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# SOCIAL LONELINESS, EMOTIONAL LONELINESS AND LONELINESS IN LOVE AS PREDICTORS OF LIFE SATISFACTION IN ADOLESCENTS

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*Keywords:*  
life satisfaction;  
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*Abstract.* The primary aim of our research was to examine the impact of social loneliness, emotional loneliness and loneliness in love on life satisfaction of young people, including the variables of gender, age and material status. The study involved 200 high school students (86 female) from Novi Pazar, Serbia, 15–19 years old ( $M=16.76$ ,  $SD=1.308$ ). The data were collected through the scale of social loneliness, emotional loneliness and loneliness in love (SSELL) as a modified version of the scale of social and emotional loneliness among adults and the life satisfaction scale (LSS). Statistically significant impact of participants' age, material status of the family, loneliness in family and loneliness in love on life satisfaction is established. Loneliness in love is the best predictor of life satisfaction. The greater the loneliness in love, loneliness in family and material status of the family, the lower the life satisfaction. The finding that the material status of the family contributes to better socialization and a higher degree of life satisfaction is counterintuitive, given that the higher the material status of the family, the lower the life satisfaction score. There is no social loneliness in the model which predicts life satisfaction. Gender differences in terms of variables which influence life satisfaction in adolescents were established. Loneliness in love has the greatest influence on life satisfaction for men, while for female respondents, loneliness in family comes first, followed by loneliness in love. Other variables which appear in the model in the case of the undivided sample do not appear in the analysis of the subsamples by gender.

## *Introduction*

We encounter different concepts and definitions of life satisfaction in the literature, but there is agreement on the most important components of 'good life' such as health and successful relationships. However, different people attach different weight to these components and have different standards of 'success' in certain periods of life. Adolescence is a developmental period in which closer relationships with peers are established more intensively. In adolescence, various challenges and problems are encountered in social situations that significantly affect life satisfaction (Nurmi et al., 1997).

Pavot and Diener (1993) give a widely accepted definition of life satisfaction as a cognitive component of subjective well-being, a process in which a person evaluates the quality of his life according to his own set of criteria. Definitions of life satisfaction indicate one-dimensional (e.g., global life satisfaction) and multidimensional constructs that affect life satisfaction among adolescents (Diener, 1984, 2012; Huebner, 1994, 2001, 2004; Penezić, 2006). It is important to note Huebner's multidimensional hierarchical model among adolescents, which includes family, friends, school, self-satisfaction, and living environment as very important for achieving life satisfaction in this period of life (Huebner, 1994, 2001, 2004). Personality characteristics significantly affect the level of life satisfaction among adolescents. Additionally, the degree of life satisfaction is affected by external conditions such as the quality of society in which a person lives, a sense of physical, economic, and legal security, the possibility of greater personal autonomy, gender equality, access to education, and access to information, employment opportunities, age, gender, marital status (Veenhoven, 1997).

For an individual, loneliness is a universal experience, which can cause insufficiency of social relationships that would meet the social needs of the individual. Loneliness is an uncomfortable emotional and motivational state that arises from the inability to satisfy the need for intimacy, love, and belonging. Weiss (1974) identified 6 such needs: attachment, social integration, opportunity

for nurturance, reassurance of worth, reliable alliance, and guidance. These needs can arise from different types of social relations (Penezić, 1999).

Based on an analysis of the main characteristics of loneliness, Pinqart and Sorensen (2001) conclude that loneliness manifests itself through a form of suffering due to the lack of contact. Rook (1984) also believes that loneliness is an uncomfortable emotional state, which occurs when a person feels rejected, alienated or misunderstood by others and lacks a society for social activities and emotional intimacy. Woodward and Kalyan-Masih (1990) define loneliness as a feeling of loneliness and disconnection or alienation from positive people, places or things. From the socio-cognitive perspective, loneliness is a mismatch between the interpersonal relationships an individual has and those they would like to have, which may mean that someone feels lonely despite a high level of social inclusion (Pinqart & Sorensen, 2001). Peplau and Perlman (1982) define loneliness as “a subjective dissatisfaction with interpersonal relationships caused by changes in current social relations or by changes in the desires and needs for social relations” (p. 93). According to Buchholz and Catton (2004 according to Rotenberg et al., 2004, p. 242), loneliness may occur as a problem in the process of forming a strong identity, often associated with a negative psychological experience that is always associated with interpersonal experience and basic trust formed in early childhood within the primary group, the family. Weiss (1973) distinguishes emotional or intimate loneliness and social loneliness as different experiences arising from deficits in different types of relationships. Emotional loneliness arises as a result of a lack of intimacy and intimate attachment to another person. It is an experience in which a person feels completely isolated from others (Weiss, 1973). Social loneliness is caused by the insufficiency of close friendships and as a feeling that one is not accepted. Emotional loneliness is caused by the insufficiency of intimacy with friends and is not related to the number of friends an individual has (Clinton & Anderson, 1999; Qualter & Munn, 2002; Rokach, 2004; van Tilburg et al., 2004). Qualter and Munn (2002) concluded that individuals may be socially isolated without having a feeling of loneliness, while other individuals may feel lonely even in the presence of a large number of people who surround them and constitute their social reality. On the contrary, there are studies that emphasize the greater importance of the quality of social interactions in relation to their number. These data indicate that although respondents with a higher degree of loneliness have approximately the same number of social contacts and activities in which they are engaged, as well as the respondents with a lower degree of loneliness, the crucial fact is that when the contacts made by the lonelier respondents are taken into consideration they are made with people who are more acquaintances and strangers than close people and family members (Jones, 1981).

The importance of life satisfaction among adolescents is confirmed in numerous studies which indicate that individual differences in life satisfaction

among adolescents may predict important life outcomes, such as the development of internalized and externalized behavioral problems (McKnight et al., 2002; Park, 2004; Suldo & Huebner, 2004), peer violence (Valois et al., 2001), loneliness, self-confidence and acceptance by peers, popularity, liking, love and other social relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2002). Life satisfaction is a subjective assessment that allows a person to use any information he considers relevant for evaluating his own life (Smailović & Mavrić, 2021). These findings are in line with the claims of Diener (2012), who state that life satisfaction among adolescents may be seen as an important psychological resource, which facilitates the achievement of adaptive development.

Trying to understand when in life loneliness is most likely to happen is crucial from a policy perspective, in order to design programmes that target specific subgroups of population. Also, it is important to understand whether it is age per se that causes feelings of loneliness or rather age-related circumstances cause it and should be targeted. A measure of age is included in almost all studies that we found through our broader search. Often, it is just a control variable or a moderator variable of the relationship between other risk factors and loneliness. Some find elevated levels of loneliness among adolescents or young adults, lower levels in mid-adulthood, and increased levels again in old age (Lasgaard et al., 2016; Mund et al., 2020; Victor & Yang, 2012). Others find that loneliness decreases linearly with age (Barreto et al., 2021; Beutel et al., 2017), while some studies show that it increases with age (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2016).

Although loneliness is experienced by both males and females, some demographic variables such as gender are related to individual differences in the severity of loneliness. Nonetheless, gender differences that have been reported in adult loneliness are not consistent together. Some studies have shown that loneliness and gender are closely related to life satisfaction (e.g., Borys & Perlman, 1985; Workman & Lee, 2011).

On the other hand, socializing with others outside of home may cost money, whether it is travelling to visit friends and family, or participating in social activities, such as sports or events, to meet new people. Therefore, those who do not have enough financial means may be disadvantaged in their ability to form and maintain social connections, and consequently, more vulnerable to feelings of loneliness. What is more, lacking financial resources may be linked to other factors that potentially impact social integration and loneliness, such as poor health. Given that an individual's financial situation can be expected to be linked to loneliness, but mostly through indirect channels, researches show that financial status and loneliness directly affect life satisfaction (e.g., Ang et al., 2014).

The primary aim of our research was to examine the impact of social loneliness, emotional loneliness and loneliness in love on life satisfaction of young people, including the variables of gender, age and material status.

## Research Methodology

*Sample and procedure.* The study involved 200 high school students from Novi Pazar, Serbia (86 female), who were between 15 and 19 years old ( $M = 16.76$ ,  $SD = 1.308$ ). The respondents were informed about the study and gave verbal consent. Data were collected live, in three schools: Medical School “Dva heroja”, Secondary School of Economics, and Gymnasium. Data on gender, material status and age were also collected.

*Instruments.* The following instruments were used in order to obtain data: *Scale of Social Loneliness, Emotional Loneliness and Loneliness in Love* (SELL) and *Life Satisfaction Scale* (LSS). The SELL (Ćubela-Adorić, 2004) is a modified version of the *Scale of Social and Emotional Loneliness* (Tomasso & Spinner, 1993). It consists of 3 subscales (36 items), which separately examine loneliness in the domains of friendly relations (subscale of social loneliness, 13 items), relationships with family (subscale of loneliness in family, 11 items) and love relationships (subscale of loneliness in love, 12 items). On all subscales, the respondents answer by assessing the degree of their agreement with an individual statement on a Likert-type scale with seven degrees (from 0 = *I do not agree at all*, to 7 = *I completely agree*).

The LSS (Penezić, 1996) consists of 20 items. Respondents answer by circling the appropriate number on a Likert-type scale with five degrees and the total score is shaped as a linear combination of estimates (1 = *I completely do not agree*, 5 = *I completely agree*). When summing the estimates, it is necessary to score two items in reverse. A higher score also means more life satisfaction, and the score ranges from 20 to 100. This scale is one-dimensional and measures life satisfaction as a global construct. The LSS may be justly observed as a functional unidimensional measure based on the conclusions of numerous studies where it was applied (e.g., Penezić, 2006; Randelović & Minić, 2012; Randelović & Smederevac, 2011; Reić & Penezić, 2010; Tuce & Fako, 2014). The scales used for data collection were made available by the authors without compensation or asking for permission.

## Results

A measure of internal consistency of the scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) was calculated for both instruments. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient values above .70 are considered acceptable (Pallant, 2010). Reliabilities of the aforementioned scales are shown in Table 1 and they are satisfactory.

Table 1. Reliability coefficients of scales and subscales

Scale	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Life satisfaction (20 items)	.84
Loneliness, the whole scale (36 items)	.83
Social loneliness (13 items)	.86
Loneliness in family (13 items)	.80
Loneliness in love (13 items)	.86

The mean value of social loneliness in our sample is  $M = 34.52$  ( $SD = 13.153$ ), of loneliness in family is  $M = 22.99$  ( $SD = 11.50$ ), and the mean value of loneliness in love is  $M = 45.46$  ( $SD = 13.587$ ). Skewness indicates an increased but acceptable asymmetry ( $Sk < \pm 1$ ). The mean value of life satisfaction in our sample is  $M = 74.65$  ( $SD = 12.276$ ). Skewness indicates negligible asymmetry ( $Sk < \pm 1$ ), while kurtosis indicates that the distribution is mesokurtic ( $Ku = 0.095$ ).

A multiple linear regression was run in GNU PSPP (*Free Open-Source Statistical Package*) in order to explain score on life satisfaction scale based on participant's age, average grades in the previous grade, parents' employment, material status of the family, the type of school the respondent attends, scores on the scale of social loneliness, loneliness in family and loneliness in love. All of the assumptions for the regression analysis were met. The overall model which includes the independent variables of participants' age, material status of the family, the type of school the respondent attends, loneliness in family and loneliness in love scale scores explains 18.9% variation of the life satisfaction scale score,  $F(4, 195) = 11.33, p < .01$ . The variables of parents' employment, average grades in the previous grade and social loneliness, and the type of school the respondent attends didn't enter the model due to an insufficient correlation with the dependent variable.

As it can be seen from the data presented in Table 2, the variable that contributes the most to the model is loneliness in love, and right next to it is loneliness in family. The higher the score for these variables, the lower the score for life satisfaction. The same result is obtained for material status of the family. Subjects who are older tend to have higher scores on life satisfaction scale.

Table 2. Regression coefficients and correlations for the entire sample

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	90.69	5.31		17.07	.000
Loneliness in love	-.22	.06	-.24	-3.75	.000
Loneliness in family	-.22	.07	-.21	-3.21	.002
Material status of the family	-3.64	1.23	-.19	-2.96	.004
Age	2.93	1.32	.14	2.22	.03

In order to examine whether there are gender differences, we performed two separate regression analyses according to the previously described model and with the same variables, except we split the sample according to gender.

In male respondents, the overall model which includes one independent variable, that is the loneliness in love scale scores, explains 11.3% variation of the life satisfaction scale score,  $F(1, 112) = 14.22, p < .01$ . The other variables included in the analysis didn't enter model due to an insufficient correlation with the dependent variable.

As it can be seen from the data presented in Table 3, the higher the loneliness in love score, the lower the life satisfaction score.

Table 3. Regression coefficients and correlations for the male subsample

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	80.34	4.98		16.12	.000
Loneliness in love	-.27	.08	-.297	-3.31	.001

In female respondents, the overall model which includes the independent variables of the loneliness in family and loneliness in love scale scores explains 18.7% variation of the life satisfaction scale score,  $F(2, 83) = 9.52, p < .01$ . The other variables included in the analysis didn't enter the model due to an insufficient correlation with the dependent variable.

As it can be seen from the data presented in Table 4, the variable that contributes the most to the model is the loneliness in family score. The higher the loneliness in family score, the lower the life satisfaction score; the same is for the loneliness in love score.

Table 4. Regression coefficients and correlations for the female subsample

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	95.73	5.24		18.28	.000
Loneliness in family	-.38	.11	-.36	-3.58	.001
Loneliness in love	-.25	.09	-.27	-2.75	.007

Table 5 shows the correlations between loneliness and life satisfaction in the entire sample. There is a statistically significant negative correlation between life satisfaction, on the one hand, and social ( $r = -.155, p < .05$ ), family ( $r = -.212, r < .01$ ) and loneliness in love ( $r = -.290, r < .01$ ), on the other hand. So, the higher the loneliness, the lower the satisfaction with life.



Table 5. Correlations of variables for entire sample

		Life satisfaction	Social loneliness	Loneliness in family	Loneliness in love
Life satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	-.155*	-.212**	-.290**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.029	.003	.000
	N	200	200	200	200
Social loneliness	Pearson Correlation	-.155*	1	.551**	.118
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.029		.000	.097
	N	200	200	200	200
Loneliness in family	Pearson Correlation	-.212**	.551**	1	.027
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.000		.701
	N	200	200	200	200
Loneliness in love	Pearson Correlation	-.290**	.118	.027	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.097	.701	
	N	200	200	200	200

Table 6 shows the correlations between loneliness and life satisfaction in the male subsample. There is a statistically significant negative correlation between life satisfaction and loneliness in love ( $r = -.336$ ,  $r < .01$ ).

Table 6. Correlations of variables for the male subsample

		Life satisfaction	Social loneliness	Loneliness in family	Loneliness in love
Life satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	-.085	-.122	-.336**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.367	.194	.000
	N	114	114	114	114
Social loneliness	Pearson Correlation	-.085	1	.579**	.274**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.367		.000	.003
	N	114	114	114	114
Loneliness in family	Pearson Correlation	-.122	.579**	1	.102
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.194	.000		.282
	N	114	114	114	114
Loneliness in love	Pearson Correlation	-.336**	.274**	.102	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.003	.282	
	N	114	114	114	114

Table 7 shows the correlations between loneliness and life satisfaction in the female subsample. There is a statistically significant negative correlation between life satisfaction, on the one hand, and social ( $r = -.241$ ,  $p < .05$ ), family ( $r = -.336$ ,  $r < .01$ ) and loneliness in love ( $r = -.248$ ,  $r < .05$ ), on the other hand.

Table 7. Correlations of variables for the female subsample

		Life satisfaction	Social loneliness	Loneliness in family	Loneliness in love
Life satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	-.241*	-.336**	-.248*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025	.002	.021
	N	86	86	86	86
Social loneliness	Pearson Correlation	-.241*	1	.517**	-.070
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025		.000	.524
	N	86	86	86	86
Loneliness in family	Pearson Correlation	-.336**	.517**	1	-.069
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000		.527
	N	86	86	86	86
Loneliness in love	Pearson Correlation	-.248*	-.070	-.069	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	.524	.527	
	N	86	86	86	86

## Discussion

Based on the results of the research on the observed sample of young people from Novi Pazar, Serbia, we have established a statistically significant impact of participants' age, material status of the family, loneliness in family and loneliness in love on life satisfaction. Thus, the greater the loneliness in love, the loneliness in family and the material status of the family, the lower the life satisfaction. When trying to determine the relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction, negative correlations are usually obtained (Brajković, 2010). Ozben (2013) also found a negative association between loneliness and life satisfaction in students (N = 525) of Turkish University.

Loneliness in love is the best predictor of life satisfaction, which is understandable, since we are dealing with adolescents, for whom partner relations at this age are of crucial importance for being satisfied with their lives. Loneliness in this sense, and the feeling of unrequited love or attention for those in relationships, worsens the feeling of satisfaction with life. Similar explanations can be applied to the impact of loneliness in family on life satisfaction. It is possible that the adolescents we examined feel lonely in their families, who no longer see them as children, and leave it up to them to make certain decisions, and yet their parents are not yet ready to give them the complete freedom that befits adults. It is known that adolescents at the age we researched feel that their family environment does not understand them, and that it is a period of transition full of challenges, in which family is also being restructured. Our data show that older respondents tend to be more satisfied with their life. The

life satisfaction depends on one's cognitive and subjective evaluation of life. Additionally, a person's thoughts about themselves and others influence the likelihood of their forming satisfying relationships, because these cognitions impact how they interact, as well as how they interpret interpersonal situations (Murphy & Kupshik, 1992 according to Heinrich & Gullone, 2006, p. 715). According to previous studies, lonely individuals have a generally negative view of themselves and the world (Perlman & Peplau, 1981).

The finding that the material status of the family contributes to the model is expected, but also counterintuitive, given that the higher material status of the family, the lower the life satisfaction score. It is possible to connect this finding with the previous one, which refers to the relation of loneliness in family. Namely, it is likely that parents tend to work more and earn more and raise the material status of the family, considering that the children are grown up and can do a lot on their own requiring less attention and help. This way, the material status of the family grows, but the children begin to feel lonelier, so both mentioned variables have a negative impact on life satisfaction. This finding is not aligned with other studies. Studies using longitudinal design provide mixed results on the relationship between financial situation and loneliness – some of them find that worse financial situation is linked to an increase in loneliness (Hajek and König, 2020; von Soest et al., 2018), while others do not find a statistically significant relationship (Dahlberg et al., 2018; Kristensen et al., 2021).

It is very interesting to mention that there is no social loneliness in the model that predicts life satisfaction. It may mean that the respondents do not feel that they are socially lonely, or that peer friendships do not affect the level of life satisfaction. We assume that there have been changes in the sphere of contacts with peers. Friendships and social contacts have moved to the virtual world and today's adolescents may feel that their friends are always there, 'a few clicks away', so they do not feel loneliness in this sense. On the other hand, a love partner or family members are not and should not be 'a few clicks away', but by nature more intimate contacts; therefore, loneliness in this sense has a stronger impact on the level of life satisfaction.

A very important finding is the existence of a gender difference in terms of variables that predicted life satisfaction in adolescents. Namely, as we saw in the presentation of the results, loneliness in love has the greatest influence on life satisfaction for men, while for female respondents, loneliness in family comes first, followed by loneliness in love. Other variables that appear in the model in the case of the undivided sample do not appear in the analysis of the subsamples by gender. These results are somewhat unexpected, given the results of previous studies. Similar studies showed that loneliness is more expressed within female respondents (e.g., Weiss, 1973). Others do not find gender differences in expressing loneliness (e.g., Russell et al., 1980). Rokach and Brock (1995) found differences in expressing loneliness, but these differences were not consistent

and they were in different directions on different factors. Research results show that men and women experience loneliness differently (e.g., Schmitt & Kurdek, 1985). Women report greater loneliness when they lack intimacy and trust in interpersonal relationships (intimate loneliness), while men feel lonelier when they lack a group of friends to turn to for support (social loneliness; McWhirter, 1997). The results of our research can be seen in the light of these findings.

We should keep in mind the fact that socially desirable answers could be more prevalent among male respondents, specifically, it is possible that due to the traditional view of the male role, they avoided pointing out loneliness in family, considering attachment to parents and the need for their support undesirable at their age.

It is recommended to perform a longitudinal study to validate the findings, as well as to establish other factors that predicted life satisfaction among adolescents. Based on what is known so far, it is clear that measures should be taken to educate young people how to overcome social loneliness, emotional loneliness and loneliness in love in a constructive way in order to improve the quality of life.

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Социјална усамљеност, емоционална усамљеност  
и усамљеност у љубави као показатељи задовољства  
животом код адолесцената

Резиме

Примарни циљ нашег истраживања био је да испитамо утицај социјалне усамљености, емоционалне усамљености и усамљености у љубави на задовољство животом младих, са посебним уважавањем родних разлика. У истраживању је учествовало 200 средњошколаца (86 особа женског пола) из Новог Пазара, старости 15–19 година ( $M=16,76$ ,  $SD=1,308$ ). Подаци су прикупљени путем скале социјалне усамљености, емоционалне усамљености и усамљености у љубави (SSELL) као модификоване верзије Скале социјалне и емоционалне усамљености одраслих и Скале задовољства животом (LSS). Утврђен је статистички значајан утицај узраста учесника, материјалног статуса породице, усамљености у породици и усамљености у љубави на задовољство животом. Усамљеност у љубави је најбољи показатељ задовољства животом. Што је већа усамљеност у љубави, усамљеност

у породици и материјални статус породице, то је задовољство животом мање. Налаз да материјални статус породице доприноси бољој социјализацији и вишем степену задовољства животом је контраинтуитиван, с обзиром на то да виши материјални статус породице подразумева нижи резултат задовољства животом. У моделу који предвиђа задовољство животом нема социјалне усамљености. Утврђене су полне разлике у погледу варијабли које утичу на задовољство животом код адолесцената. Највећи утицај на задовољство животом код мушкараца има усамљеност у љубави, док је код испитаница на првом месту усамљеност у породици, а затим усамљеност у љубави. Остале варијабли које се појављују у моделу у случају неподељеног узорка не појављују се у анализи у подузorcима према полу.

*Кључне речи:* задовољство животом; усамљеност; адолесценти.



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