

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Volunteer Blood Donors' Wellbeing: Social Connectedness and Belongingness as Multiple Mediators

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This research examines the mediating roles of social connectedness and belongingness in the relationship between emotional intelligence and wellbeing. The study group for the research consists of 1001 volunteer blood donors ($M_{age} = 38.33$, $SD = 10.78$). The participants were subjected to wellbeing, emotional intelligence, social connectedness, and belongingness scales. The correlation analysis has revealed emotional intelligence to be positively correlated with wellbeing, social connectedness, and belongingness. Furthermore, the results from the mediation analyses indicate that social connectedness and belongingness mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and wellbeing. All findings provide us with a better understanding of the variables influencing volunteer blood donors' wellbeing.

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Emotions guide individuals' decisions as well as their actions in life. Individuals who act by recognizing their emotions can have healthier interpersonal relationships. Goleman (2006) stated in his research on emotional intelligence that individuals who recognize their emotions will also have fewer problems in their work, family, and social lives. Emotional intelligence has been examined in many studies in recent years and is defined as an individual's ability to understand, regulate (Mayer et al., 2004), and express (Matthews et al., 2004) their emotions. Another study explained emotional intelligence as individuals' ability for self-awareness regarding their own as well as others' emotions (Bridge, 2003). Based on all these definitions, emotional intelligence can be said to be an individual's ability to perceive themselves and others in relation to their emotional competencies.

Individuals with high emotional intelligence have been reported to be able to cope with pressurized situations, be aware of emotional reactions, express themselves clearly, and remain positive in difficult situations

(Stein, 2009). Griebel (2015) stated that individuals with high emotional intelligence understand their own and others' emotions more easily. In addition, these individuals have been found to possess higher levels of wellbeing, a more positive outlook on life, and stronger emotional skills (Deniz et al., 2017; Zhao et al., 2013). Koydemir et al. (2013) also reported that emotional intelligence can predict individuals' mental health, and all these studies support the relationship between emotional intelligence and wellbeing.

Wellbeing involves individuals' ability to determine appropriate goals in life and live a functional life by using their potential toward these goals (Ryff, 1989). Keyes et al. (2002) also explained wellbeing as the level to which individuals are aware of themselves and their environment and pursue meaningful goals. Individual wellbeing is as important for the society in which they live as it is for themselves. According to a World Health Organization (WHO, 2004) report, individuals with high levels of wellbeing contribute more to the society in which they live. From this point of view, other vari-

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ables that impact individuals' wellbeing, such as emotional intelligence, should also be examined. In this context, Helliwell et al. (2009) specifically emphasized variables in the social context that may also influence wellbeing. This study addresses the concept of social connectedness as one of these social context variables.

Being closely related to individual wellbeing (Griffiths et al., 2007), social connectedness is defined as the feelings individuals have regarding belongingness to the society in which they live and the interpersonal relationships they establish in this direction (O'Rourke et al., 2018). Characteristics such as experiencing fewer problems in life, being more active in terms of sociability, having sincere interpersonal relationships, and feeling a sense of belongingness to a group by adapting to the society in which one lives appear in individuals with strong social connectedness (Appau et al., 2019; Faro et al., 2019). Similarly, Liao and Weng (2018) reported that high social connectedness has a positive impact on individuals' lives in many areas. The literature has also reported that individuals' wellbeing varies with respect to their social connectedness (e.g., Brown et al., 2012; McLoughlin et al., 2019). Similarly, Jose et al.'s (2012) longitudinal study revealed social connectedness to positively influence individual wellbeing. All these findings in the literature are also supported by the results obtained in Yelpeze et al.'s (2021) study, which states social connectedness to be one of the predictors of wellbeing.

Social connectedness is seen as one of the key concepts of wellbeing in the literature and has been characterized as a concept that can strengthen an individual's sense of belongingness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Lee and Robbins' (1995) study showed belongingness to have an important place in the development of social connectedness. These two studies revealed social commitment and belongingness to be interrelated concepts. Arslan's (2015) study revealed that social commitment and belongingness play a mutual mediating role. Due to belongingness being another important predictor of individual wellbeing (Mellor et al., 2008), this study uses it as a second mediating variable.

Belongingness is when individuals feel themselves as a part of an organization, society, or culture and perceive themselves as valuable in their environment (Hagerty et al., 1992). Another definition of belongingness identifies it as an emotion that connects individuals to society and makes them feel safe (Duru, 2015). When examining the studies on belongingness, it has been stated that this feeling develops more in individuals with high emotional intelligence (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Similarly, Balak's (2017) thesis study reported a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and belongingness. Other studies in the literature have stated that a sense of belongingness is a factor that protects individuals' mental health (Mellor et al., 2008). This finding is similar to the results of many other studies in the literature (e.g., Choenarom et al., 2005; Duru, 2007). These studies have stated that social connectedness and belongingness are factors that protect individuals' wellbeing. Yılmaz and Büyükcebeci's (2019) study reported a significant positive relationship between belongingness and wellbeing. Based on all these research results, it can be said that social connectedness and belongingness may play a mediating role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and wellbeing. Although studies are found in the existing literature to have shown the relationship between these variables, the lack of any study examining all these variables together makes this research valuable. In this framework, this study's aim is to investigate the mediating role of social commitment and belongingness in the relationship between emotional intelligence and wellbeing in order to reveal the connections that influence individuals' wellbeing.

Method

Participants and Procedure

With the support of the Turkish Red Crescent, data were collected from 1005 volunteer blood donors by sending invitations to volunteer blood donors throughout Turkey via e-mail. As a result of the outlier analysis using Mahalanobis distances, the responses of four participants were excluded from the data set, with the data of the study being realized over 1001 volunteer blood donors. The majority of the participants are male ($n_{\text{male}} = 828, 82.7\%$; $n_{\text{female}} = 173, 17.3\%$). The participants' ages range from 18 to 64 years with a mean age of 38.33 years ($SD = 10.78$). The characteristics of the participants are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1
 Descriptive Information About the Participants

	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	173	17.3
Male	828	82.7
<i>Education level</i>		
Primary School	25	2.5
Middle School	43	4.3
High School	216	21.6
Associate Degree	174	17.4
Master's	423	42.3
PhD	120	12.0
<i>Socioeconomic status</i>		
Low	206	20.6
Middle	694	69.3
High	101	10.1
<i>Blood type</i>		
0 Rh-	52	5.2
0 Rh+	274	27.4
A Rh+	367	36.7
A Rh-	55	5.5
AB Rh-	10	1.0
AB Rh+	71	7.1
B Rh-	24	2.4
B Rh+	148	14.8

Measures

Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form. Deniz et al. (2013) conducted the Turkish adaptation of this scale developed by Petrides and Furnham (2001). As a result of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of the scale, a four-dimensional structure consisting of 20 items was obtained. These four subdimensions are subjective wellbeing, self-control, emotionality, and sociability. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the scale revealed that sufficient fit to be present between the data and the model. In the reliability analysis, Cronbach's alpha of internal consistency was calculated as .81 for the overall scale, with the value varying between .66 and .72 for the subdimensions. In addition, the test-retest reliability value was calculated as .86. Cronbach's alpha of internal consistency for this study is .87.

Flourishing Scale. This scale was developed by Diener et al. (2010) and is used to determine the participants' well-being. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Telef (2011) is a unidimensional scale with a total of eight items. The scale is a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree), and can obtain a range of scores between 8 and 56, with higher scores indicating the participants to have a more positive perception of themselves. The results from the scale's CFA state sufficient fit to be present between the data and the model. The reliability analysis reported a Cronbach's alpha of internal consistency of .80, with a test-retest reliability of .86. This study has found the Cronbach's alpha of internal consistency to be .90.

Social Connectedness Scale. This scale was introduced to the literature by Lee and Robbins (1995) with the purpose of measuring participants’ levels of social connectedness. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Duru (2007) as a unidimensional scale consisting of eight items scored on a 6-point scale. The scale also has reverse-scored items. After adjusting the reverse-scored items, a score between 8 and 48 can be obtained from the scale, with higher scores indicating the participants to have a higher level of social commitment. Within the scope of the reliability analysis, Cronbach’s alpha of internal consistency for the overall scale was reported as .90. Cronbach’s alpha of internal consistency in the current study is .94.

General Belongingness Scale. This scale was developed by Malone et al. (2012) and adapted into Turkish by Satıcı and Göçet-Tekin (2016). The scale consists of a total of 12 items and two dimensions: acceptance and rejection. Each dimension is scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale, with each dimension being able to obtain a score between 6 and 42 points. Higher scores indicate a higher level of the relevant subdimension. The scale was reported to have acceptable fit indices as a result of its CFA. In addition, the reliability analysis calculated Cronbach’s alpha of internal consistency as .82 for the acceptance subdimension and .76 for the rejection subdimension. The current study calculated Cronbach’s alpha of internal consistency for the overall scale as .87.

Statistical Analyses

This study aims to reveal the relationship network among emotional intelligence, social commitment, belongingness, and wellbeing in volunteer blood donors; it first examines the means, standard deviations, and skewness and kurtosis values before performing the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis. The PROCESS Macro (Model 4) as developed by Hayes (2018) was used to examine whether social commitment and belongingness have a mediating role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and wellbeing. Confidence intervals of 95% were created by resampling the data 5,000 times. The examined pathways whose confidence intervals were not equal to zero were concluded to be significant.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables as well as the correlation coefficients among the variables. As expected, the volunteer blood donors’ emotional intelligence, social commitment, and belongingness are significantly and positively related to their wellbeing. However, their emotional intelligence was also found to be significantly and positively related to their social commitment and belongingness.

Variable	1	2	3	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
1. Wellbeing	-			45.57	8.97	-1.124	1.231
2. Emotional intelligence	.64**	-		20.86	4.77	-0.606	.239
3. Social connectedness	.18**	.14**	-	32.22	13.03	-0.484	-1.059
4. Belongingness	.71**	.65**	.18**	64.45	13.80	-0.837	.319

** $p < .001$

The Mediation Analyses

Using PROCESS Macro Model 4, this study tests the multiple mediation of social connectedness and belongingness regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and wellbeing, with Table 3 and Figure 1 presenting the results. These results show the total direct effect of emotional intelligence in predicting wellbeing (*path c* without mediators: $B = .637, t_{(1,001)} = 10.97, p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.468, .672]$), direct effect (*path c'* with mediators: $B = 1.207, t_{(1,001)} = 26.46, p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ CI } [1.12, 1.29]$) and indirect effect (total $B = .637, 95\% \text{ CI } [.543, .737]$) to be significant. The findings also support both social connectedness ($B = .012, 95\% \text{ CI } [.001, .025]$) and belongingness ($B = .625, 95\% \text{ CI } [.531, .723]$) as mediating the relationship between emotional intelligence and wellbeing with regard to the volunteer blood donors.

Table 3
Path Coefficients of the Model

Model	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI		
					Lower	Upper	
Model without mediator							
Path <i>c</i>	EQ → WB	1.207	.05	26.46	< .001	1.12	1.29
Model with psychological distress as mediator							
Path <i>a</i> ₁	EQ → SC	.383	.08	4.47	< .001	.215	.551
Path <i>a</i> ₂	EQ → BG	1.89	.07	27.37	< .001	1.75	2.03
Path <i>b</i> ₁	SC → WB	.031	.02	2.07	.038	.002	.059
Path <i>b</i> ₂	BG → WB	.330	.02	18.26	< .001	.294	.365
Path <i>c</i> '	EQ → WB	.570	.05	10.97	< .001	.468	.672
<i>a</i> * <i>b</i>	Total indirect effect	.637	.05			.543	.737
	Indirect effect of SC	.012	.01			.001	.025
	Indirect effect of BG	.625	.05			.531	.723

EQ = emotional intelligence (independent variable); WB = wellbeing (dependent variable); SC = social connectedness (mediator); BG = belongingness (mediator).

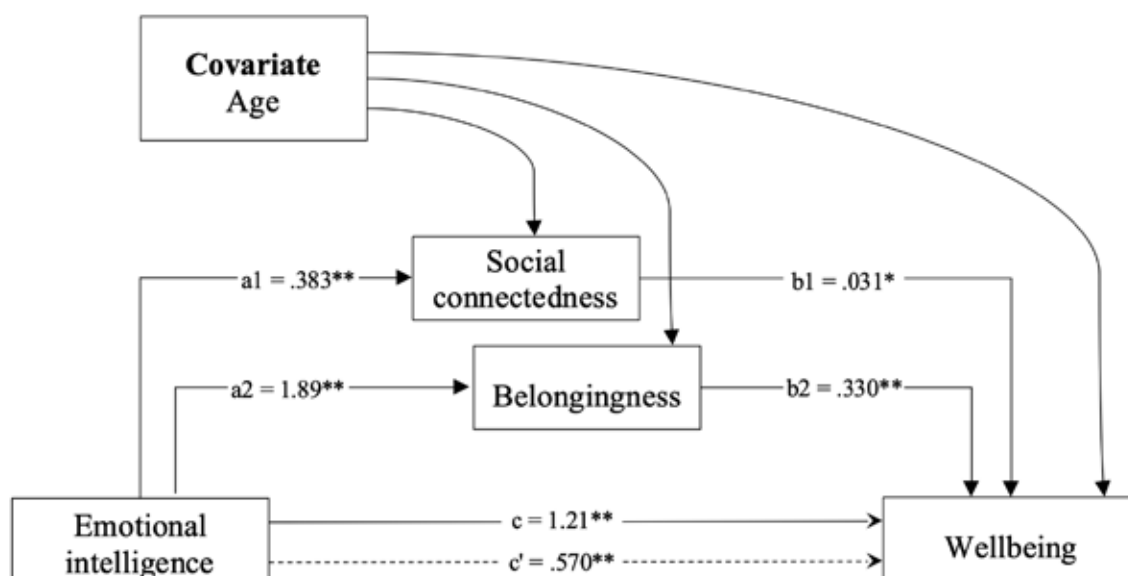


Figure 1. The mediation model (* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$).

Discussion

Mental health has an important place in life as it enables individuals to be successful in life, to establish healthy relationships with their environment, to be aware of their abilities, and to evaluate themselves and other individuals realistically. Mental health is related to an individual's level of wellbeing. Therefore, many different studies have examined the variables

affecting wellbeing, with emotional intelligence, social connectedness, and belongingness being considered determinants of wellbeing. The purpose of this study has been to examine the mediating role social commitment and belongingness play in the relationship between emotional intelligence and wellbeing. The study's findings have shown social connectedness and belongingness to play partial mediating roles in the relationship between emotional intelligence and wellbeing.

The first finding involves how social connectedness plays a mediating role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and wellbeing. Individuals who act by recognizing their own and others' emotions develop stronger social bonds, and these individuals who have the ability to understand and regulate emotions can establish more intimate interpersonal relationships. This study has found that individuals' high emotional intelligence increases their social connectedness. This finding coincides with previous research results (e.g., du Plessis, 2021; Olasupo et al., 2021). These two studies revealed increased social connectedness to be related to higher levels of emotional intelligence. In addition, increased social connectedness positively affects individuals' wellbeing, with individuals who are more social and who feel more belongingness to a group by having adapted to society being expected to be healthier mentally. The findings from this and other studies in the literature support this expectation (e.g., Griffiths et al., 2007; McLoughlin et al., 2019). As in other studies, Michaels et al.'s (2022) study findings resemble those of the present study, which states that strong social relationships are effective at increasing individuals' wellbeing. In other words, social connectedness is a predictor of wellbeing. Based on all these research results, developing emotional intelligence can be said to positively impact individuals' levels of social connectedness as well as their wellbeing indirectly.

The second finding of the study is that belongingness has a mediating role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and wellbeing. Individuals who understand their own emotions as well as those of those around them in society and who have a certain level of awareness of these emotions may feel more belonging to the group in which they live. This study has found that individuals with high emotional intelligence experience a greater sense of belongingness. This finding is supported by Baumeister and Leary's (1995) study, which stated that emotional intelligence can predict belongingness. Similarly, Balak's (2017) study emphasized emotional intelligence as a concept that improves one's sense of belongingness. Increasing belongingness also positively affects individuals' wellbeing. Individuals who feel they belong to a group, organization, culture, or society may also feel they are not alone and therefore may remain healthier mentally. The literature has stated that belongingness is a protective factor for mental health (Ryzin et al., 2009). Many studies are found in the literature to parallel this finding (e.g., Duru, 2007; Mellor et al., 2008; Yılmaz & Büyükcebeci, 2019). All of these studies reported belongingness to predict wellbeing as well as an increase in individuals' belongingness to positively influence their wellbeing. Similarly, Choenarom et al. (2005) reported a significant relationship between belongingness and wellbeing. The results of their study and those from other studies in the literature prove that improving emotional intelligence will positively influence belongingness as well as social connectedness. This situation can be said to indirectly reflect positively on individuals' wellbeing.

This study confirmed the model testing the partial mediating role of social commitment and belongingness in the relationship between emotional intelligence and wellbeing. This model shows emotional intelligence to directly predict wellbeing at a statistically significant level. This finding coincides with other research results in the literature (e.g., Petrides & Furnham, 2003; Özbay et al., 2012; Schutte & Malouff, 2011; Zeidner et al., 2009), which also revealed emotional intelligence to predict wellbeing. Similarly, Özdemir and Dilekmen's (2016) study stated that emotional intelligence is a determinant of wellbeing. Another study conducted in recent years has also revealed emotional intelligence to be related to wellbeing (Dilmaç & Tezelli, 2021). All these research results prove that individuals' development of their emotional intelligence will positively impact their wellbeing.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has certain limitations. The first is that the data collection tools used in the study are self-report scales. Although the data were collected from voluntary participants, biased responses may have been obtained from the participants due to errors from social-desirability bias. Future studies can collect data using different methods. The second limitation is that the study is a cross-sectional study. Due to cross-sectional studies inability to test the cause-effect relationship, longitudinal models can be tested in future research. The third and final limitation is the study's use of convenience sampling as the sampling method. Future research can reexamine the model tested in this study using different sampling methods.

Conclusion and Implications

This study has revealed emotional intelligence to predict wellbeing and social commitment and, alongside belongingness, to be statistically significant mediating variables in this relationship. This study examined a complex model by considering the importance of individuals' mental health. Some interventions or techniques can be applied based on the study's findings to increase wellbeing in the counseling process. In addition, the development of certain psychoeducational programs that support the development of emotional intelligence and increase social commitment and belongingness may benefit individuals' wellbeing. The findings from this study are thought to be able to guide both researchers and practitioners working in the field of mental health.

Ethical approval

This study has emphasized voluntary participation, and ethics approval for it was obtained from the Artvin Çoruh University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (REF: E-18457941-050.99-38195).

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