Exploring the Effect of Social Connectedness on Life Satisfaction in Adolescents: The Mediating Roles of Emotional Self-Efficacy and Anxiety

Paula Pedić Duić

Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia

Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between social connectedness and life satisfaction in adolescents. It specifically examined whether this relationship is mediated by emotional self-efficacy and anxiety, both independently and combined, using a serial mediation model. The research involved 308 adolescents enrolled in a Croatian high school, who were predominantly female (72.08%), with an average age of 16 years. Participants completed the Connectedness subscale from the EPOCH questionnaire (Kern et al., 2016) to measure social connectedness, the Emotional Self-Efficacy subscale from the Croatian version of the SEQ-C questionnaire (Vulić-Prtorić & Sorić, 2006) to measure emotional self-efficacy, the Anxiety subscale of the DASS-21 questionnaire (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) to assess anxiety, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) to evaluate life satisfaction. Structural equation modeling was applied to test the serial mediation model. The results indicated that social connectedness has a positive direct effect on life satisfaction and a positive indirect effect through emotional self-efficacy. However, the indirect effect of social connectedness on life satisfaction via anxiety, as well as the serial mediation effect of emotional self-efficacy and anxiety in the relationship between social connectedness and life satisfaction, were not significant. These findings highlight the importance of fostering social connectedness and emotional self-efficacy in adolescents to enhance their life satisfaction. Conversely, the role of anxiety was found to be less impactful in this context.

Keywords: social connectedness, life satisfaction, emotional self-efficacy, anxiety, adolescents, serial mediation model

Introduction

Social connectedness refers to belonging to a social relationship or network (Lee & Robbins, 1998). More specifically, it means having fulfilling relationships with others and feeling cared for, loved, respected, and valued. In addition to

Paula Pedić Duić ⬛ https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4840-8641

✉ Paula Pedić Duić, University of Zagreb, Faculty of Teacher Education, Savska cesta 77, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia. E-mail: *paula.pedic-duic@ufzg.hr*

receiving support from others, it also assumes offering friendship and support to others (Kern et al., 2016). Social connectedness has been consistently shown to be a protective factor for physical and mental health (Ashida & Heaney, 2008). Regarding the latter, social connectedness is especially important in youth's well-being (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008). For adolescents, the connections with family, friends, and the greater community have a crucial effect on development and well-being (Blum et al., 2022). For instance, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health in the United States found that adolescents who felt connected to their home or school were less likely to engage in health-risk behaviors and had better mental health in adulthood compared to their less-connected peers. Additionally, the Harvard Study of Adult Development, which followed over 700 men for more than 70 years, revealed that individuals with strong connections to family, school, and community tend to live longer, enjoy better health, and have higher levels of well-being than those with weaker connections (Blum et al., 2022). Well-being can be defined in numerous ways, but the dichotomy of subjective and psychological well-being is often reported in psychological research (Diener, 2000). Subjective well-being is recognized as a comprehensive concept that includes both affective and cognitive components, which are distinct yet moderately correlated constructs (Galinha & Pais-Ribeiro, 2011). The latter component is referred to as life satisfaction and can be defined as the intraindividual evaluation and comparison of achievements and aspirations. Satisfaction increases when achievements closely align with aspirations and decreases otherwise (Diener et al., 1985).

Two major theoretical models explain why social connectedness may protect and promote life satisfaction: the main (or direct) effect hypothesis and the buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985). The main effect hypothesis suggests that social connections have a broad and consistent positive impact on well-being, regardless of stressors. Social connections help people maintain healthy habits and take care of themselves because friends and family encourage and support these behaviors (Umberson & Montez, 2010). These social connections also strengthen self-esteem (Harris & Orth, 2020) and add meaning to life (Heintzelman & King, 2014), both of which are precursors to life satisfaction (Steger et al., 2008). On the other hand, the buffering hypothesis proposes that social connections provide support—such as advice, emotional comfort, or practical help—that helps people cope with stress during difficult times or major life changes (Cohen, 2004). Based on these theoretical explanations and previous research that uniformly shows the positive effect of social connectedness on life satisfaction (Ambrey et al., 2017) especially in adolescents (e.g., Oberle et al., 2024), the first hypothesis in this research states:

H1: Social connectedness positively predicts the life satisfaction of adolescents.

Adolescence is a time of significant metamorphosis between childhood and adulthood, and the successful transition largely depends on adolescents' self-efficacy (Taheri et al., 2023). Self-efficacy is a concept introduced by Bandura (1977) that indicates how someone perceives their ability to perform the behaviors required to

produce specific performance attainments. Self-efficacy of adolescents is usually depicted in a three-part nature: social, emotional, and academic self-efficacy (e.g., Taheri et al., 2023). Social self-efficacy refers to adolescents' perceived ability to build and maintain relationships with peers and to be assertive in challenging situations (Vulić-Prtorić & Sorić, 2006). Academic self-efficacy pertains to adolescents' confidence in their academic abilities (Basili et al., 2020) and is a major contributor to students' academic achievements and overall personal success (Koçak & Canli, 2018). Emotional self-efficacy, which involves managing and understanding one's emotions, is essential for maintaining well-being and resilience, particularly in dealing with negative emotions during adolescence (Mesurado et al., 2018). Several studies by Caprara et al. (2006, 2007, 2017) have reported that people's perceived ability to regulate positive and negative emotions positively influences life satisfaction. Managing one's feelings can lead to better coping strategies (Aldao et al., 2010), and improve mental health (John & Gross, 2004), contributing to a more satisfying life overall.

Phan and Ngu (2016) have shown that connectedness to family and peers predicts self-efficacy beliefs in adolescents. Most studies on the relationship between social connectedness and self-efficacy have considered self-efficacy in general (Dang & Liu, 2023), but it would be beneficial to examine how social connectedness relates to different aspects of self-efficacy. It is reasonable to hypothesize that connectedness is related to increased emotional self-efficacy as previous studies suggest that social connectedness contributes to emotional regulation (Pietromonaco & Collins, 2017), which shapes emotional self-efficacy beliefs (Caprara et al., 2017). To sum up, the literature suggests that social connectedness and self-efficacy are valuable predictors of adolescents' well-being. However, further research is needed to understand the mechanisms of this relationship (Begun et al., 2018). Given that social connectedness predicts self-efficacy (Phan & Ngu, 2016), which in turn predicts life satisfaction (Caprara et al., 2006, 2007) the second hypothesis of this research is:

> H2: Emotional self-efficacy serves as a mediator in the relationship between social connectedness and life satisfaction among adolescents. Specifically, increased social connectedness leads to increased emotional self-efficacy, which in turn increases life satisfaction.

The aforementioned buffering hypothesis posits that social connectedness can serve as a buffer against daily challenges and stressors (Cohen, 2004). By alleviating these negative aspects, social connectedness may indirectly increase overall life satisfaction. Stressful events can increase susceptibility to anxiety (McLaughlin & Hatzenbuehler, 2009) by increasing self-awareness and vigilance (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). Under stress, individuals tend to focus more on their physical sensations and anxiety symptoms in order to understand and manage their stress (Barlow, 2002). This increased focus can lead to a cycle of rumination, where constant reflection on anxiety and its causes amplifies sensitivity to anxiety over time (Watkins, 2008).

Therefore, social connectedness, by buffering everyday stressors, could also reduce anxiety symptoms.

Taylor et al. (2020) conducted a quasi-experimental study where individuals with clinically significant anxiety or depression symptoms were assigned to either a positive activity intervention group or a control group. The positive activity intervention aimed to improve connectedness among participants. The results indicated that these interventions were effective in fostering social connectedness, leading to significant reduction in anxiety symptoms in more than half of the participants. These outcomes are comparable to the success rates of established psychosocial treatments for anxiety and depression (Cuijpers et al., 2020).

Reducing anxiety is a valuable goal *per se*, however, the added value is that reduced anxiety also improves life satisfaction (Hoseini-Esfidarjani et al., 2022). By promoting social connectedness, adolescents are less likely to engage in rumination (McMahon et al., 2022), which mitigates anxiety (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000). Lowered anxiety subsequently increases life satisfaction (Hoseini-Esfidarjani et al., 2022). Therefore, the third hypothesis of this research is:

H3: Anxiety serves as a mediator in the relationship between social connectedness and life satisfaction in adolescents. Specifically, increased social connectedness leads to reduced anxiety, which in turn increases life satisfaction.

Given that this research proposes two potential mediators of the relationship between social connectedness and life satisfaction, it is crucial to further elaborate on their theoretical relationship in order to classify the model as either parallel or serial mediation. Parallel mediation assumes that two mediators of the same relationship are neither theoretically nor statistically significantly interconnected. In contrast, serial mediation assumes a substantial connection between the two mediators, even after controlling for the predictor in their relationship (Hayes, 2013). To determine the type of mediation, one statistical approach is to test the partial correlation between the mediators after controlling for the predictor (Hayes, 2013). This will be detailed in the results section. Theoretically, emotional self-efficacy and anxiety are expected to be negatively correlated, which aligns with previous research (Tahmassian & Jalali Moghadam, 2011). Individuals with high emotional self-efficacy are more adept at regulating their emotions, using adaptive strategies to cope with negative emotions, thus reducing the likelihood of experiencing anxiety. Effective emotion regulation helps individuals manage their emotional responses to stressors, leading to lower anxiety levels (Doménech et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2021). Moreover, emotional self-efficacy is associated with greater emotional stability, meaning that individuals are less likely to experience extreme emotional fluctuations. This stability acts as a buffer against anxiety, as emotionally stable individuals can manage stress and negative emotions more effectively (Doménech et al., 2024). With this in mind, the fourth hypothesis of this research is:

H4: Emotional self-efficacy and anxiety operate as serial mediators between social connectedness and the life satisfaction of adolescents. More specifically, social connectedness increases emotional self-efficacy, which decreases anxiety, and lower levels of anxiety increase life satisfaction.

Figure 1.

Proposed Latent Serial Mediation Model Linking Social Connectedness to Life Satisfaction Through Emotional Self-Efficacy and Anxiety as Serial Mediators.
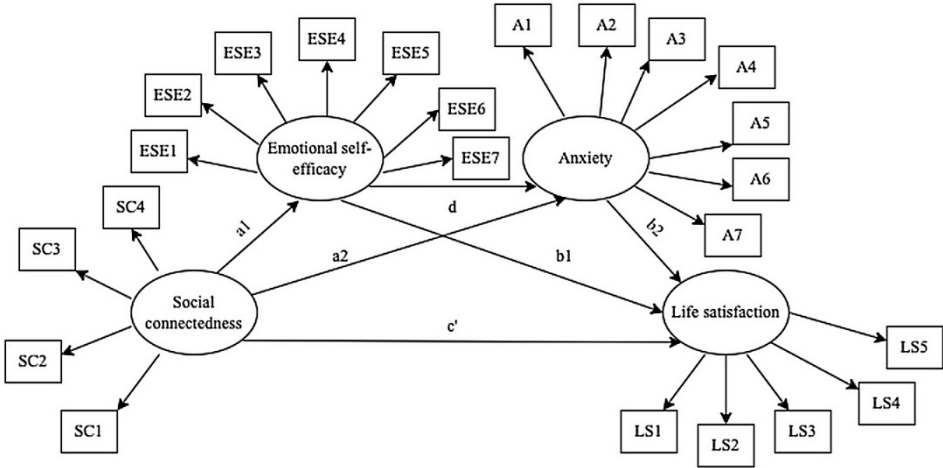
Note. a, b, c', and d represent path coefficients (Table 2)

Method

Participants and Procedure

The study included 308 adolescents from a high school in Zagreb, Croatia. The gender distribution was predominantly female, with 72.08% female participants and 27.92% male. The mean age of the participants was 16.25 years (*SD* = 1.66). Regarding their educational status, 28.25% of the participants were freshmen, 20.13% were sophomores, 27.92% were juniors, and 23.70% were seniors. 66% of the participants reported average SES, 26.62% reported above-average SES and 7.8% reported below-average SES. The study took place during the winter term of the 2023/2024 school year. Participants were informed about the study by the school psychologist, who explained the purpose and procedures, whereupon they provided informed consent. The questionnaires were administered during regular classes at school by a school psychologist who provided the participants the QR code leading them to Google form questionnaires. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with an 86% response rate. The research was conducted in compliance with ethical

standards and with the approval of the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb.

Instruments

Social connectedness was measured with the EPOCH questionnaire (Kern et al., 2016), more specifically with the Connectedness subscale. EPOCH is an adolescent well-being questionnaire that measures 5 dimensions of adolescent well-being according to Kern et al. (2016): engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness. Previous EPOCH validation studies (Kern et al., 2016; Maurer et al., 2021; Zeng & Kern, 2019) revealed that the five-factor model suits the data well and that each subscale can be used separately. All subscales, including connectedness, contain 4 items. Connectedness refers to the quality of social relations of adolescents; sense of belonging and peer support. Each item is scored on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = *almost never/not at all like me*; 5 = *almost always/very much like me*). The scores for each domain are calculated as the average of the four items. The Cronbach's alpha of the connectedness subscale was .78 in this research.

Anxiety was measured using items from the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The Anxiety subscale of the DASS-21 includes seven items that assess the severity of anxiety symptoms experienced by participants over the past week. The items focus on autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effects, situational anxiety, and subjective experience of anxious affect. Each item is rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*did not apply to me at all*) to 3 (*applied to me very much, or most of the time*). The scores are summed to provide a total score for anxiety, with higher scores indicating greater levels of anxiety. The Anxiety subscale has demonstrated good internal consistency in this study (Cronbach's alpha = .72).

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985) has been used to assess life satisfaction of adolescents, supported by previous research confirming its one-factor structure and reliability in adolescent samples (e.g., Jovanović et al., 2022). The SWLS comprises five items designed to gauge global life satisfaction, which involves individuals evaluating the quality of their lives according to their own criteria. Although the original scale uses a 7-point response format ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), the 5-point scale has also demonstrated adequate psychometric properties (Espejo et al., 2022). Due to its simplicity and ease of use, this research utilized the 5-point scale. The total score, indicating greater life satisfaction, is derived by summing the scores of the five items. In this study, the SWLS exhibited excellent reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .84).

The Croatian version (Vulić-Prtorić & Sorić, 2006) of Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children (SEQ-C; Muris, 2001) was used to assess emotional self-efficacy. The SEQ-C measures children's and adolescents' beliefs about their ability to control their emotions, behavior, and academic performance. It comprises three

subscales: emotional, social, and academic self-efficacy. The emotional self-efficacy subscale specifically evaluates an individual's capacity to regulate their emotions when faced with various stressors. For example, this subscale includes items such as "I can calm myself down when feeling angry." It is measured with 7 items, with each item rated on a 5-point scale with 1 = *not at all* and 5 = *very well*. The scores are summed to provide a total score for emotional self-efficacy. In this study, the emotional self-efficacy subscale demonstrated excellent reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .87.

Power Analysis

An a priori power analysis using the *semPower* package in R (Moshagen & Bader, 2023) indicated that a minimum sample size of 105 participants was required (α = .05, power = .80, RMSEA = .05). With 308 participants, the study exceeds this requirement and ensures robust statistical power.

Analysis Plan

First, descriptive statistics were calculated and normality tests were conducted for all variables in the study. Pearson correlation coefficients were then calculated to examine the bivariate relationships between the variables. These analyses were conducted in JASP (JASP Team, 2020).

To investigate the hypothesized direct effect of social connectedness on life satisfaction and the indirect impact of social connectedness on life satisfaction through emotional self-efficacy and anxiety (separately and combined), a latent serial mediation model was tested. This approach allows for the examination of multiple mediators operating in series while accounting for measurement error in the latent constructs. The model included social connectedness as the independent variable, emotional self-efficacy as the first mediator, anxiety as the second mediator, and life satisfaction as the dependent variable.

In addition to the primary variables, gender, and age were covariates in the model. This decision was justified by previous research indicating significant gender differences in emotional self-efficacy (Graziano et al., 2024), anxiety (Bahrami & Yousefi, 2011), and social connectedness (Liebler & Sandefur, 2002), while age has been associated to variability in life satisfaction across the lifespan (Baird et al., 2010).

Before specifying the latent serial mediation model, the partial correlation between the two mediators (emotional self-efficacy and anxiety) was estimated while controlling for the independent variable (social connectedness). This approach was used to determine whether the association between the two mediators was entirely due to the independent variable or whether they had an additional common cause other than the independent variable. If the latter is the case, then specifying a serial

mediation model is the right choice to describe the relationship between the variables (Bolin, 2014; Hayes, 2013). Latent serial mediation analysis was performed in R (R Core Team, 2021) using the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique, implemented through the *lavaan* package (Rosseel, 2012).

A full model specification was undertaken, specifying the hypothesized serial mediation model with measurement models for each latent construct included in this specification (Figure 1). Following specification, the model was estimated using maximum likelihood estimation. To assess the model fit, several indices were used: the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). According to Hu and Bentler (1999), CFI and TLI values above 0.90 indicate an acceptable fit. Browne and Cudeck (1992) suggest that RMSEA values below .06 and SRMR values below .08 are indicative of a good fit. Direct paths from social connectedness to life satisfaction (c), emotional self-efficacy (a1), and anxiety were assessed (a2), as well as the effects of emotional self-efficacy (b1) and anxiety (b2) on life satisfaction and the effect of emotional self-efficacy on anxiety (d), as depicted in Figure 1.

Indirect effects were calculated to evaluate the mediation pathways from social connectedness to life satisfaction through emotional self-efficacy and anxiety (separately and combined). The bootstrap method ($n = 5000$) was implemented to determine the statistical significance of the mediating effects with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Results

As can be seen in Table 1, the ranges of skewness (from -0.05 to 1.90) and kurtosis (from -0.40 to 4.67) for all main variables were within the acceptable range for the SEM of -10 to +10 for kurtosis and -3 to +3 for skewness (Brown, 2015). Notably, the scores for social connectedness were concentrated at the high end of the scale, with a high mean ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 0.32$) and limited variability. This pattern aligns with findings from previous research using the EPOCH social connectedness subscale in adolescent populations, which consistently report elevated mean values and distributions that tend to be slightly negatively skewed (Buerger et al., 2023; Maurer et al., 2021; Zeng et al., 2019). These results reflect the strong emphasis placed on social bonds and relationships during adolescence, a period when social connectedness is considered a key component of psychological well-being and development (Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Regarding the relationships between the variables, social connectedness was moderately positively related to life satisfaction, weakly positively to emotional self-efficacy, and weakly negatively to anxiety. Emotional self-efficacy was moderately negatively correlated with anxiety and positively with life satisfaction. Emotional

self-efficacy and anxiety were still moderately negatively correlated after controlling for social connectedness (Table 1, the coefficient in parenthesis). Anxiety was moderately negatively correlated with life satisfaction.

Table 1.

Mean, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 308)

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness (SE)	Kurtosis (SE)	1.	2.	3.
1. Social connectedness	4.57	0.58	-1.90 (0.14)	4.67 (0.28)	-		
2. Emotional self-efficacy	22.4	6.43	-0.50 (0.14)	-0.43 (0.28)	.31*	-	
3. Anxiety	7.10	5.15	0.63 (0.14)	-0.53 (0.28)	-.27*	-.58* (-.54*)	-
4. Life satisfaction	17.99	4.18	-0.41 (0.14)	-0.40 (0.28)	.47*	.53*	-.40*

Note. Partial correlation of two mediators in the parenthesis.
*$p < .01$.

Test of the Mediation Model

Structural equation modeling was used to examine the latent constructs of social connectedness, emotional self-efficacy, anxiety, and life satisfaction and their proposed relationships with the maximum likelihood estimator. The latent serial mediation model demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data with $\chi^2(265) = 509.76$, $p < .01$, CFI = .93, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .05 (90% CI [0.05, 0.06]), and SRMR = .06. As illustrated in Table 2 and Figure 2, the effect of social connectedness on life satisfaction and emotional self-efficacy is both positive and significant. Social connectedness is also negatively and significantly related to anxiety. Emotional self-efficacy predicts life satisfaction positively and significantly, while the effect of anxiety on life satisfaction is not significant. Additionally, emotional self-efficacy has a negative and significant effect on anxiety. Finally, the total effect of social connectedness on life satisfaction is positive and significant. The model controlled for gender and age as covariates.

Table 2.

Unstandardized and Standardized Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, and Significance Levels for Pathways in the Mediation Model of Social Connectedness, Emotional Self-Efficacy, Anxiety, and Life Satisfaction, Controlling for Gender and Age

Pathway	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	p-value	Standardized Coefficient (Std)
Social Connectedness → Emotional Self-Efficacy (a1)	0.77	0.11	< .01	.47
Social Connectedness → Anxiety (a2)	-0.11	0.05	< .05	-.15
Emotional Self-Efficacy → Life Satisfaction (b1)	0.43	0.08	< .01	.44
Anxiety → Life Satisfaction (b2)	-0.03	0.18	> .05	-.01
Social Connectedness → Life Satisfaction (c')	0.64	0.12	< .01	.41
Emotional Self-Efficacy → Anxiety (d)	-0.28	0.05	< .01	-.61
Total Effect	0.98	0.15	< .01	.62

Table 3 shows the bootstrap results for indirect effects. The indirect effect of social connectedness on life satisfaction through emotional self-efficacy was positive and significant. This suggests that higher social connectedness leads to increased emotional self-efficacy, which in turn increases life satisfaction in adolescents. The indirect effect of social connectedness on life satisfaction through emotional anxiety was not significant, nor was the total indirect effect of social connectedness on life satisfaction through both emotional self-efficacy and anxiety.
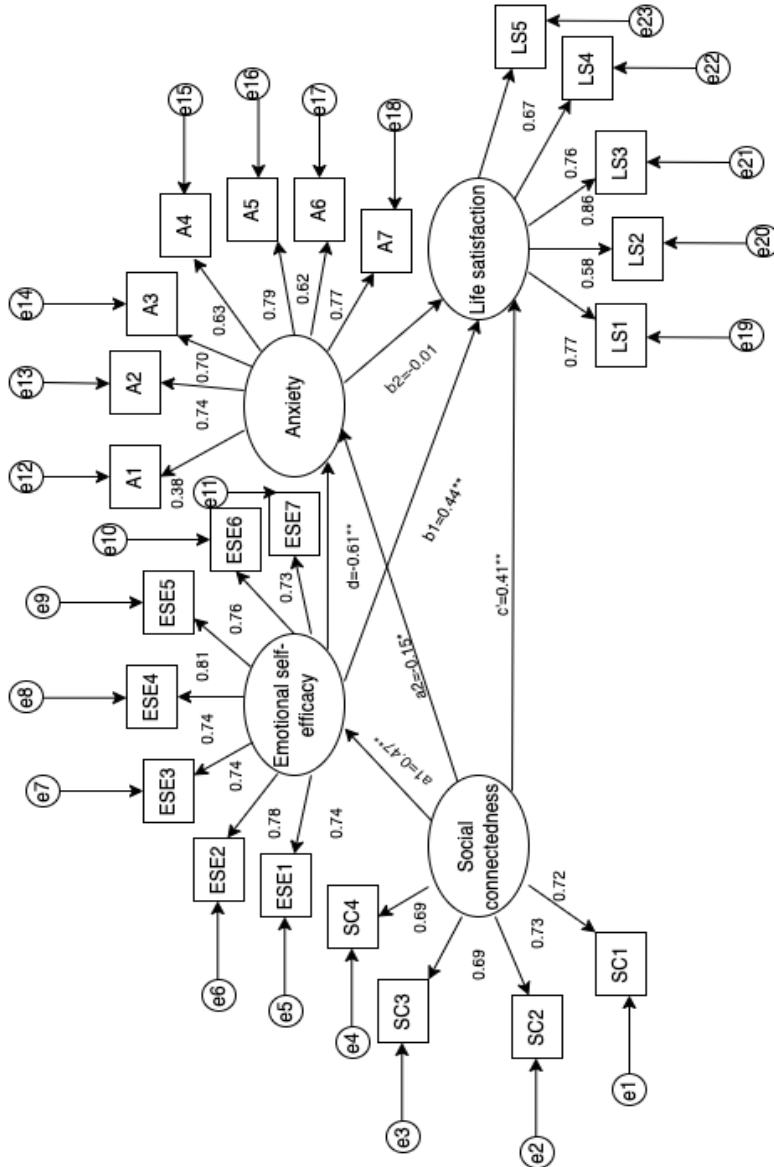
Table 3.

Unstandardized Indirect Effects (Number of Bootstrap Samples: 5000)

Effects	B	SE	Bootstrapping CI Lower	Bootstrapping CI Upper	The R^2 effect-size (%)
Indirect Effect of Social Connectedness on Life Satisfaction through Emotional Self-Efficacy (a1b1)	0.33	0.07	0.20	0.49	27.35
Indirect Effect of Social Connectedness on Life Satisfaction through Anxiety (a2b2)	0.00	0.02	-0.05	0.04	0.08
Indirect Effect of Social Connectedness on Life Satisfaction through Emotional Self-Efficacy and Anxiety (a1db2)	0.00	0.04	-0.06	0.08	0.15

Figure 2.
Results of the Serial Mediation Model

Note. Rectangles are used for observed variables, and ellipses for latent variables. e1–e23 denote the measurement errors of the corresponding observed variables. The path coefficients are standardized (see Table 2 for their meaning). The numbers attached to the arrows between the latent and observed variables are the standardized factor loadings.

Discussion

Empirical studies have consistently shown a positive association between social connectedness and life satisfaction (Ambrey et al., 2016; Blum et al., 2022). However, there hasn't been much research depicting the mechanisms of this relationship. Social connectedness is a crucial predictor of life satisfaction in adolescents, when connections with others significantly impact mental health (Blum et al., 2022). Therefore, it is essential to further explore the relationship between social connectedness and life satisfaction during adolescence. Previous research has indicated potential links and directions of this relationship. For instance, Jose et al. (2012) conducted a longitudinal study demonstrating that connectedness predicts life satisfaction and not the other way around. Research has also shown that social connectedness increases self-efficacy (Phan & Ngu, 2016)**,** and that self-efficacy facilitates life satisfaction (Poorbaferani et al., 2018). Thus, the aim of this research was to examine whether social connectedness has a positive effect on the life satisfaction of adolescents and whether emotional self-efficacy plays a mediating role in the relationship between social connectedness and life satisfaction. Rather than conceptualizing self-efficacy as a general construct, this research sought to examine the role of emotional self-efficacy. Emotional self-efficacy, defined as the belief in one's ability to regulate emotions (Vulić-Prtorić & Sorić, 2006), may be particularly important in the context of social connectedness and life satisfaction. Social connectedness provides a supportive environment that strengthens emotional self-efficacy. When adolescents feel connected to their peers and community, they receive emotional support and validation (Wickramaratne et al., 2022), which can strengthen their confidence in managing emotions. This increased emotional self-efficacy can in turn contribute to higher life satisfaction. The findings confirmed both hypotheses: social connectedness positively affects adolescents' life satisfaction, and adolescents who feel socially connected have a higher level of emotional self-efficacy, which subsequently increases their life satisfaction (Table 3, Figure 2). Also, the percentage of variance explained by this mediation effect (Table 3) was deemed substantial by conventional standards (Cohen, 1998).

Previous research has shown that social connectedness is negatively correlated with loneliness, suicidal thoughts or behaviors, depression, and anxiety (Malaquias et al., 2015). In terms of anxiety, the proportion of adolescents meeting the criteria for anxiety screening is increasing (Parodi et al., 2022), which is alarming considering that anxiety negatively predicts life satisfaction (Nishida et al., 2016). This study proposed that anxiety mediates the relationship between social connectedness and life satisfaction. The results showed that social connectedness has a significant negative effect on anxiety, indicating that adolescents who feel more socially connected tend to experience lower levels of anxiety. However, anxiety had no significant effect on life satisfaction, resulting in a non-significant indirect effect of social connectedness on life satisfaction through anxiety (Table 3, Figure 2). The third hypothesis could therefore not be confirmed. A possible explanation for the

insignificant effect of social connectedness on anxiety could be the type of anxiety measured in this research. This study focused on state anxiety, which is defined as a temporary emotional state characterized by feelings of tension, apprehension, and increased autonomic nervous system activity (Spielberger, 1966). These feelings are subjective and can fluctuate in intensity depending on the situation. In contrast, trait anxiety denotes a person's general tendency to respond to perceived threats in their environment with anxiety, representing a relatively stable aspect of their personality (Spielberger, 1966). Previous research by Lee and Robbins (1998) suggests that social connectedness has a less pronounced impact on state anxiety compared to trait anxiety. They argue that state anxiety is more influenced by immediate, situational factors rather than by long-term social relationships. State anxiety is typically influenced by specific, short-term stressors such as upcoming exams, deadlines, or personal conflicts, rather than by broader, long-term social relationships. Furthermore, because state anxiety is less likely to reflect an individual's life's wider, long-term aspects, it is also less likely to impact overall life satisfaction (Lee & Robbins, 1998). This is consistent with findings from this research, where anxiety had no significant influence on the life satisfaction of adolescents.

The combined mediation effect of emotional self-efficacy and anxiety was expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social connectedness impacts the life satisfaction of adolescents. However, the insignificant serial mediation effect suggests that the combined effect of emotional self-efficacy and anxiety does not significantly explain the relationship between social connectedness and life satisfaction (Table 3), contrary to the fourth hypothesis of this research. Social connectedness does increase emotional self-efficacy, which reduces anxiety (Table 2), but this reduction in anxiety may not be sufficient to significantly influence life satisfaction in the short term, particularly when anxiety is caused by immediate factors (state anxiety). In other words, the immediate and fluctuating nature of state anxiety can undermine the stability needed for a strong serial mediation effect.

In light of these considerations, future research should delve deeper into the differences between trait and state anxiety, particularly regarding their impacts on life satisfaction. Additionally, while this study provides evidence that emotional self-efficacy serves as a mediator in the relationship between social connectedness and life satisfaction, future research should examine and compare the effects of social, academic, and emotional self-efficacy within this context.

This study has several limitations. First, a cross-sectional design was used, which is less suitable for the serial mediation model that examines a sequence of mediating variables linking an independent variable to a dependent variable. A longitudinal design would be more appropriate for establishing causal inferences (Hayes, 2013). Furthermore, the assessment tools used in this study were self-reported measures. Future research could benefit from employing multiple methods to measure these variables, such as qualitative assessments and peer/parent reports. Moreover, the use of convenience sampling in this study means that the findings may

not be generalizable to all high school adolescents. Lastly, the gender imbalance in the sample (over 70% girls) may have influenced the results. While gender was statistically controlled as a covariate, this imbalance limits the generalizability of the findings across genders and should be interpreted with caution.

Despite these limitations, this study contributed to existing research by further exploring the mechanisms underlying the relationship between social connectedness and life satisfaction in adolescence. It examined two theoretically and developmentally relevant potential mediators: emotional self-efficacy and anxiety. The study demonstrated that social connectedness contributed to life satisfaction both directly and indirectly by increasing emotional self-efficacy. Although anxiety did not mediate this relationship, nor did the serial mediation effect reach significance, the study offered several possible explanations for these findings that can be explored in future research.

The findings of this study offer significant implications for interventions targeting improvements in adolescents' life satisfaction. First, the direct association between social connectedness and life satisfaction highlights the need to cultivate environments that facilitate positive social interactions among adolescents. Schools, for example, could implement peer-support programs or extracurricular activities that foster a sense of belonging and strengthen students' connection to their communities.

Second, the mediating role of emotional self-efficacy underscores the importance of interventions beyond enhancing social connectedness to equipping adolescents with effective emotional regulation skills. Programs promoting emotional self-regulation strategies, such as mindfulness training or cognitive-behavioral techniques, may strengthen adolescents' emotional self-efficacy and, in turn, contribute to greater life satisfaction.

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Učinak socijalne povezanosti na životno zadovoljstvo adolescenata: Medijatorska uloga emocionalne samoučinkovitosti i anksioznosti

Sažetak

Cilj je ovog istraživanja bio ispitati odnos između socijalne povezanosti i životnog zadovoljstva adolescenata, uz poseban naglasak na ulogu emocionalne samoučinkovitosti i anksioznosti kao mogućih medijatora tog odnosa. Pritom se analiziralo njihovo djelovanje pojedinačno i u kombinaciji, primjenom modela serijalne medijacije. U istraživanju je sudjelovalo 308 srednjoškolaca iz Hrvatske, pretežito djevojaka (72.08 %), prosječne dobi od 16 godina. Sudionici su ispunili subskalu Povezanosti iz upitnika EPOCH (Kern i sur., 2016) za mjerenje socijalne povezanosti, subskalu Emocionalne samoefikasnosti iz hrvatske verzije upitnika SEQ-C (Vulić-Prtorić i Sorić, 2006) za procjenu emocionalne samoučinkovitosti, subskalu Anksioznosti iz upitnika DASS-21 (Lovibond i Lovibond, 1995) za mjerenje razine anksioznosti te Skalu životnog zadovoljstva (Diener i sur., 1985) za procjenu životnog zadovoljstva. U svrhu testiranja modela serijalne medijacije korišteno je linearno strukturalno modeliranje. Rezultati su pokazali da socijalna povezanost ima izravan pozitivan učinak na životno zadovoljstvo te neizravan pozitivan učinak posredstvom emocionalne samoučinkovitosti. Međutim, neizravan učinak socijalne povezanosti

posredstvom anksioznosti, kao i kombinirani medijatorski učinak emocionalne samoučinkovitosti i anksioznosti u odnosu između socijalne povezanosti i životnog zadovoljstva, nisu se pokazali značajnima. Ovi nalazi naglašavaju važnost promicanja socijalne povezanosti i emocionalne samoučinkovitosti kod adolescenata kao važnih čimbenika njihovog životnog zadovoljstva, dok se anksioznost u ovom kontekstu nije pokazala značajnim posrednikom.