Social Support, Self-Control and Subjective Well-Being as Predictors of Psychological and Social Adjustment among Arab Adolescents in Israel

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Abstract

*Adjustment is the process in which one learns to vary one’s behaviour and attitudes toward the goal of achieving harmony with oneself, with others, and with the environment. It is especially challenging for adolescents, who face the developmental task of developing a stable identity in a stage of life in which crises and conflicts abound. It is even more fraught for adolescents living in a society experiencing social change, such as Arab society in Israel. This society is undergoing processes of modernization and not only Israelization but also the contrary process of Palestinization, a situation that puts obstacles in Arab adolescents' path to developing their identity. This study examines the personal and social resources that may improve personal and social adjustment of Arab adolescents at school and in society, assessing the contribution of self-control, social support and subjective**well-being to improved social and personal adjustment and how they predict variance in adjustment levels.*

Keywords: adjustment, self-control, subjective well-being, social support

# Introduction

Personal and social adjustment, the process in which individuals choose behaviours and attitudes that put them in harmony with themselves, with those around them, and the broader society, depends on the development of self-control and social skills, the level of social support, and societal stability. The adjustment of Arab adolescents is particularly challenging for two reasons. They are in a stage of life often characterized by emotional lability, crisis, and conflict. In addition, they are living in a Jewish state within an Arab society shaped by modernization processes and both Israelization and Palestinization, which are often contradictory forces.

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Arab adolescents in Israel face serious challenges to achieving this al task. They belong to a society.[[2]](#footnote-2),ethnic group, level of ,and M

This studyesof Arab adolescents determinessubjective well-being and how well these factors predict variance in levels of adjustment[[3]](#footnote-3) u[[4]](#footnote-4).[[5]](#footnote-5)This study first assesses subjective well-beingit thenstrengthening the latter three factorsimprove Arab and how those factors predict variance in adjustment

# Theoretical Background

## Social and Personal Adjustment

Wollman defines adjustment as the process in which changes in behaviours and attitudes are made for the purpose of satisfying the environment's demands and the person's needs. He emphasizes that the aim of adjustment is to create harmonious relations between a person and his or her environment.[[6]](#footnote-6) Grossman, in contrast, defines adjustment as the efficiency with which individuals meet the standards of independence and personal responsibility expected of them at their age and in their culture.[[7]](#footnote-7) Yet another definition, due to Avnion, states that adjustment is a process of becoming habituated to a new situation and adapted to given conditions;[[8]](#footnote-8) this process is usually measured on a timeline because the level and quality of adjustment change over time.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The process of adjustment takes place in many domains: physical, psychological, and social, amongst them. Psychological adjustment has been defined both as a process whereby a person adapts the satisfaction of his or her needs and inner drives to the ethical demands of the external world,[[10]](#footnote-10) and as an inner psychological product incorporating a person's sense of personal and cultural identity, subjective well-being and sense of satisfaction.[[11]](#footnote-11) Social adjustment refers to the extent to which individuals in a society get along with others, control their social behaviour and refrain from acting inappropriately. Normal social adjustment requires the ability to acquire social skills, engage in social interactions, and attain personal goals, while maintaining proper relations with others in a variety of social environments.[[12]](#footnote-12) It relies on a child's ability to recognize significant social cues; to correctly assess another's emotional state, thoughts and intentions; and to learn to regulate his or her feelings and behaviour and fit them to different reactions and social situations.[[13]](#footnote-13) These abilities have affective and cognitive components and evolve over time.[[14]](#footnote-14)

As noted earlier, adjustment reflects an individual's personal and social skills, such as self-control, as well as emotional and social awareness in major domains and functions of life. During adolescence, the development of these skills and awareness is challenging but very important to future development. This study thus examines how self-control skills, including problem-solving abilities, and social, cognitive, and affective skills can contribute to improving personal and social adjustment of Arab adolescents.

## Factors that Facilitate Adjustment

### Self-control

Self-control is the acquired repertory of cognitive and affective skills that enable a person to attain goals and to overcome obstacles on the way to their attainment**.[[15]](#footnote-15)** It enables an individual to choose appropriate behaviour that would facilitate meeting his or her goals**.[[16]](#footnote-16)** This definition emphasizes two features of self-control: having free choice and making a choice between two possibly contradictory behaviours at a given time.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Self-control is based on cognitive abilities—cognitive structuring, problem-solving strategies, control of one’s inner speech and self-direction—as well as confidence in one's ability to control one’s emotions and feelings. Dodge claims that children who possess self-control are better able to regulate their emotions, curb negative feelings, and plan and think in a more balanced manner.[[18]](#footnote-18) They are able to understand social codes, interpret events more realistically, and choose less impulsive responses.[[19]](#footnote-19) .[[20]](#footnote-20)

Several studies have examined self-control among Arab adolescents and students as a variable that can temper violent behaviour, reduce risky behaviour and depression, help them cope with stress and improve subjective well-being.[[21]](#footnote-21)

### Social Support

Although self-control is a personality resource that makes coping possible, the environmental resource of social support is of no less importance. According to Cobb, social support is a result of long-lasting social interactions among people with similar values, who can be trusted and from whom one can obtain encouragement, help and feedback.[[22]](#footnote-22) These relationships enable individuals to believe that there are those who love, appreciate and take care of them and that they belong to a configuration of mutual ties and commitments. Cohen and Wills view social support as a system that provides four major types of support: opportunities to consult and share with others, substantive or material support, support for one's self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Social support can emanate from a number of sources, such as one's spouse, relatives, friends, colleagues and professional workers.[[23]](#footnote-23) Because individuals engage in transference and generalization of their parent-child relationship to their broader environment, that initial relationship becomes the basis for the ability to feel trust and safety.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Positive social relationships give adolescents a sense of capability and success. They help young people function as helpers and supporters, enhancing their self-esteem and making them feel that they have something to contribute to their society.[[25]](#footnote-25) Helping others thus reduces dependence and gives individuals a sense of control and value. Adolescents can provide informal support to their friends by listening and by sharing anxiety, grief and worries. An adolescent may confide in a friend and share sensitive information that he or she would not tell an adult or a professional. Studies have found that in cases of depression, social problems, or when seeking information about contraceptives, adolescents prefer to speak to their friends than to parents, older relatives, counselors, psychologists and the like.

There are many studies on the importance of social support for helping children and adolescents cope with stressful situations. Research has confirmed that social support among Arab adolescents reduces violent (Agbaria, 2014) and risky behaviour (Agbaria & Abu Raya, 2014), helps them cope with stress (Agbaria, Ronen & Hamama, 2012) and depression (Agbaria, 2013) and improves subjective well-being (Abu Raya & Agbaria, in press).

Studies have also shown that the level of social support can predict adolescents’ adjustment.[[26]](#footnote-26) Support from family and friends has been found to correlate positively with academic and personal adjustment.[[27]](#footnote-27) Parental support has been shown to be a uniquely powerful predictor of adjustment among both boys and girls, whereas peer support is a uniquely powerful predictor of adjustment among boys.[[28]](#footnote-28)

### Subjective Well-being

Subjective well-being (SWB) refers both to people's subjective assessment of the quality of their lives, happiness, and satisfaction and to the qualitative assessment of their inner experiences in various domains.[[29]](#footnote-29) It is based on emotional reactions and cognitive judgements; it therefore encompasses moods and self-evaluations of satisfaction and happiness in general and relating to specific aspects of life.

Early studies on SWB dealt mainly with the connection between its affective and cognitive components. The affective component, which is the focus of this study, consists of a person's assessment of felt positive and negative affects—excitement, happiness, dejection and so on—elicited by everyday experiences, as well as the frequency of those affects. Such an assessment is spontaneous and experiential, based on a comparison between one's positive and negative feelings.[[30]](#footnote-30) High levels of SWB result from high levels of positive affect and low levels of negative affect.[[31]](#footnote-31) The cognitive component of SWB involves the assessment of the rational and intellectual aspects of an individual's satisfaction with life, as determined by a comparison between achievements and aspirations.[[32]](#footnote-32)

People with high SWB levels have been found to have more satisfying relationships and a greater ability to bond to others, help and understand them, cooperate, act prosocially and altruistically and solve conflicts efficiently. They feel more in control of their lives, are able to cope effectively with stressful situations, and set themselves goals in life.[[33]](#footnote-33)

An individual’s level of SWB affects how he or she copes with distress and stressful situations. High levels of SWB increase coping ability by enhancing social skills.[[34]](#footnote-34) People with high levels of SWB respond faster to negative events and so cope with them more successfully than those with low SWB levels.[[35]](#footnote-35) Thus, adolescents who have high levels of SWB will do a better job of coping with the circumstances of their lives and adapt to them more efficiently.

To the best of my knowledge, no studies have been conducted on the relationship between SWB and social and emotional adjustment among Arab adolescents, although several studies have found a correlation between SWB and school violence among Arab adolescents.[[36]](#footnote-36)

### Number of Siblings

Relationships between siblings are fundamental and have long-term effects on the psychological and social development of children and adolescents and on the quality of their relationships in the future; sibling relationships affect psychological autonomy, SWB and behaviour.[[37]](#footnote-37) For example, having a large number of siblings can be expected to provide more frequent interaction partners at home, which in turn would be expected to have a positive effect on personal and social development, especially with respect to interpersonal skills.[[38]](#footnote-38) Agbaria, Ronen and Hamama likewise show that having a large number of siblings may contribute to improving SWB and reducing pathological symptoms.[[39]](#footnote-39) In a study examining the correlation between the number of siblings and three personality traits—internalization of problematic behaviour, perception of self and self- control—Yucel finds that the number of siblings has only a modest effect on personality traits among young adolescents.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Some studies claim that having multiple siblings exerts a negative effect on the development of children and adolescents. It may have a deleterious effect on academic achievement due to the dilution of parental resources.[[41]](#footnote-41) A number of studies indicate that one sibling can provide all the fraternal interactions needed to develop social skills and having that more siblings, although it will increase the number of interactions, will not necessarily contribute to the improvement of social skills.

Other studies have analysed the correlation between the number of siblings and social skills, but with inconsistent results.[[42]](#footnote-42) However, Dunn finds that having several brothers can provide increased social support and improve SWB and adaptation skills by making richer social interactions possible.[[43]](#footnote-43) Encounters among siblings help them acquire more highly developed critical interpersonal abilities that lead to richer relationships.[[44]](#footnote-44) Building on these studies, Hypothesis 4 claims that, for Arab adolescents, who live in a society characterized by a strong sense of community, having multiple siblings will contribute toward the development of more positive personality traits.

# Study Methodology

## Research Hypotheses

This study has the following four hypotheses:

1. A positive correlation will be found between self-control and personal and social adjustment, so that self-control will be a positive predictor of variance in personal and social adjustment.
2. A positive correlation will be found between social support and personal and social adjustment, so that social support will be a positive predictor of variance in personal and social adjustment.
3. A positive correlation will be found between subjective well-being and personal and social adjustment, so that subjective well-being will be a positive predictor of variance in personal and social adjustment.
4. A positive correlation will be found between the number of siblings and personal and social adjustment, so that the number of siblings will be a positive predictor of variance in personal and social adjustment.

## Study Sample

The study sample was obtained by convenience sampling at twelve secondary schools in the Triangle and North districts; most of the students at these schools came from middle-class homes. It consisted of 800 Arab students in the tenth grade; more than two-thirds of participants were girls (70.2%). The students were between fifteen and sixteen years old: 40.1 per cent were fifteen years old, 3.3 per cent were fifteen-and-a-half years old, and 56.6 per cent were sixteen years old . The median age was sixteen, and the average age was 15.58 years with a standard deviation of 0.48. Half the participants had three or fewer siblings, more than 40 per cent had between four and six siblings, and the rest (6.6%) had between seven and nine siblings. The median number of siblings for the sample was three, and the average number was 3.76, with a standard deviation of 1.60.

## Research Tools

### Personal and Social Adjustment (Appendix 1)

To measure personal and social adjustment, I administered the California Test of Personality (CTP), a diagnostic test for children and youths between the ages of eight and eighteen that gives an adjustment profile of the subject.[[45]](#footnote-45) The test addresses two types of adjustment: personal (affective) and social. The components of the category **of** personal adjustment are self-confidence, self-esteem, sense of personal liberty, sense of belonging, tendency towards reservation and signs of sadness. The components of the social adjustment category are social standards, social skills, antisocial tendencies, domestic relationships, school relationships and community relationships. Each category consists of forty-eight yes-and-no questions (yes=1, no=2); a subject can thus score between48 and 96 in each category. TheCTP has been found to correlate strongly (between 0.60–0.87) with clinical findings.[[46]](#footnote-46) The test was adapted for use in Israel by Blitzki[[47]](#footnote-47) and has subsequently been used in a number of studies.[[48]](#footnote-48) Its reliability in these studies ranged between 0.89 and 0.90 for personal adjustment and between 0.86 and 0.90 on the questionnaire that tested for social adjustment. Hubal Abbas found, for example, a reliability of 0.85 for the personal adjustment part of the test and 0.84 for the social adjustment part.[[49]](#footnote-49)

To make the task of completing the questionnaire less onerous, I selected 48 items (24 for each category) that had been found to have the highest reliability in earlier studies on the Arab population.[[50]](#footnote-50) The category of personal adjustment consisted of three dimensions: self-confidence (questions 1–8): ‘Do you find it easy to speak before the children in the classroom’?; self-esteem (questions 9–16): ‘Do your parents think that you are talented’?; and a sense of belonging (questions 17–24): ‘Do people want you near them’? The category of social adjustment also consisted of three dimensions: social skills (questions 25–32): ‘Do you speak with the new children in school’?; school relationships (questions 33–40): ‘Are there many bad children in your school’?; and community relationships (questions 41–48): ‘Do you get invited to play in the neighbour's yard’?

This study yielded the following reliability values: for overall adjustment, α = 0.80; for overall personal adjustment**,** α = 0.75**;** for personal adjustment (self-confidence)**,** α = 0.65**;** for personal adjustment (self-esteem)**,** α = 0.63**;** for personal adjustment (sense of belonging) α = 0.75; for overall social adjustment**,** α = 0.70**;** for social adjustment (social skill**s**)**,** α = 0.60**;** for social adjustment (school relationships)**,** α = 0.69**;** and for social adjustment (community relationships)**,** α = 0.65.

### Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS;Appendix 2)

PANAS was developed for adults by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen in 1988 and was later adapted for children and adolescents by Laurent et al. in 1999.[[51]](#footnote-51) I used the version that tested subjective well-being among adolescents. It contains two verbal scales on which subjects rate their feelings on a positive affect scale and a negative affect. The scale for positive affect consists of ten items associated with feelings of vitality and pleasure (‘shows interest’, ‘alert’, ‘excited’, ‘happy’, ‘strong’, ‘energetic’, ‘calm’, ‘vital’, ‘active’, ‘proud’, ‘gay’, ‘fearless’, ‘touched’, and ‘daring’). The scale for negative affect also contains ten items, which are associated with subjective distress, anger, fear, guilt and nervousness (‘sad’, ‘scared’, ‘ashamed’, ‘despondent’, ‘nervous’, ‘guilty’, ‘worried’, ‘unhappy’, ‘tense’, ‘frightened’, ‘lonely’, ‘insane’, ‘disgusted’, ‘depressed’, and ‘bleak’). Subjects assess the extent to which they have experienced such feelings in recent weeks on a scale from 1–5 (1= ‘very little’, 2 = ‘a little’, 3 = ‘some’, 4 =‘quite a lot’ and 5 = ‘very much’). They receive two scores: one for positive affect (where a high grade indicates a high level of subjective well-being) and one for negative affect (where a high grade indicates a low level of subjective well-being).

I found a reliability of α = 0.82 for positive affect and α = 0.70 for negative affect, compared to the study by Agbaria and Ronen, which found r = 0.80 for positive affect and α = 0.79 for negative affect.[[52]](#footnote-52)

### Self-control Questionnaire (Appendix 3)

Rosenbaum originally developed this questionnaire in1980 to assess individual differences in self-control skills.[[53]](#footnote-53) It asks subjects to report on the use of cognitions (for example, instructions to themselves) and problem-solving strategies for coping with emotional and physiological responses. The questionnaire was adapted for children by Rosenbaum and Ronen to include thirty-two items expressing various parameters of self-control skills, such as delaying gratification, overcoming pain, planning, and using self-instruction; for example, ‘When I am in a bad mood I try to think of good things that can make me happy or things that gave me pleasure in the past’, and ‘When I don't know the answer to a question in a test I go on to the next question and try not to let the unanswered question bother me’.[[54]](#footnote-54) Subjects rate each item on the extent to which it is typical of his or her behaviour or thoughts. The scale has six responses: -1= ‘very untypical of me‘; -2= ‘fairly untypical of me‘; -3= ‘somewhat untypical of me‘; 1= ‘somewhat typical of me’; 2= ‘typical of me’; and 3- ‘very typical of me’. Reverse items are 4, 6, 8, 14, 17, 18, 26, 31 and 32. The questionnaire is constructed with one factor, so that a high score indicates a high degree of self-control.

The questionnaire has been validated in a number of studies. A test of its reliability for adults and adolescents found relatively high values of the Cronbach alpha (0.85 – 0.87), and lower values for children (0.65 – 0.69);[[55]](#footnote-55) the older the child, the higher the alpha.[[56]](#footnote-56) Agbaria and Ronen found a high value for the Cronbach alpha coefficient (r = 0.77) for the Arabic version.[[57]](#footnote-57) In this study I calculated the Cronbach alpha for the entire sample at α = 0.83.

### Social Support: Social Support Questionnaire

This questionnaire has twelve items that assess characteristics of the support system: the degree of support provided and from which sources, its denseness and its availability.[[58]](#footnote-58) It uses a scale from 1–4 (1, ‘very untypical of me’, to 4, ‘very typical of me’). The higher the score, the greater the perceived social support. Reverse items in the social support questionnaire are 1, 2, 7, 8, 11, 12. The Arabic version received a high Cronbach alpha coefficient (α = 0.90) in the study by Agbaria.[[59]](#footnote-59) In this study I obtained a value of α = 0.65, after removing item 8.

### Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix 5)

Each participant answered questions on his or her age, gender, and number of siblings.

## Research Procedure

After obtaining the needed clearances**,** school principals were approached for permission to conduct the study and distribute the questionnaires. Then the parents were asked in writing to give their consent to having their children participate. After all the parties gave consent, I went into the classrooms on a normal school day and explained the study's purpose, stressing that the questionnaires would remain anonymous. Ninety per cent of the students agreed to participate.

I calculated ,and, as well assubjective well-being shown Correlations among the study's variables were then calculated (Table 2). To test the research hypotheses I performed a stepwise regression analysis (Tables 3 and 4).

# Findings

Overall, the students rated personal and social adjustment and most adjustment components as medium or higher, social support as high, the level of self-control as medium, positive affect as slightly above medium and negative affect as slightly below medium. As shown in Table 1, adjustment and its components were positively correlated with social support, self-control and positive affect, and negatively correlated with negative affect (with the exception of community relationships).

The data supported Hypothesis 1’s claim of a positive correlation between personal and social adjustment and self-control, but not the predictive ability of self-control to explain variance in adjustment levels. Whereas Table 2 showed a statistically significant correlation between self-control and personal adjustment (r = .18, p < .05) and between self-control and social adjustment (r = .20, p < .05), the regression analysis for predicting personal adjustment (Table 3) found that self-control did not contribute in a way that was statistically significant towards explaining variance in that category (B = -.008, SE = .01, β = -.002); similarly Table 4 found that self-control did not contribute in a statistically significant manner towards explaining variance in social adjustment (B = .02, SE = .01, β = .10).

In contrast, the findings supported Hypothesis 2—that there is a positive correlation between personal and social adjustment and social support. Table 2 showed a statistically significant correlation between social support and personal adjustment (r = .51, p < .01) and between social support and social adjustment (r = .31, p < .01). The regression analysis for predicting personal adjustment (Table 3) found that self-control contributed in a way that was statistically significant towards explaining variance in that category (B = .35, SE = .02, β = .13), as did the regression analysis for predicting social adjustment (Table 4; B = .08, SE = .03, β = .23).

Hypothesis 3, which holds that personal and social adjustment correlates with subjective well-being, as tested through positive and negative affects, was also supported by the findings. Table 2 showed a statistically significant correlation between positive affect and personal adjustment (r = .44, p < .01) and between positive affect and social adjustment (r = .26, p < .01); conversely, there was a statistically significant negative correlation between negative affect and personal adjustment (r = -.39, p < .01) and between negative affect and social adjustment (r = -.24, p < .01). The regression analysis for predicting personal adjustment (Table 3) found that both positive affect (B = .32, SE = .01, β = .05) and negative affect (B = .29, SE = .01, β = .05) contributed in a way that was statistically significant towards explaining variance in that category. Although the regression analysis for predicting social adjustment (Table 4) found that positive affect did not contribute in a statistically significant manner towards explaining variance in that category (B = .02, SE = .01, β = .14), negative affect did contribute significantly towards explaining such variance (B = -.05, SE = .01, β = -.21).

The evidence is mixed for Hypothesis 4, which claims that personal and social adjustment correlate with the number of siblings. Table 1 showed no statistically significant correlation between the number of siblings and personal adjustment (r = -.02, p. > .05), and the regression analysis for predicting personal adjustment (Table 3) found that the number of siblings did not contribute in a way that was statistically significant towards explaining variance in that category (B = -.04, SE = .009, β = -.004).

In contrast, for social adjustment, Table 1 showed a statistically significant positive correlation with the number of siblings (r = .17, p < .05); similarly the regression analysis for predicting social adjustment (Table 3) found that the number of siblings contributed in a statistically significant manner towards explaining variance in that category (B = .01, SE = .008, β = .16).

# Discussion

This study had three aims: to assess (1) how the personal and social adjustment of Arab adolescents living in Israel correlates with self-control, subjective well-being (positive and negative affect) and social support; (2) how those variables contribute to improving social and personal adjustment and (3) how those variables predict differences in the level of personal and social adjustment. Its findings support the importance of developmental components and personal and social resources to personal and social adjustment and point to the contribution of the personal resources of self-control, subjective well-being and social support to predicting the level of personal and social adjustment among adolescents. These findings were broadly consistent with those of earlier studies conducted in various contexts.[[60]](#footnote-60)

## Self-control and Social and Personal Adjustment

The study found that self-control is correlated with adjustment and makes some contribution to predicting personal and social adjustment. Thus the second element of Hypothesis I was only partially confirmed, in that the predictive value of self-control was not statistically significant. This finding can be explained by the complexity of the concept of adjustment and the multiplicity of variables that are involved in predicting it and that can moderate the influence of self-control. It is consistent with results from earlier studies on self-control and adjustment,[[61]](#footnote-61) as well as with studies on the contribution of self-control to reducing violence, depression and risky behaviour and to increase coping with stressful situations, all variables that are considered important indices for measuring personal adjustment among adolescents.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Furthermore, the study found that self-control promotes positive personal and social adjustment and is associated with a child's ability to identify significant social clues from which to understand the thoughts and intentions of others, in order to regulate his or her own feelings and behaviour and adapt it to different situations.[[63]](#footnote-63) The findings are consistent with Dodge's (social information processing model, according to which children with more self-control are better able to regulate their emotions and control negative feelings and are also able to plan and think in a less emotional manner.[[64]](#footnote-64) In other words, self-control helps students cope with stressful situations[[65]](#footnote-65) and contributes to improving their personal and social adjustment by helping them regulate their feelings.

## Social Support and Personal and Social Adjustment

The study's findings point to a positive correlation between social support and social and personal adjustment, thus validating Hypothesis 2. These findings are consistent with earlier studies[[66]](#footnote-66) and seem to confirm the important role that the social environment has on the developmental process. Social support contributes greatly to shaping an adolescent's personal identity. The social-emotional function is an important index in the lives of adolescents, one that explains their expectations of support; that support encourages them to invest cognitive and emotional resources to create ties characterized by caring, security and trust and that satisfy the need for appreciation.[[67]](#footnote-67) Thus the social support that an adolescent receives from family and friends is critical at that age, because it can help them resolve issues that are of relevance to them.[[68]](#footnote-68)

These findings are consistent with the literature on social support among Arab adolescents on its contribution to reducing violent and risky behaviour, coping with stressful situations, reducing depression and improving subjective well-being.[[69]](#footnote-69) Most of these variables are considered important indices for measuring problems of adjustment among adolescents. In other words, personal and social adjustment is strongly associated with the social support that an individual receives: the greater the support, the better the social and personal adjustment.[[70]](#footnote-70) Social support is thus an adjustment factor that contributes to the development of adolescents and improves social, educational and academic outputs.

Each social support system makes a unique contribution to personal and social adjustment. Good relations with one's parents contribute to a sense of satisfaction and increased subjective well-being, which may be used as measures of personal adjustment. Students who build a network of social connections with their peers function better socially than students who suffer from a lack of social support and are found to have low levels of social adjustment.[[71]](#footnote-71) A sense of closeness and connection can thus provide protection against negative affects.

## Subjective Well-being and Social and Personal Adjustment

The findings support Hypothesis 3, pointing to a significant positive correlation between positive affect and personal adjustment and to a significant negative correlation between negative affect and personal adjustment. In a regression analysis for predicting personal adjustment it was found that both positive and negative affects are significant for the explanation of variance in that domain. These findings are consistent with studies that show that high levels of subjective well-being (SWB) can help individuals cope with stressful situations, because they motivate their social skills, help them reach decisions, and promote creative thinking.[[72]](#footnote-72) People with positive SWB respond to negative events faster and therefore cope with them better than people with low levels of subjective well-being.[[73]](#footnote-73)

A stepwise regression analysis for predicting social adjustment found that positive affect does not make a statistically significant contribution towards explaining variance in social adjustment, but that negative affect is a significant explanatory factor. In other words, negative affect contributes significantly to students' social adjustment, but positive affect is not necessarily a predictor of good social adjustment, despite its contribution to personal adjustment.

The study's findings show a correlation between positive SWB and social adjustment, in line with an earlier study that found that people with high levels of SWB had more satisfying relationships; were more capable of becoming attached to others and to help, understand and cooperate with them; acted in an altruistic manner, resolved conflicts efficiently; felt more in control of their lives; coped effectively with stressful situations and set goals in life.[[74]](#footnote-74) There can thus be no doubt that students who demonstrate a greater degree of SWB will cope better with life's problems and will adjust more efficiently.

## Number of Siblings and Social and Personal Adjustment

The study found no significant correlation between the number of siblings and personal adjustment. The regression analysis for predicting personal adjustment found that the contribution of the number of siblings to explaining variance in that category was not statistically significant. In contrast, earlier psychological and sociological studies found that having more siblings did have a statistically significant negative impact on the development of children and adolescents and on academic achievement, because children with many siblings had to compete for parental resources.[[75]](#footnote-75)

However, a significant correlation was found between the number of siblings and social adjustment: The more brothers an individual has, the better his or her social adjustment. In addition, the regression analysis found that the number of brothers made a statistically significant contribution towards explaining variance in social adjustment. This finding is consistent with several studies in the psychological literature that showed that the number of siblings has a unique positive effect on social development.[[76]](#footnote-76) Siblings give children their first opportunities for interaction with their age peers; these social experiences provide behavioural training that enables them eventually to go out into society armed with helpful social skills that contribute to positive social adjustment. Siblings promote the acquisition of well-developed critical interpersonal abilities in addition to providing rich interactions. Another study considered siblings a resource and argued that the mere presence of multiple siblings helped one acquire interpersonal skills.[[77]](#footnote-77) Having a large number of siblings was found to reduce children's externalization and promoted self-control in a sample of kindergarten children.[[78]](#footnote-78) The more siblings there are, the better the individual is able to develop social skills and abilities.

Fraternal relations thus have long-term effects on the personalities of children and adolescents and on their success in future relationships. Siblings within the family system influence children's and adolescents' psychological and social development, their psychological autonomy, their subjective well-being and their behaviour.

# Educational Applications

This study focused on Arab adolescents in the tenth grade and how both personal and social resources contributed to their personal and social adjustment among them. Fifteen- to sixteen-year-old students are making the transition from middle to secondary school, and this study indicated the need for and impact of sensitive and structured interventions to facilitate that transition. The study also built on existing data on adjustment among adolescents in school, especially the importance of positive social and personal adjustment during periods of transition in the lives of adolescents.

The study's findings should be used to guide the development of training programs for students in developing and implementing self-control skills, social and personal skills, anger management, and cognitive reframing, thereby enabling them to better cope with various social and inner stimuli. Such programs can contribute to improving adjustment so as to bring about a reduction in violent behaviour and in the school dropout rate. They will also enable Arab adolescents to develop more adaptive behaviours and become better integrated into society.

Another practical contribution will be the increased effectiveness of teacher training and of parent education. Workshops should be held for parents, teachers and school staff on the importance of self-control, subjective well-being and social support during the period of transition between middle and secondary school. One desired outcome of these workshops would be a support group for adolescents that would help them reduce their negative feelings that could deleteriously affect their social and cognitive functioning.

# The Study's Limitations and Proposals for Future Research

This study suffers from several limitations that restrict its generalizability. First, it lacks randomness; it is based on a convenience sample comprising one ethnic group from a specific geographical region: Muslim Arabs from the ‘Triangle’ region. This region contains about 20 per cent of Israel's Muslim Arab population.[[79]](#footnote-79) No Christians, Druze or Bedouins were part of the sample. Further study is thus needed that will encompass the various groups in Arab society. Furthermore, the present study was limited to students in the tenth grade, and so research is needed to obtain data on students of other age groups, especially in middle school.

Secondly, the research was done using a quantitative methodology and solely relied on questionnaires completed by the subjects themselves. In addition, all the research variables were internal personality components that could only be measured by self-reporting. Using questionnaires risks introducing biases into the findings due to social volition or because of the adolescent desire to express independent and eccentric opinions. It must be remembered that self-reporting data may reflect no more than a tendency. It is therefore recommended to use additional research tools in future, such as questionnaires for teachers and for peers.

Thirdly, the study was carried out against a background of a relative dearth of research on the Arab population of Israel, which makes it difficult to compare its findings to others. Follow-up studies can further elucidate these findings, give them greater precision and make them clearer. Such studies may shed light on issues that are also relevant to the present study, such as economic status and academic achievement.

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