

# Gratitude as a Moderator for the Relation Between Relationship Quality and Social-Emotional Competence in Opportunity Youth

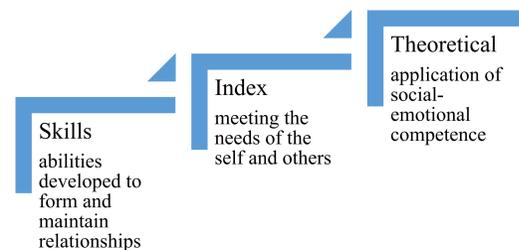
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## Introduction

- Homeless or at-risk adolescents and young adults may experience social-emotional risks, such as difficulties forming and maintaining relationships (Cleverley & Kidd, 2011).
- The current study refers to homeless or at-risk adolescents and young adults as opportunity youth in recognition of their potential (Belfield, 2012).
- Social-emotional competence is the effectiveness or ease with which an individual can understand and interact with their social and emotional world (Rose-Krasnor, 1997).
- Social-emotional competence is proposed to develop through 3 levels in the Social Competence Prism (Rose-Krasnor, 1997):



- Relationship quality is the perceived level of connection that an individual has with others (Farooqi, 2014). This term reflects the Index level of the Social Competence Prism (Rose-Krasnor, 1997).
- Gratitude is the value of a benefactor recognizing the wants and needs of the recipient (Algoe, 2012; Hussong et al., 2018). It is an ability at the Skills level of the Social Competence Prism (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Prior research suggests gratitude is positively related to both relationship quality (Algoe, 2012; Kubacka et al., 2011) and social-emotional competence (Caputo, 2015; Casu et al., 2020), suggesting that it may also serve to strengthen the relation between the two variables.

**Hypothesis 1:** Relationship quality will be positively related to social-emotional competence.

**Hypothesis 2:** Gratitude will moderate the relation between relationship quality and social-emotional competence.

## Methods

### Participants:

- 38 youth recruited across six sites in Minnesota providing Independent Living Skills (ILS) services through Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota.
- 35 of participant's responses were used for data analysis due to 3 incompletions.

### Procedure:

- Secondary analysis of the Good Gifts Project (GGP) data.
- Youth were informed about GGP when enrolling in ILS and consent was obtained from interested youth.
- A 20-minute pre-test survey was conducted in the first ILS meeting and youth received \$30 for survey completion.

### Measures:

- Relationship Quality:** Social Connections (17 items) (positive relationships with others and self) and Concrete Supports (10 items) (accessing and valuing necessary resources) (Center for the Study of Social Policy and Metis Associates, 2018)
- Social-Emotional Competence:** Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence scale (16 items) (abilities and attitudes to develop identity and sense of adulthood) (Center for the Study of Social Policy and Metis Associates, 2018)
- Gratitude:** Self-Reported Gratitude Scale (13-items) (responses to items about how often youth experienced different aspects of moments they were thankful) (Hussong et al., 2008)

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range	Alpha
Gratitude	3.8	.78	1.8 - 5.0	.94
Relationship Quality	3.8	.70	2.2 - 5.0	.93
Social-Emotional Competence	4.0	.64	2.3 - 5.0	.89
Age	3.1	.81	2.0 - 5.0	

### Correlation Table

	Gratitude	Relationship Quality	Social-Emotional Competence	Age
Gratitude	1.00			
Relationship Quality	.50**	1.00		
Social-Emotional Competence	.32*	.63***	1.00	
Age	-.06	-.13	.08	1.00

\*Marginal Significance ( $p = .06$ )  
\*\* $p < .01$   
\*\*\* $p < .0001$

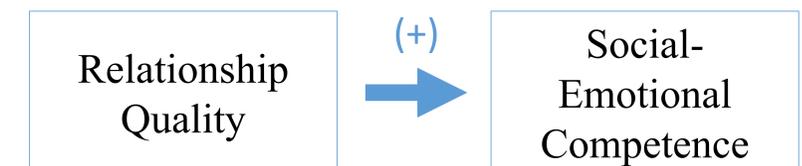
### Linear Regressions

	Beta	Standard Error	T-Test	P-Value	R <sup>2</sup>
<b>Hypothesis 1: Relationship Quality is Associated with Social-Emotional Competence</b>					
Intercept	1.75	.48	3.64	<.001	.38
Relationship Quality	.57	.12	4.67	<.0001	
<b>Hypothesis 2: Gratitude Moderates the Relation Between Relationship Quality and Social-Emotional Competence</b>					
Intercept	1.75	2.09	.84	.40	.34
Relationship Quality	.57	.58	.98	.34	
Gratitude	.00	.59	.00	1.00	
Relationship Quality x Gratitude	.00	.16	.01	.99	

When models were estimated for the main effect of relationship quality (hypothesis 1) and for the interaction of relationship quality and gratitude (hypothesis 2) without trimming non-significant covariates, findings did not meaningfully change.

## Discussion

- Relationship quality was positively related to social-emotional competence.
- Gratitude did not moderate the relation between relationship quality and social-emotional competence. However, the correlation between relationship quality and gratitude in addition to the model becoming non-significant when gratitude is controlled for indicates possible overlap between relationship quality and gratitude. The association between relationship quality and gratitude could be an area of future research to pursue. Additionally, future research could investigate potential moderators other than gratitude, such as empathy or other skills.
- Contextual factors happening during or immediately preceding recruitment for the Good Gifts Project, including civil unrest due to continued police brutality against people of color and lapses in the provision of social services due to COVID-19, may have contributed to the small sample size achieved and potentially influenced self-report responses to the survey.
- The study's strengths include high internal validity and access to a sample of homeless or at-risk youth, allowing for insight into an often-understudied population.
- Implications of these findings include ways to improve the lives of opportunity youth by providing support for building and maintaining relationships and promoting social-emotional competence.



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