others, and a lack of belonging are unpleasant experiences for most of the people. Accordingly, they strive to restore relationships, maintain friendships, participate in group activities, and avoid jeopardizing social bonds. This process of striving for connection may have an adverse effect on well-being and mental health of the people (e.g., lack of social connections may cause psychological distress) because the individuals are more likely to experience problems to meet the need to maintain interpersonal relationships and participation in social activities (Satici, Uysal, & Deniz, 2016).

Social-connectedness is a concept which can be defined as the perceptions related to long-term interpersonal relationships and social environment (Lee et al., 2000) and that arise from interpersonal relationships within social networks. Lee and Robbins (2000) considered that social-connectedness can satisfy one's sense of belonging, and it is based on long-lasting interpersonal relationships. Also, Lee and Robbins (1998) described social-connectedness as one's sense of belonging to the social world, including family, friends and colleagues and one's belief of self in relation to others.

Social-connectedness occurs when an individual actively interacts with another person or group, then this interaction increases well-being and may reduce anxiety (Malaquias, Crespo, & Francisco, 2015). On one hand, individuals who are socially connected usually see others as friendly. On the other hand, individuals with low social-connectedness mistrust others and avoid social opportunities (Detrie & Lease, 2007).

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Social-connectedness has multi-dimensions and it comprises engagement, loneliness, affiliation, companionship, and belongingness (Arundell, Salmon, Veitch, & Timperio, 2019) Baumeister and Leary (1995) differentiated social-connectedness from belongingness, and they defined this construct by being a member of a group. Social-connectedness has two main components. The first one is the relation and connection (bond) individuals experience with others. The second one is autonomy that means the degree to which individuals feel socially supported and satisfied (Barber & Schluterman, 2008).

Social-connectedness might have an impact on psychological and individual functioning. Some research has revealed that social-connectedness was related to higher levels of well-being (Griffiths et al., 2007). McLoughlin and colleagues (2019) explained that low social-connectedness may result in depression, anxiety, and stress. Likewise, research has shown people with low connectedness often experience less satisfaction with their social relationships (Satici et al., 2016). They may also have problems with managing their internalizing symptoms (Faro, McKee, Garcia, & O'Leary, 2019). Similarly, Lee and colleagues (2001) found that people with a higher sense of social-connectedness are more active in social life, establish relationships easily, and perceive their environments in a positive manner. Therefore, this study demands researcher to explore social-connectedness of adolescents.

Purpose of the Study

The main aim of the study was to explore social-connectedness of adolescents.

1. To investigate adolescents' social-connectedness by gender and school
2. To explore components of social-connectedness of adolescents
3. To investigate adolescents' social-connectedness sub-scales by gender and school

Definitions of Key Terms

Connectedness. Connectedness is 'the degree to which individuals experience the people and places in their lives as personally meaningful and important'.(Schulze & Naidu,2014)

Social-connectedness. Social-connectedness can be defined as the perceptions related to long-term interpersonal relationships and social environment and that arises from interpersonal relationships with social networks. (Lee et al., 2000)

Adolescents. Defined by the United Nations as those between the ages of 10 and 19, adolescents experience a transition period between childhood and adulthood and with it, significant growth and development (WHO, 2019).

Review of Related Literature

Social-connectedness of Adolescents

Social-connectedness is defined as feelings of belonging and closeness to others, as well as satisfaction with relationships and perceived support and opportunities for self-disclosure of personal information. It comprises different domains (peer, school, family and community/neighborhood) and is a key social determinant of adolescent mental health and well-being. Family connectedness in particular has been found to buffer the negative effects of bullying and to be related to lower risk for suicide-related outcomes and depressive symptoms. The notion of social-connectedness refers to one's ability to feel comfortable, confident and have a sense of belonging

within a larger social context than family or friends (Lee & Robbins, 1995). If a person is struggling to find a sense of connectedness, they may feel that they cannot relate to the people around them, they may struggle to develop relationships or to understand their role in the world, and feel isolated as a result (Lee & Robbins, 1995). These feelings of isolation can then lead to other consequences such as low self-esteem, distancing one's self from society, a lack of trust, and also the absence of a sense of belongingness and feelings of loneliness (Lee & Robbins, 1995). Being socially connected has been found to reduce levels of depression and emotional/ behavioral difficulties (Fraser & Pakenham, 2009).

Research has identified links among aspects of adolescent functioning and connectedness to four particular social contexts: family, school, peers, and neighborhood and community. The importance of examining all four of these ecological environments that influence adolescents' development has been argued by Seidman (1991), and recently reiterated by Urban, Lewin-Bizan, and Lerner (2009). Moreover, ecological approaches acknowledge that adolescents are embedded within multiple social contexts simultaneously and emphasize that these contexts likely work together to influence adolescent health and adjustment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Despite the reality of adolescents experiencing connectedness in multiple social contexts, most of what we know about the relation between connectedness and adolescents' psychological health stems from research that focuses on only one or two of these contexts at a time. Examining the same conditions in multiple contexts enables the investigation of questions such as: "Is connectedness to a particular domain more important than others?"

Libbey, Ireland, and Resnick (2002) conducted one of the few studies to examine all four key social domains (family, friends, school, and neighborhood). In another study, McGraw, Moore, Fuller and Bates (2008) examined connectedness (family, peers, and school) and well-being in a large sample of Australian adolescents. Results indicated that connectedness, across all domains, was inversely related to symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Furthermore, connectedness to peers was a particularly strong predictor of well-being. In this study, the researchers explored components of adolescents' social-connectedness.

Participants of the Study

The participants in this study were selected the Grade Ten students from two Districts in the Yangon Region. The participants were (150) students in B.E.H.S Myoma, Hlegu District and (150) students in B.E.H.S (1) Hlaingtharyar, Insein District. A total of (300) grade ten students participated in this study.

Research Method

In this study, social-connectedness with school community of adolescents in the Yangon Region was examined by using the questionnaires survey method.

Rovia (2002), the Student Sense of Connectedness Scale (SSCS) provided the students' sense of social-connectedness with their school community of adolescents. The Student Sense of Connectedness Scale (SSCS) consisted of six sub scales such as the sense of belonging with peers (5 items), Teacher support (7 items), Sense of fairness and safety at school (5 items), Engagement in community (2 items), Relatedness of self with school (8 items) and Academic engagement (4 items) totally included 31 items. In this study, it was used for Four Point Likert-Scale which were strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

And then, the pilot study was done with a sample of 30 students from BEHS (3) Tharkayta Township on September 2022 to determine the clarity of items words and appropriateness of the items included in the questionnaire. After testing the pilot study, the Cronbach Alpha was conducted by using Statistic Packages for the Social Science (SPSS) to investigate the reliability and validity of the items. In computing, the Cronbach Alpha value was 0.806 for SSCS. So, SSCS has good reliability to use in the research study.

Data Analysis and Findings

Mean Comparison for Social-connectedness in Adolescents

To investigate the total of adolescents' social-connectedness in their school community, descriptive statistic was computed.

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation of Social-connectedness in Adolescents

Variable	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Social-connectedness	300	96.02	12.39	47	143

According to Table 1, it could be concluded that the total mean score of social-connectedness was 96.02 and the standard deviation was 12.39. The maximum and minimum scores of adolescents' social-connectedness were 143 and 47 respectively. So, it can be seen that adolescents' social-connectedness was satisfactory because the mean score (96.02) was higher than the theoretical mean (77.5).

Mean Comparison of Social-connectedness in Adolescents by Gender

In order to examine whether there is a significant difference in social-connectedness in adolescent by gender. Independent sample *t*-test was used and reported in Table 2.

Table 2 Mean Comparison of Social-connectedness in Adolescents by Gender

Variable	Gender	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Social-connectedness	Male	127	93.62	13.32	-2.907**	248	.004
	Female	173	97.78	11.39			

**The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level.

The result in Table 2 pointed that mean scores of female students were higher than the male students in social-connectedness. There was a statistically significant difference in social-connectedness by gender at 0.01 level.

Mean Comparison of Social-connectedness of Adolescents by School

In order to examine whether there is a significant difference in social-connectedness in adolescent by school. Independent sample *t*-test was used and reported in Table 3.

Table 3 Results of Independent Sample *t*-test for Social-connectedness in Adolescents by School

Variable	School	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Social-connectedness	School 1	150	93.46	13.431	-3.610***	287	.000
	School 2	150	98.54	10.727			

***Mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

According to Table 3, mean scores of school 2 were higher than that of school 1 in social-connectedness. There was a statistically significant difference in social-connectedness by school at 0.001 level.

Mean Comparison for Six Sub-scales of Social-connectedness of Adolescents

In order to examine six sub-scales of social-connectedness of adolescents, descriptive statistic was computed.

Table 4 Comparison of Mean Percentage for Six Sub-scales of Social -Connectedness of Adolescents

Subscales of Social-connectedness	No. of Items	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean%
The sense of belonging with peer	5	14.33	2.66	71.65%
Teacher Support	7	23.11	3.41	96.29%
Sense of Fairness and Safety at School	5	14.82	2.88	74.10%
Engagement in Community	2	5.76	2.23	72.00%
Relatedness of Self with School	8	25.32	4.57	79.13%
Academic Engagement	4	12.67	1.97	79.19%

According to Table 4, it could be concluded that the mean percentage of teacher support was the highest among all sub scales of social-connectedness. The mean percentage of the sense of belonging with peers and engagement in the community was the lowest among all sub scales of social-connectedness. The mean percentage of sense of fairness and safety at school, relatedness of self with school and academic engagement were the moderate percentage.

Therefore, the students' perception of teacher support in the classroom was higher than the other factors in their school community. Students who did not have experience acceptance by peers, moreover they had less interest in their school community.

Mean Comparison for Six Sub-scales of Social-connectedness of Adolescents by Gender

To find out for Six Sub-scales of Social-connectedness of Adolescents by gender, the descriptive statistic was computed.

Table 5 Independent Sample *t*-test for Six Sub-scales of Social-connectedness of Adolescents by Gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
The Sense of belonging with Peer	Male	127	14.55	3.40	1.234	298	.218
	Female	173	14.17	1.95			
Teacher Support	Male	127	22.57	3.73	-2.397*	298	.017
	Female	173	23.51	3.10			
Sense of Fairness and Safety at School	Male	127	14.41	3.25	-2.130*	298	.034
	Female	173	15.12	2.54			
Engagement in Community	Male	127	6.11	3.03	2.352*	298	.019
	Female	173	5.50	1.32			
Relatedness of Self with School	Male	127	24.04	4.37	-4.286***	298	.000
	Female	173	26.27	4.50			
Academic Engagement	Male	127	11.94	1.89	-5.789***	298	.000
	Female	173	13.21	1.85			

*Mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

***Mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

According to the results of Table 5, the mean scores of male students were higher than the female students in the sense of belonging with peers and engagement in the community. The mean scores of female students were higher than the male students in teacher support, sense of fairness and safety at school, relatedness of self with school and academic engagement.

There was no a statistically significant difference in the sense of belonging with peer by gender. There was a statistically significant difference in teacher support, sense of fairness and safety at school and engagement in community by gender at 0.05 level. There was a statistically significant difference in relatedness of self with school and academic engagement by gender at 0.05 level.

Male students were more free and friendly than female students in each other. Moreover, males wanted to extend into the engagement both throughout and beyond the school community. Girls were more trust in communication, they expected to receive respect of teachers and girls who experienced acceptance by peers and teachers were more likely to be interested in and enjoy school.

Mean Comparison for Six Sub-scales of Social-connectedness of Adolescents by School

To examine for Six Sub-scales of Social-connectedness of Adolescents by school, independent sample *t*-test was computed and results were reported in Table 6.

Table 6 Independent Sample *t*-test for Six Sub-scales of Social-connectedness of Adolescents by School.

Variables	School	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
The sense of Belonging with Peer	School 1	150	13.80	2.357	-3.499**	297	.001
	School 2	150	14.86	2.855			
Teacher Support	School 1	150	22.51	3.613	-3.096**	297	.002
	School 2	150	23.71	3.096			
Sense of Fairness and Safety at School	School 1	150	14.14	3.083	4.207***	297	.000
	School 2	150	15.50	2.492			
Engagement in Community	School 1	150	5.83	2.833	0.550	297	.582
	School 2	150	5.68	1.386			
Variables	School	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Relatedness of Self with School	School 1	150	24.63	4.890	-2.634**	297	.009
	School 2	150	26.01	4.142			
Academic Engagement	School 1	150	12.56	1.870	-.932	297	.352
	School 2	150	12.77	2.057			

**Mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level.

***Mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

The mean score of school 1 was higher than that of school 2 in engagement in the community. The mean score of school 2 was higher than that of school 1 in the sense of belonging with peer, teacher support, sense of fairness and safety at school, relatedness of self with school and academic engagement.

There was no statistically significant in engagement in community and academic engagement by the school.

There was statistically significant difference in teacher support, the sense of belongingness with peer and relatedness of self with school by the school at 0.01 level.

There was a statistically significant difference in the sense of fairness and safety at school at 0.001 level.

Conclusion

The main purpose was to explore social-connectedness of adolescents in Yangon Region. A total number of 300 Grade Ten students from two Basic Education High Schools, Hlegu District and Insein District participated in this study

In addition, the mean score of female was higher than the male of social - connectedness in adolescences. Female was higher than male of social-connectedness because of sufficient opportunities for female students to make all important connections with peers that leads them to feel a sense of membership at school than male students.

From the results of the independent sample *t*-test, school 2 students' mean scores were higher than school 1 students. It could be interpreted that adolescent social-connectedness explicitly conveys both adolescents' attitudes toward, and behavioral activity in, their social ecology, and the relationships within it.

Moreover, among the mean scores of six sub scales could be concluded that Teacher Support mean scores were higher than the other sub-scales mean scores and also Teacher Support mean percent, too. The means scores of the Peer factor and Engagement in Community factor were the lowest scores in all factors. The medium factors were Sense of Fairness and Safety at School, Relatedness of self with school and Academic engagement.

There were significant differences between genders in sub scales and it showed that the sense of belonging with peer and engagement in community of mean scores of male students were higher than the female students. Moreover, teacher support, sense of fairness and safety at school, relatedness of self with school and academic engagement of mean scores of female students were higher than the male students.

In a previous study, gender differences had been found in social support and social networks across the aging process. Social-connectedness varies more by gender than any other demographic characteristic. In general, females had larger and more varied social networks with more friends and more social support than males. Males tend to maintain intimate relationships with only a few people, while females identify more people as being important to them or as people they care about. (Naz, Shah, & Qayum, 2020)

Teacher Support, Sense of Fairness and Safety at School, Relatedness of self with School and Academic Engagement mean scores of school 2 were higher than that of school 1 but the sense of belonging with peer and Engagement in community mean scores of school 1 was higher than that of school 2. Especially, relatedness of self with school mean scores of school 2 was higher than that of school 1.

In previous research, people with high connectedness tend to feel very close to other people, easily identify with others, perceive others as friendly and approachable, and participate in social groups and activities. Kohut (1984) speculated that people with low connectedness failed to develop appropriate interpersonal behaviors necessary to maintain relationships later in life.

Limitations of the Study

Although the results supported the study aims as mentioned above, there are some limitations. The sample size was not sufficient to represent adolescents in all of the high schools in Myanmar. Moreover, the sample used in this study is only Grade Ten students in two high schools. So, it may not be representative of the adolescents who are attending in 2022-2023 Year.

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