

## TURKISH ADOLESCENTS' LONELINESS<sup>1</sup>

AYNUR BÜTÜN AYHAN

*Department of Child Development  
Faculty of Health Sciences Ankara University*

ŞÜKRAN ŞİMŞEK

*Department of Child Development  
School of Health Ahi Evran University*

NERIMAN ARAL AND GÜLEN BARAN

*Department of Child Development  
Faculty of Health Sciences Ankara University*

*Summary.*—The goal of this study was to characterize loneliness among adolescents with respect to socioeconomic level, sex, and mothers' and fathers' education. General information about the 400 adolescents and their families were obtained. The UCLA Loneliness Scale was administered. Results of a hierarchical multiple regression showed that mothers' educational level explained a slight but statistically significant amount of variance in adolescents' loneliness scores while sex, socioeconomic level and fathers' educational level did not.

Loneliness is generally associated with negative feelings about interpersonal relationships (Wei, Russell & Zakalik, 2005) and individual differences and is defined as a feeling of lack in interpersonal relationships (Rockach & Neto, 2000; Richaud de Minzi & Sacchi, 2004). Every person is said to experience loneliness at some point in life (Rotenberg & Hymel, 1999). Loneliness has been shown to have two dimensions, emotional and social (Qualter, 2003; Junntila & Vauras, 2009). Emotional loneliness stems primarily from feelings of lack in relations with close people such as family, spouse, or lover, while social loneliness stems from feelings of lack in relations with friends, neighbors, and workmates (Çeçen, 2007).

Previous studies have shown that loneliness may cause a wide range of psychological problems such as low self-esteem, social shyness, depression, alcoholism, obesity, and suicide (Rockach & Neto, 2000; Bugay, 2007; Witvliet, Brendgen, Lier, Koot & Vitaro, 2010; Benner, 2011; Lasgaard, Goossens & Elklit, 2011). It has been claimed that loneliness is more prevalent among young people and is experienced more intensely in adolescence than in any other stage of development (Mcwhirter, Besett-Alesch, Horibata, & Gat, 2002; Uruk & Demir, 2003; Kılınc & Sevim, 2005; Bugay, 2007; Erözkan, 2009).

Regarding adolescent loneliness, the literature states that their feelings of loneliness may be influenced by family and friend relationships (Aral, Baran, Bulut, & Çimen, 2000; Aral & Gürsoy, 2000; Qualter, 2003;

<sup>1</sup>Address correspondence to Aynur Bütün Ayhan, Ph.D., Sağlık Bilimleri Fakültesi, Ankara Üniversitesi, Çocuk Gelişimi Bölümü, Plevne Cad, Aktaş Kavşağı, No. 5, 06100 Cebeci, ANKARA, TÜRKİYE or e-mail (a\_butun@yahoo.com).

Aral, Gürsoy & Yıldız Bıçakçı, 2006; Çiftçi, Demir & Bikos, 2008), being unpopular at school (Demir & Tarhan, 2001), negative teacher-student relationships (Aral, *et al.*, 2000), and communication with the environment (McWhirter, Besett-Alesch, Horibata, & Gat, 2002). Previous research has found correlations between adolescents' loneliness and school performance ( $r = -.31, p < .05$ ; Demir & Tarhan, 2001), self-esteem ( $r = -.46, p < .001$ ; McWhirter, *et al.*, 2002), depressive symptoms ( $\beta = 0.22, p < .05$ ; Lasgaard, Goossens & Elklit, 2011), entertainment internet use ( $r = -.28, p < .001$ ; Seepersad, 2004), and poor social relationships as well as having to establish new relationships due to moving (Bugay, 2007).

Lonely children and adolescents generally have fewer friends and tend to report lower quality in the friendships they have (Benner, 2011). A negative relation has also been reported between loneliness and attachment (Salimi & Jowkar, 2011). As loneliness is experienced more intensely during adolescence, this study estimates the loneliness of adolescents attending high schools of lower and upper socioeconomic status and investigates the effects of certain variables on loneliness levels.

In Turkey, individuals' socioeconomic backgrounds affects their lives significantly. In families with a lower socio-economic background, not only the income level but also the educational level is low, thus depriving these people of many opportunities (Güler & Günay, 2004; Erdil, 2010). As socioeconomic status increases, so do income and educational levels and access to personal development opportunities. This study, thus, aims to explore the effects of socioeconomic background on adolescents' loneliness in Turkey and the effects of sex and parents' educational level on adolescents' loneliness.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

Two high schools, selected randomly from among the high schools located in Ankara and affiliated with the Ministry of Education, were enrolled in the study. One of these schools had students of lower socioeconomic background and the other students of higher socioeconomic background. Permission for the study was granted by the Ministry of Education. The study was conducted with 400 adolescents who did not have any disabilities or come from single parent families; they volunteered from among the classes chosen at random and were tested as groups in intact classes. Of these, 198 were attending high schools of low socioeconomic status selected randomly from among schools in Ankara, and 202 were attending high schools of upper socioeconomic level, again selected randomly. Males comprised 58% of the sample and females 42%. Boys' mean age was 15.8 yr. ( $SD = 0.5$ ) and girls' 15.6 yr. ( $SD = 0.4$ ).

### Measures

Demographic information about the adolescents and their families were gathered using a General Information Form designed by the researchers. The question form asked the participants to report their parents' education level from among the following: Primary school (5 yr.), secondary school (8 yr.), high school (11 yr.), university (15/16 yr.).

*Loneliness.*—Adolescents' loneliness was assessed using the UCLA Loneliness Scale designed by Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona (1980), and tested for validity and reliability by Demir (1989). The UCLA Loneliness Scale uses a 4-point rating scale, for 20 statements tapping emotions and thoughts about social relationships, 1: "I have never felt this way," 2: "I have felt this way rarely," 3: "I have felt this way sometimes," and 4: "I have felt this way often." Ten of these statements are coded positively, and the remaining 10 negatively. An "overall loneliness score" was obtained for each individual by adding the points obtained on all items. The maximum possible score on the scale is 80, and the minimum possible score 20. A high score indicates more loneliness (Demir, 1989). The UCLA Loneliness Scale has reported estimates of internal consistency between .89 and .94, and a 2-mo. test-retest reliability of .73 (Russell, 1996). Demir (1989) reported the internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the Turkish version of the scale at .96, with a 5-wk. test-retest reliability coefficient of .94.

*Socioeconomic level.*—The socioeconomic levels of the schools in the study were identified by using the socioeconomic classification of the boroughs of Ankara, and the principals of the selected schools were contacted so that lower and higher socioeconomic background schools could be studied. In addition, the teachers and the school principals were interviewed in order to learn their views on the socioeconomic level of the schools where they were working.

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the hierarchical multiple regression routine from SPSS Version 16. Prior to conducting hierarchical regression analysis, the normality assumptions were checked, and it was found that skew and kurtosis were within normal boundaries and that homoscedasticity was achieved. Before the hierarchical multiple regression model, relationships between sociodemographic variables and loneliness were assessed (Leech, Barrett, & Morgan, 2005) using a *t* test and analysis of variance.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

UCLA Loneliness Scale scores of the participants are shown in Table 1 by demographic variables. The mean loneliness scores by socioeconomic

TABLE 1  
MEAN LONELINESS SCORES AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF ADOLESCENTS BY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, SEX, MOTHERS' AND FATHERS' EDUCATION LEVEL

	N	M	SD	Comparison Statistic	p	Effect Size
SES				$t_{398} = 1.15$	ns	$d = 0.003$
Lower	198	37.2	8.7			
Upper	202	38.2	9.8			
Mothers' education				$F_{3,396} = 2.90$	.05	$\eta^2 = 0.022$
Primary school	236	38.8	9.5			
Secondary school	71	36.8	7.4			
High school	74	35.7	9.9			
University	19	35.2	7.6			
Sex				$t_{398} = 0.33$	ns	$d = 0.0003$
Female	232	37.6	8.6			
Male	168	37.9	10.2			
Fathers' education				$F_{3,396} = 2.38$	ns	$\eta^2 = 0.018$
Primary school	171	38.9	9.9			
Secondary school	86	37.5	8.5			
High school	99	36.0	8.7			
University	44	37.8	9.3			

status, sex, and fathers' educational status were not statistically different by upper and lower socioeconomic status, sex, or fathers' educational status. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed a statistically significant effect of mothers' educational level on adolescents' loneliness scores.

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis (Table 2) showed that in Step 1, mothers' educational status had a weak but statistically significant relationship with loneliness scores and explained approximately 2% of the variance. Step 2 showed that mothers' education and socioeconomic status together explained only 3% of the variance in loneliness scores. Boys' and girls' mean scores did not differ. Previous studies have

TABLE 2  
MULTIPLE HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION FOR PREDICTION OF LONELINESS (N = 400)

Step and Variable	B	Standard Error B	$\beta$	t	p
Step 1					
Constant	39.9	0.93		42.82	< .001
Mother's education	-1.30	0.48	-0.13	-2.67	.008
$F_{1,398} = 7.14 p = .008 R = .13 R^2 = .02$					
Step 2					
Constant	37.29	1.48		25.15	< .001
Mother's education	-1.66	0.51	-0.17	-3.27	< .001
Socioeconomic status	2.20	0.94	0.12	2.33	.02
$F_{2,397} = 6.32 p = .002 R = .18 R^2 = .03$					

concluded that there was no meaningful difference between male and female adolescents' loneliness scores (Neto, 1992; Gürsoy & Yıldız Bıçakçı, 2003; Aral, Gürsoy, & Yıldız Bıçakçı, 2006). Considering that adolescents' feelings of loneliness are influenced by family and friends (Aral, et al., 2000; Qualter, 2003; Çiftçi, et al., 2008), it was expected that socioeconomic status and sex would not be significantly related to adolescents' loneliness scores. Adolescents whose mothers were primary school graduates may experience self-expression or communication problems, so this relation is worthy of further investigation. More education is generally associated with better communication skills. Gürsoy and Yıldız Bıçakçı (2003) showed in their study that mothers' educational status was related to young people's mean loneliness scores.

Both mothers and fathers may benefit from professional support in establishing healthy communication with their children. Mothers, especially, should be informed about adolescents' needs, problems, expectations and communication styles.

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