

# CHANGES IN FEELING OF CONNECTEDNESS AMONG SENIOR ADOLESCENTS

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## **Abstract**

Adolescents who have low level of social connectedness more often distinguish themselves by nonadaptive, inappropriate behaviour. This study aims to disclose changes in connectedness due to application of play therapy in the senior adolescents' group. Research results disclosed that application of play therapy method "Game of Life", grounded on psychodrama principles, adjusted the feeling of social connectedness among senior adolescents: changes were observed in connectedness to self, at the social level and to the close friend. Application of play therapy resulted in more significant changes in social connectedness in the girls' group than in the boys' group. Social connectedness did not change comparing fifteen — eighteen-year-old adolescent's groups.

*Key words:* senior adolescent, social connectedness, play therapy

## **Introduction**

Analyzing various aspects of adolescence, scientists seek to disclose and predict how various environmental aspects influence the adolescent, his/her family and how interaction of various factors influencing the adolescent will affect the adolescent's further development. The research on psychological aspects of adolescence period is particularly important because it can help to identify difficulties encountered by the adolescent and ways of support in order to ensure formation of the personality that is adaptive and beneficial to the society.

At the same time, the adolescent is solving personality dilemmas related to his/her age. During adolescence particular changes take place in the structure of the personality: the adolescent is trying to find himself/herself looking for the self, experiencing the crisis of identity and identifying himself/herself with significant family members and friends. Trying to find himself/herself, the adolescent must cope with one more especially important task: to maintain emotional balance with parents: to achieve identity but emotionally not to distance from parents too much and maintain close emotional link (to be related to parents) (Noack & Puschner, 1999; Piquart & Silbereisen 2002). The feeling of social connectedness experienced by the adolescent forms the adolescent's main personality constructs: the self, self-respect, self-worth, identity, which influence further personality development of the individual (Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, & Perry, 2006), directly or indirectly influence the adolescent's academic achievements (Demaray, Malecki, Davidson, Hodgson, & Rebus, 2005; Gregory & Weinstein, 2004; Karcher, Holcomb, & Zembrano, 2006; Lezin, Rolleri, Bean, & Taylor, 2004; Taylor & Lopez, 2005). The adolescent's connectedness directly affects the adolescent's prosocial and challenging behaviour. It was found that adolescents who do not

feel connectedness smoke more, are more violent and are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviour (often damage assets, tend to commit crimes, get into fights) and are more engaged in dangerous sexual behaviour (Goldstein & Heaven, 2000; Henrich, Brookmeyer, & Shahar, 2005; Parker & Benson, 2004). Thus, researches into adolescents' feeling of connectedness, identifying its dynamics in adolescence both due to general maturity and due to applied psychological impact could be particularly relevant and productive. However, there is a lack of such studies, although their results would help to provide psychological support more effectively.

The feeling of social connectedness is the ability to interact, cooperate, feel that you belong to the group, that you adjust to it and that you are its member (Kottman, 1999). Barber (2004) and Karcher et al. (2006) present social connectedness as an emotional/cognitive condition, sensuous expression or dynamic process. In the first case it describes that the individual belongs to certain social environment; experiences closeness to other individuals (Barber, 2004; Karcher, 2003; Karcher et al., 2006). In the second case social connectedness can be understood as a dynamic process: active action (communication), seeking to engage oneself in social environment and feel closeness with it or with people in it (the family and family members, school and teachers, classmates) (Barber, 2004; Karcher, 2003; Karcher et al., 2006). In this study, social connectedness is understood both as a state and as a dynamic process, since the aim is to explore changes in connectedness due to applied psychological impact.

The aim of this study is to disclose changes in connectedness due to application of play therapy in the senior adolescents' group.

**Research objectives:**

1. To disclose changes in social connectedness due to applied play therapy.
2. To compare peculiarities of changes in social connectedness among boys and girls.
3. To identify differences of social connectedness between junior and senior adolescents.

**Research subject:**

Changes in social connectedness among senior class pupils due to applied psychological impact.

**Methodology**

**Research participants.** The research was started with 38 senior adolescents whose age was between 15 and 18 (average age — 15,62, standard deviation — 0,91). The target group was chosen randomly, main criteria were age and voluntary consent to take part in the research.

**Ways of Evaluation**

**Adolescents' feeling of social connectedness.** Assessing the feeling of social connectedness among senior adolescents, Karcher's (2002) social connectedness scale Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness was applied. The total scale of social connectedness consists of 78 questions. Every question is assessed by points: "0", "1", "2", "3", "4", "5". The higher the point, the bigger is the feeling of social connectedness. The scale was evaluated in fifteen domains of human interest such as: neighbours, friends, the close friend, parents, siblings, the mother, the father, the school, teachers, reading, peers, culturally different children, religion, self-perception in the present and future. The overall scale measuring social connectedness can be divided into three levels of connectedness according to Karcher (2001): connectedness to self, to others and connectedness to society. Further Karcher et al. (2002) also distinguish other three levels of connectedness: academic, social, and familial. Research data will be analysed according to the said connectedness scales and levels. Examples of

questions in the connectedness scale are: “I like to visit people”, “My friends are really close for me and I completely trust them”, “I like spending time with my parents”, “I like to know people who differ from me by their culture, nationality”, “Religion is important for me”.

Reliability of scales is demonstrated by Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, the value of which is from 0 to 1. The closer to 1, the higher internal reliability of the scale is. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of all four scales shows high internal reliability, enabling their application for individual diagnostics (Vaitkevičius & Saudargienė, 2006).

Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of scales of connectedness are given in Table 1:

**Table 1.** Internal reliability of scales measuring social connectedness

Scales of social connectedness	Cronbach’s alpha		Scales of social connectedness	Cronbach’s alpha	
	Before therapy	After therapy		Before therapy	After therapy
Overall scale	0,94	0,94	Culturally different children	0,86	0,87
Neighbours	0,87	0,85	Religion	0,82	0,82
Friends	0,83	0,81	Close friend	0,67	0,82
The self-in-the- present	0,68	0,83	Mother	0,82	0,76
Parents	0,79	0,90	Father	0,82	0,83
Siblings	0,86	0,85	Self	0,82	0,87
School	0,72	0,79	Others	0,85	0,95
Peers	0,61	0,79	Social level	0,84	0,88
Teachers	0,52	0,67	Academic level	0,87	0,95
The self-in-the-future	0,71	0,75	Social level	0,85	0,90
Reading	0,84	0,93	Familial level	0,88	0,89

Cronbach’s alpha values given in the table vary from 0,7 to 0,9 indicating high reliability of scales, values of several scales fluctuate between 0,6 and 0,7; values are sufficient and scales will be used for statistical calculations.

Research data were calculated employing 18.0 SPSS software. Analysing research data, the following *statistical analysis methods* were used:

- Comparison of means of two dependent samples: *the paired-samples t-test*;
- Comparison of means of two dependent samples (sensitive to small samples): *the Wilcoxon signed-rank test*.

**The process of the research.** There was the play therapy method, based on psychodrama principles, used (Raimundo, 2002; Raimundo, 2014; Barton, 2004).

Each adolescent visited 5 hours sessions of individual work, the duration of each session was 45 minutes. They attended play therapy sessions at the time convenient for them once per week. Adolescents were introduced with the instruments of the game (stage, puppets) the procedure of session.

Every session had the different theme of game and the following themes were used (Raimundo, 2002\$ Raimundo, 2014):

1. “*The pillow method*” (adolescent needs to show on the stage four positive memories of his/her childhood and connect the issues with the present moment) (Raimundo, cited by Barton, 2004).

2. “*Social atom*” (the adolescent shows on the stage interrelations with others during three periods of his/her age and discovers that positive changes are possible) (Barton, 2004).

3. “*The first step method*” (adolescent creates on the stage with puppets difficult relations and develop a new stage of positive relationships) (Raimundo, cited by Barton, 2004).

4. “*The social atom of friends*” (the adolescent creates on the stage the circle of his/her friends in the three periods of his/her development and discovers positive findings about himself/herself and relationships with his/her friends) (Barton, 2004).

5. “*The social atom of the family*” (the adolescent creates on the stage the relations with family members and using change of the role with them have positive feedback from every member of the family) (Barton, 2004).

Before first session and after the last session they filled the questionnaire.

### Research Results

Further senior adolescents’ feeling of social connectedness in general and at separate levels will be analysed. The analysis of adolescents’ connectedness was conducted applying *the paired-samples t-test* and *the Wilcoxon signed-rank test for small samples* because connectedness scale distributions are close to normal distribution. Values of means, standard deviations and p-values are given in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Mean and standard deviation of social connectedness due to application of play therapy

Connectedness		Mean	Standard deviation	p (Wilcoxon criterion)	p (Paired t-criterion)
Overall scale	Before therapy	274,25	37,97	0,07	0,09
	After therapy	279,46	38,81		
Self	Before therapy	43,38	7,59	0,05*	0,05*
	After therapy	45,50	7,59		
Others	Before therapy	157,96	22,44	0,41	0,17
	After therapy	160,50	23,34		
Society	Before therapy	79,92	12,84	0,78	0,68
	After therapy	73,46	12,39		
Academic level	Before therapy	98,42	14,78	0,97	0,77
	After therapy	98,00	16,14		
Social level	Before therapy	80,25	13,60	0,007*	0,01*
	After therapy	84,54	14,17		
Familial level	Before therapy	74,88	15,22	0,95	0,39
	After therapy	75,92	15,08		

\* significance level  $p < 0,05$

The results given in Table 2 show that means of social connectedness before and after play therapy differ. After play therapy there were statistically significant changes in children’s social connectedness to self and at the social level ( $p < 0,005$  and  $p < 0,005$ ;  $p < 0,01$ ).

The analysis of means demonstrates that in general adolescent’s feeling of social connectedness increased in various domains. Analysing separate scales, it can be observed that the feeling of connectedness to others, to the family and at the social level increased but connectedness to society decreased; it slightly decreased at the academic level.

Further social connectedness in separate domains will be analysed. See Table 3.

**Table 3.** Mean and standard deviation of social connectedness to application of play therapy

Connectedness		Mean	Standard deviation	p
Neighbours	Before therapy	18,00	6,19	0,36
	After therapy	18,71	6,22	
Friends	Before therapy	22,00	4,85	0,45
	After therapy	22,50	4,50	
Self-in-the-present	Before therapy	20,25	4,17	<b>0,00*</b>
	After therapy	22,38	4,50	
Parents	Before therapy	22,58	4,36	0,73
	After therapy	22,42	4,93	
Siblings	Before therapy	19,15	3,71	0,84
	After therapy	19,25	3,40	
School	Before therapy	20,88	4,14	0,90
	After therapy	20,83	4,52	
Peers	Before therapy	20,50	3,83	0,73
	After therapy	20,25	4,41	
Teachers	Before therapy	20,58	3,51	0,65
	After therapy	20,88	4,00	
Self-in-the-future	Before therapy	23,13	4,23	1,00
	After therapy	23,13	4,27	
Reading	Before therapy	13,33	4,31	0,32
	After therapy	12,92	4,26	
Culturally different others	Before therapy	12,00	2,88	0,46
	After therapy	12,29	2,63	
Religion	Before therapy	8,71	3,10	1,00
	After therapy	8,71	2,97	
Close friend	Before therapy	20,00	3,24	<b>0,029*</b>
	After therapy	20,96	3,45	
Mother	Before therapy	20,08	4,23	0,36
	After therapy	20,42	3,74	
Father	Before therapy	16,25	5,50	0,29
	After therapy	17,04	5,17	

\* significance level  $p < 0,05$  (paired t-criterion)

The more detailed scale analysis disclosed that after application of play therapy adolescents' feeling of social connectedness to self ( $p < 0,000$ ) and to the close friend ( $p < 0,029$ ) increased.

Slight increase of the feeling of social connectedness in other domains is also observed but the change is statistically insignificant. Social connectedness strengthened in relationships with neighbours, friends, siblings, teachers, culturally different children, mother and father. Connectedness decreased in reading and did not change with regard to religion.

**Table 4.** Comparison of means of social connectedness scales in boys' and girls' groups

Connectedness		Boys (6)			Girls (18)		
		Mean	Standard deviation	p	Mean	Standard deviation	p
Overall scale	Before therapy	242,33	37,77	1,00	284,89	32,43	0,07
	After therapy	242,33	31,43		291,83	33,15	
Self	Before therapy	39,50	8,34	1,00	44,67	7,10	0,001*
	After therapy	39,50	4,59		47,50	7,40	
Others	Before therapy	138,33	24,48	0,54	164,50	17,99	0,26
	Before therapy	140,50	21,29		167,17	20,39	
Society	After therapy	64,50	9,42	0,23	75,72	12,79	0,29
	Before therapy	62,33	7,29		77,17	11,57	
Academic level	After therapy	86,00	12,65	0,16	102,56	13,26	0,85
	Before therapy	83,33	11,61		102,89	14,54	
Social level	Before therapy	78,50	15,39	0,61	80,83	13,39	0,011*
	After therapy	79,67	12,56		86,17	14,63	
Familial level	Before therapy	60,83	14,73	0,73	79,56	12,52	0,39
	After therapy	62,17	13,36		80,50	12,90	

\* significance level  $p < 0,05$  (paired t-criterion)

After application of play therapy, senior class pupils' social connectedness changed only in the *girls'* group: connectedness to self ( $p < 0,001$ ) and at the social level ( $p < 0,011$ ) increased. In the boys' group statistically significant change is not observed. Analysis of changes in means shows strengthening of the feeling of social connectedness to others, the family and society in the girls' group. In the *boys'* group the feeling of social connectedness increased in relationships with others, the family and at the social level but connectedness to society and at the academic level decreased.

Analysing remaining fifteen connectedness scales by sex, the statistically significant change is observed only in a few scales. Data of these scales will not be given in the table but they will be discussed in the brief review of significant changes.

*In the girls'* group the feeling of social connectedness strengthened to: self ( $p < 0,001$ ) and to the close friend ( $p < 0,05$ ). Girls' social interest increased in other domains too: interacting with neighbours, at school, with teachers, with culturally different people and with the father but decreased with peers and did not change with regard to religion (analysis of means).

*In the boys'* group social connectedness significantly decreased with regard to school ( $p < 0,05$ ). Boys' feeling of connectedness strengthened interacting with friends, culturally different children, with the close friend, the mother, particularly with the father but decreased communicating with neighbours, with peers and did not change with regard to reading and religion.

After application of play therapy the feeling of social connectedness intensified in fifteen-year-old children's group, compared with sixteen — eighteen-year-old adolescents.

**Table 5.** Comparison of means of social connectedness scales in fifteen-year-old and senior age adolescents' groups

Connectedness	Age	Fifteen-year-olds (15)			From 16 to 18 years old (9)		
		Mean	Standard deviation	p	Mean	Standard deviation	p
Overall scale	Before therapy	274,80	40,02	0,25	273,33	36,62	0,14
	After therapy	280,13	42,31		278,33	34,59	
Self	Before therapy	43,27	7,61	0,007*	43,56	8,02	0,22
	After therapy	45,53	7,87		45,44	7,57	
Others	Before therapy	159,00	22,51	0,57	156,22	23,56	0,08
	Before therapy	160,00	25,42		160,33	20,89	
Society	After therapy	72,53	13,66	0,34	73,56	12,11	0,54
	Before therapy	74,00	13,43		72,56	11,16	
Academic level	After therapy	97,80	15,29	0,49	99,44	14,72	0,57
	Before therapy	96,47	16,09		100,56	16,85	
Social level	Before therapy	78,80	13,87	0,022*	82,67	13,60	0,19
	After therapy	84,60	14,71		84,44	14,09	
Familial level	Before therapy	77,27	14,78	0,63	70,89	15,96	0,51
	After therapy	77,80	17,00		72,78	11,41	

\* significance level  $p < 0,05$  (paired t-criterion)

*Junior adolescents'* feeling of social connectedness strengthened to self ( $p < 0,05$ ) and at the social level ( $p < 0,05$ ). The analysis of means disclosed that the general feeling of connectedness strengthened as well as connectedness to others, society and family but it decreased at the academic level.

The analysis of means in the *senior age* adolescent's group demonstrates strengthening of the general feeling of social connectedness like of the feeling of social connectedness to others, the family, at the academic and social level but social connectedness to society decreased.

A more detailed analysis of social connectedness scales disclosed that in *fifteen-year-old children's group* connectedness strengthened to self ( $p < 0,001$ ), slightly less strengthened to neighbours, friends, school, culturally different children, the close friend, the mother, siblings and decreased to peers, parents, teachers and religion.

In *sixteen-eighteen-year-old children's group* the feeling of connectedness to self, friends, the close friend, the teacher, the mother and the father, religion strengthened but connectedness to neighbours, siblings, the school, peers decreased; social connectedness to parents, culturally different children did not change.

### Discussion of Results

The adolescents' changing attitude to themselves encourages to go deep into existing relationships with parents and friends and to try out different ways of social communication (Karcher et al., 2006; Ackard et al., 2006). Application of play therapy among senior adolescents helps them to slightly enhance the feeling of social connectedness to self and at the social level.

The age of adolescence is characterized by seeking independence from the family and other adults. Often the adolescent's social relationships with parents and teachers distance.

These relationships become important for them in another sense: they want their support, understanding and freedom in communication with peers (Ackard et al., 2006; Demaray et al., 2005). In general, due to application of play therapy the feeling of social connectedness with self and at the social level strengthened. Researchers' opinion that adolescents slightly distance from parents is confirmed: research results showed that the feeling of social connectedness at the family level did not change. A more detailed scale analysis demonstrates particularly strengthened feeling of connectedness to the close friend.

In the girls' group more significant changes in connectedness are observed than in the boys' group. Among girls the feeling of connectedness strengthened with self, the close friend and in general at the social level. In the boys' group strengthening of the feeling of connectedness is very small and statistically insignificant. The opposite change is observed with regard to the school: the feeling of social connectedness decreased.

In the junior age children's group the feeling of connectedness increased to self and at the social level but no changes took place in senior age children's group. It could be assumed that social relationships, the feeling of connectedness are much more significant for junior age children than for senior class pupils.

Summarizing the obtained research results, it can be confirmed that Raimundo's play therapy method "Game of Life" can be effectively applied to senior age pupils because it is short and effective.

This research can be important for further researches that will analyse effectiveness of play therapy and its applicability for senior age pupils. It would be purposeful in further researches to compare the impact of this play therapy method in case of more serious emotional disorders, such as depressiveness, anxiety and fear disorders; assess its applicability adjusting children's emotional and behavioural disorders as well as communication, adaptation difficulties. Researches would help to better understand what methods are most appropriate for solving certain problems.

According to scientific literature, both group and individual play therapy are effectively applied to help children dealing with the various problems and difficulties (Homeyer, 2000). It would be purposeful to apply this play therapy method in a small group of two-three children, in which the children could help each other.

Raimundo's play therapy method could be applied at school and at children's homes for adjustment of emotional and behavioural difficulties. Further researches that would more extensively evaluate effectiveness of Raimundo's play therapy method "Game of Life" in senior class pupils' therapy would enable to apply this short-term and effective play therapy in children's consulting.

## Conclusions

Generalisation of research findings resulted in the following conclusions:

1. Application of play therapy among senior adolescents helps to slightly strengthen the feeling of social connectedness. Application of play therapy among senior adolescents resulted in strengthening of the feeling of social connectedness to self and at the social level. A more detailed scale analysis demonstrates particular strengthening of the feeling of connectedness to the close friend.

2. In the girls' group more significant changes in connectedness are observed, compared with the boys' group. Among girls the feeling of social connectedness to self, to the close friend and in general at the social level strengthened. In the boys' group the increase of the feeling of social connectedness is very small and statistically insignificant but the feeling of connectedness with regard to school decreased.



3. Changes in the feeling of connectedness also depend on age: in the junior age adolescent's group the feeling of connectedness to self and at the social level enhanced while in the senior age adolescent's group changes did not take place.

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### Summary

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Analyzing various aspects of adolescence, scientists seek to disclose and predict how various environmental aspects influence the adolescent, his/her family and how interaction of various factors influencing the adolescent will affect the adolescent's further development. The research on psychological aspects of adolescence period is particularly important because it can help to identify difficulties encountered by the adolescent and ways of support in order to ensure formation of the personality that is adaptive and beneficial to the society. During adolescence particular changes take place in the structure of the personality: the adolescent is trying to find himself/herself looking for the self, experiencing the crisis of identity and identifying himself/herself with significant family members and friends. Trying to find himself/herself, the adolescent must cope with one more especially important task: to maintain emotional balance with parents: to achieve identity but emotionally not to distance from parents too much and maintain close emotional link (to be related to parents) (Noack & Puschner, 1999; Piquart & Silbereisen, 2002). The feeling of social connectedness experienced by the adolescent forms the adolescent's main personality constructs: the self, self-respect, self-worth, identity, which influence further personality development of the individual (Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer, Story & Perry, 2006), directly or indirectly influence the adolescent's academic achievements (Demaray, Malecki, Davidson, Hodgson & Rebus, 2005; Gregory & Weinstein, 2004). Thus, researches into adolescents' feeling of connectedness, identifying its dynamics in adolescence both due to general maturity and due to applied psychological impact could be particularly relevant and productive. However, there is a lack of such studies, although their results would help to provide psychological support more effectively.

The feeling of social connectedness is the ability to interact, cooperate, feel that you belong to the group, that you adjust to it and that you are its member (Kottman, 1999). Barber (2004) and Karcher et al. (2006) present social connectedness as an emotional/cognitive condition, sensuous expression or dynamic process. In this study, social connectedness is understood both as a state and as a dynamic process, since the aim is to explore changes in connectedness due to applied psychological impact.

The aim of this study is to disclose changes in connectedness due to application of play therapy in the senior adolescents' group. Assessing the feeling of social connectedness among senior adolescents, M. J. Karcher's (2002) social connectedness scale Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness was applied. There was the play therapy method, based on psychodrama principles, used (Raimundo, 2002, 2014; Barton, 2004).

It was found that:

Application of play therapy among senior adolescents helps to slightly strengthen the feeling of social connectedness. Application of play therapy among senior adolescents resulted in strengthening of the feeling of social connectedness to self and at the social level. A more detailed scale analysis demonstrates particular strengthening of the feeling of connectedness to the close friend.

In the girls' group more significant changes in connectedness are observed, compared with the boys' group. Among girls the feeling of social connectedness to self, to the close friend and in general at the social level strengthened. In the boys' group the increase of the feeling of social connectedness is very small and statistically insignificant but the feeling of connectedness with regard to school decreased.

Changes in the feeling of connectedness also depend on age: in the junior age adolescent's group the feeling of connectedness to self and at the social level enhanced while in the senior age adolescent's group changes did not take place.