

## The Effect of Social Connectedness on Self-Efficacy Among School-Going Adolescents

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### ABSTRACT

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to successfully perform specific behaviors and achieve desired goals. While substantial research has examined the role of social connectedness in promoting mental health, there is limited research exploring its influence on the self-efficacy of school-going adolescents. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescent mental health requires significant attention, as suicide remains one of the leading causes of death among this age group. Existing research suggests that high self-efficacy contributes to the reduction of mental health problems, underscoring the importance of investigating the relationship between social connectedness and self-efficacy in adolescents. The present study assessed the self-efficacy of school-going students using a standardized scale on a sample of 403 participants. Data were collected through convenience sampling. Findings indicated that higher levels of social connectedness positively influenced self-efficacy compared to lower levels of social connectedness. The results are discussed in relation to previous research, with attention to implications, limitations, and directions for future studies.

**Keywords:** *Social Connectedness, Self-Efficacy, Adolescents, Students*

According to Lee and Robbins (1998), social connection can be defined as a cognitive framework that reflects consistent patterns of interpersonal relationships. Strong social connections play a critical role in shaping health and longevity; individuals with robust social ties demonstrate a 50% higher likelihood of survival compared to those with weaker connections (Lunstad *et al.*, 2010). Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform a specific activity or set of tasks. This concept is fundamental in understanding how people pursue goals, manage challenges, and regulate their motivation. High self-efficacy, characterized by a strong belief in one's abilities, is associated with enhanced motivation and performance. Conversely, low self-efficacy, reflecting doubt in one's capabilities, can undermine both motivation and performance (Bandura, 1997). Adolescence is a particularly critical developmental stage for the formation of self-efficacy, shaped by physiological, emotional, and social factors. Research highlights that stress management strategies, such as relaxation techniques and physical activity, can enhance coping capacity and strengthen self-belief (Compas *et al.*, 2001). Maintaining a

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positive outlook and effectively regulating emotions fosters proactive coping, thereby strengthening self-efficacy (Carver *et al.*, 2010; Gross, 2002). On the other hand, stress and negative affect impair performance and diminish confidence. Mastery experiences, including academic achievement and the development of social skills, further contribute to adolescents' confidence and self-perception (Schunk & Pajares, 2002).

Social connectedness has been consistently identified as an important factor influencing self-efficacy across age groups and contexts. Supportive networks, meaningful interpersonal relationships, and a sense of belonging offer emotional validation, guidance, and resources that foster confidence in one's abilities. Understanding the relationship between social connectedness and self-efficacy is, therefore, essential for promoting not only academic achievement but also personal growth, career development, and psychological well-being.

Several studies provide empirical support for this relationship. Yuen and Datu (2020) investigated the association between meaning in life, social connection, and self-efficacy among secondary school students in Hong Kong. Their findings demonstrated a positive correlation, particularly in academic self-efficacy domains such as study skills, time management, critical thinking, and learning engagement. Interestingly, while school connectedness consistently correlated positively with academic self-efficacy, connections with parents, peers, and teachers were sometimes linked with reduced academic self-efficacy. Similarly, Zhang and Yuen (2022) explored social connectedness and career and talent development self-efficacy (CTD-SE) among elementary school students. Their findings revealed significant associations between parental and teacher connectedness and CTD-SE dimensions such as talent development, career exploration, and work habits. Peer connectedness was uniquely related to career search and work habit formation. Moreover, parental connectedness had a stronger influence on talent development self-efficacy among younger students (Grade 3) compared to older ones (Grade 5).

The role of social connectedness has also been examined in the context of teaching efficacy. Yang *et al.* (2021) found that educators' perceived level of school connectedness during the COVID-19 pandemic positively impacted their self-efficacy in online teaching and reduced compassion fatigue. Similarly, Neill *et al.* (2022) reported that individuals with higher levels of social connectedness generally exhibited stronger self-efficacy, reinforcing the broader literature on this association. In a cross-cultural study, Leino *et al.* (2024) identified that student connectedness was a strong predictor of online teaching self-efficacy, whereas connectedness with colleagues and institutional support showed limited effects. Interestingly, prior experience with digital tools predicted online teaching self-efficacy among lecturers in the UK but not in Switzerland, suggesting that cultural and contextual factors may shape this relationship. Expanding on these findings, Yuen and Chan (2022) demonstrated that social connectedness directly predicted the presence of meaning in life, which subsequently influenced both career adaptability and self-efficacy. Taken together, these findings emphasize the central role of social connectedness in shaping self-efficacy across different domains, age groups, and cultural contexts. However, the literature also highlights variability in outcomes, underscoring the need for further research to clarify the mechanisms underlying these associations, particularly among adolescents.

### **METHODS**

The present study employed a comparative research design to investigate the role of social connectedness in adolescents' self-efficacy. Social connectedness, categorized into low and

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high levels, was treated as the independent variable, while adolescents' self-efficacy functioned as the dependent variable.

### Participants

The study sample consisted of 403 adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18 years. Participants were selected using convenience sampling, which facilitated access to school-going adolescents within the specified age range. Data were collected with the consent of their parents or guardians.

### Tools/Scales

- **The Social Connectedness Scale-R:** The Social Connectedness Scale (SCS), developed by Lee and Robbins in 1995 and revised in 1998 (SCS-R), is a 20-item self-report instrument. It has demonstrated high reliability ( $\alpha > 0.92$ ) and is particularly suited for adolescents aged 14–18. Recent studies confirm its continued relevance (Lee *et al.*, 2023).
- **The Self-Efficacy Scale:** The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE), developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem in 1995. The scale consists of 10 items, scored on a 4-point scale. It is designed for adults and adolescents over 12 year old. The GSE has strong reliability (Cronbach's alphas from .76 to .90). Recent studies confirm its continued relevance (Kim *et al.*, 2023. Ozdemir *et al.*, 2025)

## RESULTS

The present study sought to examine the effect of social connectedness on adolescents' self-efficacy and proposed the hypothesis that a high level of social connectedness would enhance the self-efficacy of school-going adolescents compared to a low level of social connectedness. The results supported this hypothesis.

Table 1 presents the comparison of self-efficacy scores between adolescents with high and low levels of social connectedness. Adolescents with high social connectedness reported a mean self-efficacy score of 28.25 (SD = 6.67), whereas those with low social connectedness reported a mean score of 24.84 (SD = 6.76). The analysis yielded an F-value of 21.577, with a highly significant *p*-value of .000 ( $p < .05$ ), indicating that adolescents with higher social connectedness demonstrated significantly greater self-efficacy.

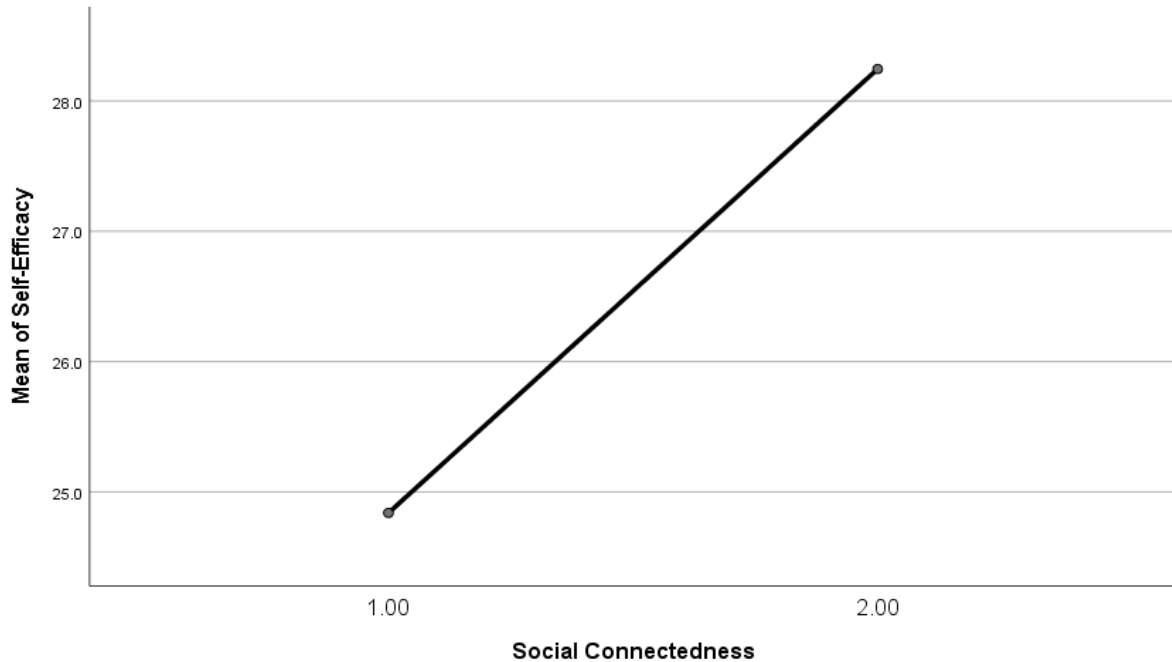
This finding is further illustrated in Figure 1, which visually depicts the positive impact of high social connectedness on self-efficacy among adolescents.

**Table 1: table of N, Mean, SD, df, F and p value of social connectedness on self- efficacy**

| Self-Efficacy | Social connectedness | N   | Mean  | SD   | df | F      | p       |
|---------------|----------------------|-----|-------|------|----|--------|---------|
|               | High                 | 192 | 28.25 | 6.67 | 1  | 21.577 | 0.001** |
|               | Low                  | 211 | 24.84 | 6.76 |    |        |         |

$P=0.001<.01$

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**Figure 1:** Mean level comparison between high (2) and low (1) social connectedness groups on self-efficacy.

### DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study affirmed that social connectedness is a key determinant of adolescent self-efficacy. This aligns with Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes the importance of social persuasion and vicarious experiences in shaping self-beliefs. Adolescents with strong social ties benefit from verbal encouragement, positive role models, and emotional validation, all of which strengthen their perceived capabilities. Conversely, limited social connections deprive adolescents of these critical sources of efficacy information, leaving them more vulnerable to self-doubt, disengagement, and diminished performance.

From an ecological perspective, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory highlights that self-efficacy develops within multiple, interconnected social contexts, including the family, peer groups, and broader community. Supportive family relationships are particularly influential. For instance, Bian and Wu (2023) demonstrated that higher family socioeconomic status positively impacts parent-child attachment and emotional regulation self-efficacy, underscoring the formative role of home environments in shaping adolescents' confidence. Similarly, Tazouti and Jarlégan (2019) found that parental self-efficacy and engagement often reinforced through robust social networks indirectly enhance children's academic self-efficacy and performance.

Peers also play a critical role in self-efficacy development. Positive peer interactions not only provide emotional support but also create opportunities for mastery experiences, collaborative learning, and constructive social comparison (Klein *et al.*, 2020). Such experiences validate adolescents' competence, especially in group-based activities such as sports and collaborative academic tasks. Beyond immediate family and peer influences, community belonging through participation in school clubs, sports teams, or local organizations fosters a sense of relatedness and purpose, which, according to Self-

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Determination Theory (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003), is essential for sustained motivation and personal growth.

Empirical evidence further supports that social connectedness mitigates the negative psychological effects of isolation. Adolescents lacking supportive relationships are more likely to experience anxiety, reduced motivation, and low self-esteem, which hinder their ability to set and achieve goals. In contrast, those embedded in strong social networks demonstrate greater persistence, resilience, and readiness to engage with challenges (Quatman *et al.*, 2001).

In sum, high social connectedness enhances self-efficacy in adolescents through multiple pathways, including emotional support, modeling, encouragement, and opportunities for meaningful participation. This multidimensional influence underscores the importance of strengthening family bonds, fostering positive peer networks, and promoting community engagement as central strategies to improve adolescents' self-efficacy, mental health, and academic outcomes.

### CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that adolescents with stronger social connectedness report higher levels of self-efficacy, underscoring the value of supportive relationships during this critical developmental stage. By establishing a clear link between social ties and self-belief, the findings highlight the importance of fostering positive connections within families, peer groups, and schools. These insights can inform the development of targeted interventions that not only strengthen adolescents' confidence but also promote resilience and overall well-being.

#### *Limitations and Future Directions*

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the findings are limited to adolescents aged 14–18 years, which restricts their generalizability to younger age groups and individuals in early adulthood. Second, rural–urban differences were not considered, limiting insights into how contextual factors may shape self-efficacy. Third, the sample included only male and female adolescents living with parents or guardians, excluding other genders and those in alternative living arrangements, such as orphanages or juvenile institutions. Additionally, the use of convenience sampling may have introduced selection bias and reduced the representativeness of the sample. Finally, the study did not account for potentially influential factors such as family environment, academic stress, socioeconomic status, peer pressure, or personality traits, which could provide a more holistic understanding of adolescent well-being.

Future research should extend the age range to include younger adolescents and individuals transitioning into early adulthood. Larger and more diverse samples, incorporating both rural and urban populations as well as varied cultural contexts, would strengthen the reliability and generalizability of findings. Longitudinal designs are recommended to examine how social connectedness and self-efficacy evolve over time. Expanding participant inclusion to encompass other genders and adolescents from nontraditional living arrangements would also yield a more inclusive perspective. Beyond demographics, future studies should investigate the psychological and neurocognitive mechanisms through which social connectedness influences self-efficacy, integrating perspectives from neuroscience, developmental psychology, and education.

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Applied research is also needed. Intervention studies could evaluate the effectiveness of school-based programs, mentoring initiatives, or peer-support networks that actively foster social connectedness. Policy-oriented research may further translate these insights into practice by informing educational curricula, teacher training, and community mental health strategies designed to enhance resilience and self-belief among adolescents.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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