

# The Predictive Analysis of Adjustment Difficulties from Loneliness, Social Support, and Social Connectedness

*Erdoğan DURU\**

## **Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to examine direct and indirect effects of social support, social connectedness, and loneliness in predicting adjustment difficulties. The sample of the study was 404 university students (212 females and 192 males) studying in different departments of the Faculty of Education at Pamukkale University. The ages of the students ranged from 16 to 27 years with a mean 18.65 years. Forty-seven percent of the participants were male and 53% were female. A set of demographic questions, the Adjustment Difficulties Scale, the UCLA Loneliness Scale, the Social Provision Scale, and the Social Connectedness Scale were used to collect the data. Results show that social support, social connectedness, and loneliness correlate significantly in the expected direction with the measures of adjustment difficulties. In addition, findings indicate that social support, social connectedness, and loneliness are predictors of adjustment difficulties. Social connectedness and social support have indirect effects in relation between loneliness and adjustment difficulties. In other words, social connectedness and social support serve not only indirectly as a mediator to loneliness in predicting to adjustment difficulties, but also they predict directly to adjustment difficulties.

## **Keywords**

Loneliness, Adjustment Difficulties, Social Support, Social Connectedness.

\* *Correspondence:* Assist. Prof. Dr. Erdoğan Duru, Pamukkale University, Department of Educational Sciences, Kinikli Campus, Denizli / Turkey. E-mail: eduru@pamukkale.edu.tr

Transition from high school to higher education is an important period in students' social as well as academic lives from the adjustment point of view (Oswald, & Clark, 2003). Previous studies on adjustment have suggested that significant relationships with others are essential for students to adjust to the college environment (Duru, 2005, 2008a). Students who are able to establish connections in their new environment adjust better than students who are unsuccessful to establish new relationships. In transition to a college, students may have some opportunities that value for growth and change, and are faced with various problems including social, academic, and personal adjustment. Colleges offer a new environment for students to try new identities and social ties, and form new activities, interests, and social relationships. On the other hand, the process of adjustment to a new environment is considered an important psycho-social process that may affect in different ways the performance and functioning of an individual (Bojuwoye, 2002; Ceyhan, 2006, Dyson, & Renk, 2006; Jackson, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2005; Jay, & D'augelle, 1991; Kulaksızoğlu, Dilmaç, Ekşi, & Otrar, 2003; Larose, & Boivin, 1998; Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Alisat, 2004; Paul, & Bri-er, 2001; Stroebe, Van Vliet, Hewstone, & Willis, 2002).

Previous studies support that loneliness and anxiety increase among students during the college transition. Research also points out that students may have limited resources to deal with adjustment problems during this period such as adapting to new roles and rules, lacking study skills, academic difficulties, loss or lack of social support, friendsickness, and loneliness (see Chen, 1999; Cheng, & Furnham, 2002; Duru, 2005; Halamandaris, & Power, 1997, 1999). Chen (1999) stresses that social connectedness, identity negotiation, and academic competences are three important aspects of the transition process. Research supports an important notion that academic adjustment, especially emotional and social adjustment, might be affected in negative ways and some students who experience separation from their family and previous social environment may have hard time to cope with this process. Furthermore, students who have higher levels of loneliness in transition to university may also experience loss or lack of social relationships, social network, and social ties that may affect, directly or indirectly, the levels of adjustment of these students.

The links between loneliness, adjustment, and social relationship have been examined within different settings, cultures, and age groups (Cal-

vete, & Connor-Smith, 2006; Cutrona, 1982; Cutrona, & Russell, 1987; Deniz, Hamarta, & Ari, 2005; DiTommase, Brannen, Ross, & Burgess, 2003; DiTommaso, & Spinner, 1997; Duru, & Poyrazli, 2007a, 2007b; Eker, Arkar, & Yaldız, 2001; Herman, & Betz, 2006; Herrero, & Gracia, 2004; Hamamcı, & Duy, 2007; Lau, & Kong, 1999; McWhirter, 1997; Pearson, 1986; Peplau, & Perlman, 1982; Rokach, 2001; Schmitt, & Lawrence, 1985; Shams, 2001; Weis, 1973; Wheeler, Reis, & Nezlak, 1983; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). Previous studies indicate that loneliness and adjustment correlate with different measures of personal relationships among college students and young adults (Akman, & Tuğrul, 1996; Duru, 2007; DiTommase et al., 2003). In earlier studies, variable that have emerged as consistent predictors of the level of loneliness are the meaningfulness of the interactions (Wheeler et al., 1983), companionship and social support (Duru, 2005, 2007), attachment and social expressivity (DiTommase et al., 2003), and social network (Duru, & Balkis, 2007). In the light of above studies, research results suggest that loneliness and adjustment not only relate to psychological and physical aspects of subjective well-being, but also relate strongly with social aspects of life. In addition to social support, Duru found that social connectedness was related to loneliness among college students (2007, 2008a, 2008b).

Lee and Robbins (1995, 1998) define social connectedness as an aspect of the self and as the subjective awareness of being in close relation with the social world. Social connectedness appears to be related to how other people are represented within oneself. Some individuals feel a close relation with others such as family, friends, peers, even strangers, whereas others may not feel this close relation (Lee, Draper and Lee, 2001). As a result, interpersonal closeness in the social world may contain both proximal and distal relations with others (Lee, & Robbins, 1998). Social connectedness can affect one's emotions, cognitions, perceptions, and therefore, his/her actions in relation to the social world. For example, people with higher levels of connectedness may easily manage relationships with other people and participate in social activities. On the other hand, people with lower social connectedness may not effectively manage their needs and emotions (Lee, & Robbins, 1998). As a result, it is expected that students with higher social connectedness and social support will likely to adjust easier to their social environment and experience lower levels of loneliness.

In sum, in the framework of developmental guidance, it is clear that some students may need psychological help and support in the process of adjustment to university (Yeşilyaprak, 2003). Because of that it is important to understand how loneliness, social support, and social connectedness particularly influence students in the adjustment process. Specifically, the purpose of the study is to examine direct and indirect effects of social support and social connectedness in predicting the effect of loneliness on adjustment difficulties.

## Method

### Participants

The sample of this study was composed of 404 university students (212 females and 192 males) studying in different departments of the Faculty of Education at Pamukkale University. The age of the students ranged from 16 to 27 years with a mean 18.65 years. Fourth-seven percent of the participants were males and 53 % were females.

### Measures

A set of demographic questions, the Social Connectedness Scale adapted by Duru (2007), the UCLA Loneliness Scale adapted by Demir (1989), the Social Provision Scale adapted by Duru and Balkis (2007), and the Adjustment Difficulties Scale adapted by Duru for this study were used to collect the data. All recorded data were analyzed by correlation, analysis of variance, sobel test statistic (Baron, & Kenny, 1986), and regression.

## Results and Discussion

The results show that social support, social connectedness, and loneliness correlate significantly in the expected direction with the measures of adjustment difficulties. In addition, the findings indicate that social support, social connectedness, and loneliness are predictors of adjustment difficulties. Social connectedness and social support also have indirect effects in relation between loneliness and adjustment difficulties. In other words, social connectedness and social support serve not only indirectly as a mediator to loneliness in predicting to adjustment difficulties, but also they predict directly to adjustment difficulties.

The results of this study show that social connectedness and social support decrease the effect of loneliness on adjustment difficulties. Therefore, a high level of social connectedness and social support can provide opportunities for students to interact with others and increase their social connections with social and academic environment that may help them cope with the adjustment process of university. In addition, students who experience higher level of loneliness can be helped by designing intervention programs that target increasing students' social relations, social skills, and communication skills.

## References / Kaynakça

- Akman, Y. & Tuğrul, C. (1996). Üniversite gençliğinin aile sorunları, yalnızlık ve uyum düzeyleri. *Psikoloji Semineri Dergisi*, 11, 117-133.
- Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 1173-1182.
- Bojuwoye, O. (2002). Stressful experiences of first year students of selected universities in South Africa. *Counseling Psychology Quarterly*, 15 ( 3), 277-290.
- Calvete, E., & Connor-Smith, J. K. (2006). Perceived social support, coping, and symptoms of distress in American and Spanish students. *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping*, 19 (1), 47-65.
- Ceyhan, A. A. (2006). An investigations of adjustment levels of Turkish university students with respect to perceived communications skill levels. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 34 (4), 367-380.
- Chen, C. P. (1999). Transition to higher education: Major aspects and counseling guidelines. *Guidance Counseling*, 14 (3), 31-37.
- Cheng, H., & Furnham, A. (2002). Personality, peer relations, and self confidence as predictors of happiness and loneliness. *Journal of Adolescence*, 25, 327-339.
- Cutrona, C. E. (1982). Transition to college: Loneliness and the process of social adjustment. In L. A. Peplau, & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Loneliness: A source book of current theory, research and therapy* (pp. 290-309). New York: John Wiley ve Sons.
- Cutrona, C. E., & Russell, D.W. (1987). The provision of social relationship and adaptation to stress. In W. H. Jones, & D. Perlman (ed.), *Advances in personal relationships* (vol. 1, pp. 37-67). Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press.
- Demir, A. (1989). U.C.L.A. Yalnızlık Ölçeğinin geçerliği ve güvenilirliği. *Türk Psikoloji Dergisi*, 7 (23), 14-18.
- Deniz, M. E., Hamarta, E., & Ari, R. (2005). An investigation of social skills and loneliness levels of university students with respect to their attachment styles in a sample of Turkish students. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 33 (1), 19-32.
- DiTommase E., Brannen C., Ross L., & Burgess, M. (2003). Attachments styles, social skills and loneliness in young adults. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 35, 303-312.
- DiTommaso, E., & Spinner, B. (1997). Social and emotional loneliness: A reexamination of Weiss' typology of loneliness, *Personality and Individual Differences*, 22, 411-421.
- Duru, E. (2005). Amerika'da lisan üstü öğrenim gören Türk öğrencilerinin yalnızlık düzeylerinin Türkiye örneklemleri ile karşılaştırılması ve yalnızlık düzeyinin bazı psikolojik değişkenler açısından incelenmesi. *Eğitim ve Bilim*, 30, 16-26.
- Duru, E. (2007). Sosyal Bağlılık Ölçeği'nin Türk kültürüne uyarlanması. *Eğitim Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 26, 85-94.
- Duru, E. (2008a). Sosyal bağlılık ve sosyal desteğin yalnızlık üzerine doğrudan ve dolaylı rollerinin üniversiteye uyum süreci çerçevesinde incelenmesi. *Türk Psikolojik Danışma ve Rehberlik Dergisi*, 29 (3), 13-24.

- Duru, E. (2008b). Yalnızlığı yordamada sosyal destek ve sosyal bağlılığın rolü. *Türk Psikoloji Dergisi*, 24 (61), 15-24.
- Duru, E., & Balkıs, M. (2007). Sosyal provizyon ölçeğinin psikometrik karakteristikleri. *Türk Psikolojik Danışma ve Rehberlik Dergisi*, 27, 79-90.
- Duru, E., & Poyrazlı, S. (2007a). Personality dimensions, psychosocial-demographic variables and English language competency in predicting level of acculturative stress among Turkish international students in the U.S. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 14 (1), 99-110.
- Duru, E., & Poyrazlı, S. (2007b). *The role of perceived discrimination and social connectedness in predicting adjustment difficulties among Turkish international students in the U.S.* Paper presentation at the 2007 Annual APA Convention, San Francisco.
- Dyson, R., & Renk, K. (2006). Freshmen adaptation to university life: Depressive symptoms, stress and coping. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 62 (10), 1231-1244.
- Eker, D., Arkar, H., & Yıldız, H. (2001). Çok boyutlu algılanan sosyal destek ölçeğinin gözden geçirilmiş formunun faktör yapısı, geçerlik ve güvenilirliği. *Türk Psikiyatri Dergisi*, 12 (1), 17-25.
- Halamandaris, K. F., & Power, K. G. (1997). Individual differences, dysfunctional attitudes, and social support: A study of the psychosocial adjustment to university life of home students. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 22 (1), 93-104.
- Halamandaris, K. F., & Power, K. G. (1999). Individual differences, social support and coping with the examination stress: A study of the psychosocial and academic adjustment of first year home students. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 26, 665-685.
- Hamamcı, Z., & Duy, B. (2007). Sosyal beceriler, fonksiyonel olmayan tutumlar, akılcı olmayan inançlar ve ilişkilerle ilgili bilişsel çarpıtmaların yalnızlıkla ilişkisi. *Eğitim Araştırmaları*, 26, 121-130.
- Hermann, K. S., & Betz, N. E. (2006). Path models of the relationships of instrumentality and expressiveness, social self-efficacy, and self-esteem to depressive symptoms in college students. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 25, 1086-1106.
- Herrero, J., & Gracia, E. (2004). Predicting social integration in the community among college students. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 32, 707-720.
- Jackson, M. L., Pratt, M. W., Hunsberger, B., & Pancer, S. M. (2005). Optimism as a mediator of the relation between perceived parental authoritative and adjustment among adolescents: Finding the sunny side of the street. *Social Development*, 14 (2), 273-304.
- Jay, G. M., & D'augelli, A. R. (1991). Social support and adjustment to university life: A comparison of African- American and White Freshmen. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 19, 95-108.
- Kulaksızoğlu, A., Dilmaç, B., Ekşi, H. & Otrar, M. (2003). Uyum ölçeği-üniversite formunun dilsel eşdeğerlik, geçerlik ve güvenilirlik çalışması. *Eğitim Bilimleri ve Uygulama*, 2 (3), 65-76.
- Lau, S., & Kong, C. K. (1999). The acceptance of lonely others: Effects of loneliness and gender of the target person and loneliness of the perceiver. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 139 (2), 229-241.
- Larose, S., & Boivin, M. (1998). Attachment to parents, social support expectations, and socioemotional adjustment during the high school-college transition. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 8 (1), 1-27.

- Lee, R. M., & Robbins, S. B. (1995). Measuring belongingness: The social connectedness and the social assurance scales. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 42* (2), 232-241.
- Lee, R. M., & Robbins, S. B. (1998). The relationship between social connectedness and anxiety, self-esteem, and social identity. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 45*, 338-345.
- Lee, R. M., Draper M., & Lee, S. (2001). Social connectedness, dysfunctional interpersonal behaviors, and psychological distress: Testing a mediator model. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 48* (3), 310-318.
- McWhirter, B. T. (1997). Loneliness, learned resourcefulness, and self-esteem in college students. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 75*, 460-469.
- Oswald, D. L., & Clark, E. M. (2003). Best friends forever?: High school best friendship and the transition to college. *Personal Relationships, 10*, 187-196.
- Pearson, J. E. (1986). The definition and measurement of social support. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 64*, 390-395.
- Pancer, S. M., Pratt, M., Hunsberger, B., & Alisat, S. (2004). Bridging troubled waters: Helping students make the transition from high school to university. *Guidance and Counseling, 19* (4), 184-190.
- Paul, E. L., & Brier, S. (2001). Friendsickness in the transition to college: Precollege predictors and college adjustment correlates. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 79* (1), 79-89.
- Peplau, L., & Perlman, D. (1982). *Loneliness: A sourcebook of current theory, research and therapy*. New York: Wiley-Interscience.
- Rokach, A. (2001). Strategies of coping with loneliness throughout the lifespan. *Current Psychology, 20* (1), 3-18.
- Schmitt, J. P., & Lawrence, A. K. (1985). Gender differences in and personality correlates of loneliness in different relationships. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 49*, 485-495.
- Shams, M. (2001). Social support, loneliness and friendship preference among British Asian and Non-Asian adolescents. *Social Behavior and Personality, 29* (4), 399-404
- Stroebe, M., Van Vliet, T., Hewstone, M., & Willis, H. (2002). Homesickness among students in two cultures: Antecedents and consequences. *British Journal of Psychology, 93*, 147-168.
- Weis, R. S. (1973). *Loneliness: The experience of emotional and social Isolation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT. Press.
- Wheeler, L., Reis, H., & Nezlak, J. (1983). Loneliness, social interaction, and sex roles. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45*, 943-953.
- Wilcox, P., Winn, S., & Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005). 'It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people': The role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 30* (6), 707-722.
- Yeşilyaprak, B. (2003). *Eğitimde rehberlik hizmetleri*. Ankara: Nobel Yayınları.