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**Turkish Studies - Economics, Finance, Politics**

eISSN: 2667-5625

*Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi*



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## **Does Alienation Have a Multiple Mediating Role in the Relationship Between Self-Competence and Psychological Vulnerability?\***

*Öz Yeterlik ile Psikolojik Kırılganlık İlişkisinde Yabancılaşmanın Çoklu Aracı Rolü Var Mı?*

Mustafa Yüksel Erdoğan\*\* - Yulia Kryvenko\*\*\* - Sena Öksüz\*\*\*\*

**Abstract:** Alienation occurs as a result of the discrimination between one's physical and spiritual existence; one who alienates from themselves does not perceive themselves as someone thinking or feeling, and if the individual drifts apart from socialization and sees themselves individually, this indicates that they are going through the process of alienation. This research investigated the multiple mediating roles of powerlessness, normlessness, and social isolation, which are the subscales of alienation, in the relationship between undergraduates' self-competence and psychological vulnerability levels. Ethics committee approval numbered 2022/10 is received from Istanbul Sabahattin University Ethics Board on 30.11.2022. The study group of the research was composed of 395 (49%) women and 405 (51%) men (800 in total) attending a foundation university in İstanbul. The descriptive statistics of the scores obtained in the scales were analyzed, and Pearson's product moment-correlation coefficient was calculated to identify the correlation between binary variables. For testing the effects of the multiple mediation model, Ordinary Least Squares Regression was used, and bootstrapping was performed to see whether the data were significant. Bootstrap analyses were conducted using "Model 6" with PROCESS Macro. The findings indicated that powerlessness and normlessness were significant mediators in the relationship between self-competence and psychological vulnerability, while social isolation was insignificant. The findings were discussed in general terms, and recommendations were made accordingly.

\* Araştırmanın etik kurul onayı İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim Üniversitesi Etik Kurul Başkanlığından 30.11.2022 tarih ve 2022/10 sayı numarası ile alınmıştır.

Ethics committee approval of the study was obtained from Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University Ethics Committee with the date 30.11.2022 and number 2022/10

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**Cite as/ Atıf:** Erdoğan, M.Y., Kryvenko, Y., & Öksüz, S. (2024). Does alienation have a multiple mediating role in the relationship between self-competence and psychological vulnerability?. *Turkish Studies - Economy*, 19(2), 437-455. <https://dx.doi.org/10.7827/TurkishStudies.67727>

**Received/Geliş:** 16 January/Ocak 2023

**Accepted/Kabul:** 25 June/Haziran 2024

**Published/Yayın:** 30 June/Haziran 2024

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**Structured Abstract:** Alienation occurs as a result of the discrimination between one's physical and spiritual existence; one who alienates from themselves does not perceive themselves as someone thinking or feeling, and if the individual drifts apart from socialization and sees themselves individually, this indicates that they are going through the process of alienation. Given the general impacts of alienation on society and individual, its outcomes are observed to be negative. When addressing previous research findings, it is anticipated that alienation might pose a barrier to self-competence and increase psychological vulnerability while those with higher self-competence levels would be psychologically stronger.

The following hypotheses are addressed in the research: there is a negative relationship between self-competence and psychological vulnerability; there is a negative relationship between self-competence and alienation subscales (powerlessness, normlessness, social isolation); there is a positive relationship between alienation subscales (powerlessness, normlessness, social isolation) psychological vulnerability; alienation subscales (powerlessness, normlessness, social isolation) have a multiple mediating role in the relationship between self-competence and psychological vulnerability.

Since the aim of this research was to explore the relationships among five different variables namely powerlessness, normlessness, social isolation, self-competence, and psychological vulnerability, the research utilized the correlational survey model.

The research was carried out on the students of XXX University. 800 undergraduates 395 (49%) women, 405 (41%) men participated in the research. 249 (31%) of the undergraduates were in the first grade, 216 (27%) were in the second grade, 221 (28%) were in the third grade, and 114 (14%) were in the fourth grade. Mean age of the undergraduates were 21.30 years and their mean academic achievement was measured to be 3.10.

Self-Liking/Self-Competence Scale (Two-Dimensional Self-Competence Scale): The Two-Dimensional Self-Competence Scale was developed by Tafarodi and Swan (2001) and adapted to Turkish language by Doğan (2011). Psychological Vulnerability Scale: The Psychological Vulnerability Scale was developed by Sinclair and Wallston (1999) and adapted to Turkish language by Akın and Eker (2011). Alienation Scale: The Alienation Scale used in the research was developed by Dean (1961).

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Values of the Scales Used in the Research

	$\bar{X}$	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Alienation total	25.48	4.16	--					
2. Social Isolation	19.70	2.70	0.78**	--				
3. Powerlessness	14.13	3.22	0.79**	0.39**	--			
4. Normlessness	59.33	8.18	0.70**	0.30**	0.42**	--		
5. Psyc. Vulnerability	17.36	3.98	0.30**	0.17**	0.34**	0.18*	--	
6. Self-Competence	24.02	3.97	-	-	-	-	-	-
			0.21**	0.24**	0.29**	0.20**	0.33**	

N=300, \*\* $p < 0.01$

As seen in Table 1, positive correlations were found between psychological vulnerability scores and alienation subscales of social isolation ( $r = .17, p < .01$ ), powerlessness ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ) and normlessness ( $r = .18, p < .01$ ). However, a positive correlation was found between psychological vulnerability scores and alienation total scores ( $r = .30, p < .01$ ). There were negative significant correlations between self-competence scores and alienation subscales of social isolation ( $r = -.24, p < .01$ ), powerlessness ( $r = -.29, p < .01$ ) and normlessness ( $r = -.20, p < .01$ ). There was also a significant correlation between self-competence scores and alienation total scores ( $r = -.21, p < .01$ ). A negative correlation was found between psychological vulnerability scores and self-competence scores ( $r = -.33, p < .01$ ).

The indirect effects of the variables in the research were tested using 5000 bootstrap samples, the estimates were evaluated within the 95% confidence interval, bias error was corrected by elimination, and the results were given in Table 2. According to Table 2, total indirect effect of self-competence together with alienation on psychological vulnerability was statistically significant (point estimate =  $-.3259$  and % 95 BCa

CI [-.1270 -.0124]). When addressing three variables that mediated the indirect effects of self-competence on psychological vulnerability individually, mediating effect of powerlessness (point estimate = -.1745 and % 95 BCa CI [-.2817, -.0673]) and normlessness (point estimate = -.0302 and % 95 BCa CI [-.1275, -.0669]) was found significant. Furthermore, mediation of social isolation (point estimate = -.0893 and % 95 BCa CI [-.0365, .2153]) on psychological vulnerability was found significant. Regarding the paired comparison of indirect effects of the variables that mediated psychological vulnerability, it was observed that powerlessness was a stronger variable than normlessness.

According to the research findings, there was a negative relationship between self-competence and psychological vulnerability, and self-competence was found to have a direct and negative effect on psychological vulnerability in the mediation analysis. In other words, those with higher self-competence had lower levels of psychological vulnerability.

**Table 2:** Comparison of indirect effects of undergraduates' self-competence on psychological vulnerability through the mediation of alienation subscales

Effects	Point estimate	SE	z	p	BOOTSTRAP	
					95% BCa Confidence Interval	
					Low	High
<b>Total indirect effect</b>	-0.3259*	0.0623			-0.1270*	-
<b>Powerlessness</b>	-0.1745	0.0544	-3.2058	0.0015	-0.2817*	-
<b>Normlessness</b>	-0.0302	0.0494	-2.6126	0.5406	-0.1275	-
<b>Social isolation</b>	-0.0893	0.0639	1.3969	0.1635	-0.0365	0.2153

There were significant relationships between self-competence and powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation, and direct effects of self-competence on those variables were found to be significant and negative.

According to the research findings, there were positive relationships among alienation subscales of powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation levels, and direct effects of those variables on each other were found to be significant in the mediation analysis. It is thought that how individuals do not play a decisive role in regulating their own experiences (powerlessness) causes them to live outside the norms in reaction to such situation (normlessness), and consequently, such individuals get excluded from the society.

Determining the mediating effects and roles of alienation subscales in the relationship between self-competence and psychological vulnerability is the strength of this research. However, the fact that the research data were obtained from undergraduates attending a foundation university is a limitation of the research. Future studies can be performed to see whether similar variables will provide similar results in different sample groups.

**Keywords:** Psychology, Alienation, Self-competence, Powerlessness, Normlessness, Social Isolation.

**Öz:** Yabancılaşma, kişinin fiziksel ve ruhsal varlığı arasındaki ayrımcılığın bir sonucu olarak ortaya çıkar; kendine yabancılaşan bireyler, kendini düşünen veya kendini hisseden biri olarak algılamaz. Kişi sosyalleşmeden ve kendini bireysel bir varlık olarak görmekten uzaklaşırsa bu, yabancılaşma sürecinden geçtiğini gösterir. Yabancılaşmanın toplum ve birey üzerindeki genel etkileri göz önüne alındığında, sonuçlarının olumsuz olduğu görülmektedir. Araştırmalar yabancılaşmanın öz yeterlilik için bir engel oluşturabileceği ve psikolojik kırılganlığı artırabileceği, öz yeterlilik düzeyi yüksek olanların ise psikolojik olarak daha güçlü olacağını göstermektedir. Bu araştırma, yabancılaşmanın alt ölçekleri olan güçsüzlük, normsuzluk ve sosyal izolasyonun, lisans öğrencilerinin öz yeterlilikleri ile psikolojik kırılganlık düzeyleri

arasındaki ilişkideki çoklu aracılık rollerini araştırmaktadır. Araştırmanın etik kurul onayı İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim Üniversitesi Etik Kurul Başkanlığından alınmıştır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu İstanbul'da bir vakıf üniversitesine devam eden 395 (%49) kadın ve 405 (%51) erkek (toplam 800) öğrenci oluşturmuştur. Ölçeklerde elde edilen puanların tanımlayıcı istatistikleri analiz edilmiş ve ikili değişkenler arasındaki korelasyonu belirlemek için Pearson çarpım moment-korelasyon katsayısı hesaplanmıştır. Çoklu arabuluculuk modelinin etkilerini test etmek için genelleştirilmiş en küçük kareler regresyonu ve verilerin anlamlı olup olmadığını görmek için bootstrapping yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, güçsüzlük ve normsuzluğun, öz yeterlilik ile psikolojik kırılabilirlik arasındaki ilişkide önemli araçlar olduğunu sosyal izolasyonun ise anlamlı olmadığını göstermiştir. Araştırmanın bulguları genel olarak literatür ışığında tartışılmış ve buna göre uygulamalı ve araştırmacılara yönelik önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Psikoloji, Yabancılaşma, Özyeterlilik, Güçsüzlük, Normsuzluk, Sosyal İzolasyon.

### Introduction

Having seen further development in recent years, positive psychology addresses individuals' strengths, attaching importance their subjective well-being (Seligman, Steen, Park and Peterson, 2005) and focuses on experiences such as looking at the future with hope and being happy and optimistic (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) rather than being problem-oriented. What matters here is to find out the factors determining whether the individual is psychologically strong and happy and identifying variables that prevent their positive development to take necessary precautions. One of these variables is vulnerability. Vulnerability is defined as susceptibility to being hurt both physically and psychologically (Simpson and Weiner, 1989), inclination to psychological problems (Ingram and Price, 2010), and being targeted by threat-posing situations (Lee and Scanlon, 2007). In general, vulnerability is a personality trait, and vulnerable individuals are more likely to have psychological problems such as stress and anxiety (Beck, 2002; Dykman and Johll, 1998; Uysal, 2015). Looking at the definitions of vulnerability, it is observed that the concept is addressed rather with its psychological aspect, and that is why the concept of psychological vulnerability is used more frequently. Psychological vulnerability refers to the beliefs developed by the individual toward their self-worth (Sinclair and Wallston, 1999). In other words, it is individual's sensitivity about being subject to harm in the sense of physical and mental health and its level depends on personal perceptions (Akdeniz, 2018). Previous negative experiences affect psychological vulnerability of individuals more (Kashdan et al., 2006), and psychological vulnerability is regarded as one of the reasons driving them to mental uneasiness (Monroe and Simons, 1991). It is stated that individuals with psychological vulnerability are highly inclined to crime (Gudjohnsson, 2010), and such individuals are more likely to go through depression (Hewitt and Dyck, 1986; Sinclair and Wallston, 1999). According to Luthar and Zigler (1991), negative experiences of individuals and their psychological vulnerabilities are the reason and consequence of each other; they have an impact on each other. Research has explored that there is a negative relationship between psychological vulnerability and conscious awareness (McKee et al., 2007) a positive relationship between stress and psychological vulnerability (Ingram and Luxton, 2005). Research findings have shown that women are more likely to have psychological vulnerability than men (Hoshi, 2008; Cui and Vaillant, 1997). It was observed that individuals with psychological vulnerability found themselves incompetent in their social relationships, and therefore, they refrained from socialization (Levine, 2004).

It is recognized in recent studies that another main reason for individuals' psychological vulnerability is cognitive factors (Monroe and Simons, 1991). Based on this consideration, another variable addressed in this research is self-competence (self-competence), which is a main component of self. Self-competence is defined as individuals' perceptions that they can do things (Bandura and Ramachandran, 1994; Zimmerman, 1995). Individuals' perceptions of their own abilities or inabilities determine their self-competence (Tschannen and Hoy, 2005). Those with high self-

competence have higher expectations of achievement (Henson, 2001; Woolfolk-Hoy and Davis, 2005); it is accordingly anticipated that those with high perception of self are psychologically stronger. Because perception of self refers to individuals' moods of themselves (Branden, 1990; Lyubomirsky et al., 2006; Rosenberg, 2015) and is effective in their behaviors and mental health. Individuals with a high self-structure are highly confident and avoid destructive behaviors (Wells and Marwell, 1976). It is observed in previous studies that there is a negative relationship between self-competence and depression (Bum and Jeon, 2016), those with a higher self-competence have lower social anxiety (Tan et al., 2016), they are better at coping with stress (Leary, 1990), and they are academically at higher levels (Tremblay et al., 2000, Pullmann and Allik, 2008). There are research findings which showed that individuals with high levels of self-competence went through psychosomatic problems less frequently in case of being subject to psycho-violent behaviors (Einarsen and Mikkelsen, 2002) and were more successful at coping with workload (Salanova et al., 2006).

Aday (2002) emphasized that reasons and solutions of vulnerability are associated with social environment, and therefore, need to be investigated socially. Similarly, Huebner et al. (2014) state that social pressure is effective in vulnerability, and in this sense, vulnerability has also a social aspect. Accordingly, the concept of alienation, which is considered as being related to psychological vulnerability, was addressed another variable of the research.

The concept of alienation was first used in the political sense by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Fisher, 1990), and it was first used in the philosophical sense by Hegel (1831) (as cited. Osmanoğlu, 2016), a representative of German idealism (Bottomore et al., 1991). According to Hegel, alienation occurs as a result of the discrimination between one's physical and spiritual existence; one who alienates from themselves does not perceive themselves as someone thinking or feeling (Salerno, 2003), and if the individual drifts apart from socialization and sees themselves individually, this indicates that they are going through the process of alienation (Bottomore et al., 1991).

Feuerbach, (1957) unlike Hegel, attributed a negative meaning to alienation and described it as individual moving away from creativity and creating a fictitious being called god (Meyer, 1984). Marx defined the concept of alienation as the loss of individuality and argued that this is not socially acceptable (Kanungo, 1992). In the psychological sense, alienation is defined as how the individual has become estranged from themselves, is drawn away from their goals, and the distrust in others and the tension of being among others (Fromm, 1996; Keniston, 1972).

Based on all these definitions, Seeman (1975) handled alienation with its social and psychological aspects and set five categories, which are: powerlessness (not being determinative in one's life), normlessness (effects of norms coming to an end), meaninglessness (one's doings becoming meaningless to them), isolation (society's values and beliefs losing their significance for the individual), and self-estrangement (individual's behaviors becoming an instrument for satisfactions other than themselves). Horney (2017) describes the concept which Seeman defined as powerlessness as the loss of the power of being active and individual becoming estranged from their ideal self. Those with the sense of powerlessness believe that events and outcomes are predestined, and therefore, they are hard to be controlled and changed; that is why they lack the power of deciding. Those who find life meaningless cannot see and predict the cause-effect of the behaviors of them and others. Hence, it is meaningless to plan a future (Mackey and Ahlgren; 1977). Normlessness is the incompatibility between individual's demands and the instruments through which they can meet these demands (Durkheim, 1992); those who have such an emotion has less social engagement and are people who has a negative worldview (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1972). Isolation is defined as moving away from social environments and not feeling that one belongs to there, and such people avoid socialization and exhibit passive personality traits (Mackey, 1974).

Given the general impacts of alienation on society and individual, its outcomes are observed to be negative. Individuals who alienates from what they do and their job feel unhappy and regard what they do as an obligation rather than the desire of self-development (Lukes, 1998). Not being able to deliver the responsibilities they are assigned with at school, students do not find enough attention and respect at school and accordingly experience guilt, incompetence and alienation, which leads to tendency of anger and violence among students (Gibbs, 2004; Noguera, 1995; Trent, 2001). A study by Russell (1994) observed that the students attending at schools of traditional education system had higher levels of alienation. It has been shown by research findings that there is a positive relationship between teacher's authoritarian behaviors and alienation (Murdock, 1994). Research on the relationship between socioeconomic status and alienation has provided different results. It is seen that the idea of alienation is more prevalent among those with lower socio-economic statuses in some of the research (Murdock, 1994; Seidel and Vaughn, 1991) and among those with higher socioeconomic statuses in others (Trusty, 1993; Trusty and Dooley-Dickey, 1993).

When addressing all these previous research findings, it is anticipated that alienation might pose a barrier to self-competence and increase psychological vulnerability while those with higher self-competence levels would be psychologically stronger.

In general, it is considered important to conduct research which mainly investigates this subject for identifying variables that may be related to psychological vulnerability, which is a negative mood, for taking necessary measures and creating awareness. Hence, this research investigated the multiple mediating roles of powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation, which are the subscales of alienation, in the relationship between undergraduate's levels of self-competence and psychological vulnerability.

The hypotheses to be addressed in the research are as follows:

1. There is a negative relationship between self-competence and psychological vulnerability.
2. There is a negative relationship between self-competence and alienation subscales (powerlessness, normlessness, social isolation).
3. There is a positive relationship between alienation subscales (powerlessness, normlessness, social isolation) psychological vulnerability.
4. Alienation subscales (powerlessness, normlessness, social isolation) have a multiple mediating role in the relationship between self-competence and psychological vulnerability.

## **Method**

### *Research Design*

Since the aim of this research was to explore the relationships among five different variables namely powerlessness, normlessness, social isolation, self-competence, and psychological vulnerability, the research utilized the correlational survey model.

### *Participants*

The research was carried out on the students of Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University. 800 undergraduates 395 (49%) women, 405 (41%) men participated in the research. 249 (31%) of the undergraduates were in the first grade, 216 (27%) were in the second grade, 221 (28%) were in the third grade, and 114 (14%) were in the fourth grade. Mean age of the undergraduates were 21.30 years and their mean academic achievement was measured to be 3.10.

### *Data Collection Instruments*

Self-Liking/Self-Competence Scale (Two-Dimensional Self-Competence Scale): The Two-Dimensional Self-Competence Scale was developed by Tafarodi and Swan (2001) and adapted to

Turkish language by Doğan (2011). The 5-point Likert-type scale consists of 16 items and 2 subscales (self-liking and self-competence). Only the self-competence subscale was used in this research. Higher scores in the scale indicate high self-competence. The confirmatory factor analysis performed on the adapted scale confirmed the two-factor construct, and the achieved fit indices were observed to be acceptable ( $\chi^2 / sd = 2.64$ , GFI = .94, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .049). The Cronbach's Alpha calculated for scale's reliability analysis was .83 for the self-liking subscale and .74 for the self-competence subscale. Test-retest reliability values of the scale were calculated to be .72 for both subscales (Doğan, 2011). The Cronbach's alphas of the scale were re-calculated for this research, and the alpha was found to be .78 for the self-competence subscale.

**Psychological Vulnerability Scale:** The Psychological Vulnerability Scale was developed by Sinclair and Wallston (1999) and adapted to Turkish language by Akın and Eker (2011). The 5-point Likert-type scale is composed of one factor and six questions. Higher scores obtained in the scale mean higher levels of psychological vulnerability. For the reliability study of the scale, the Cronbach's alpha was calculated to be 0.75. The confirmatory factor analysis for the final version of the adapted scale concluded a single factor and fit indices within acceptable limits ( $\chi^2 / sd = 0.87$ , GFI = 0.99, CFI = 1.00 and SRMR = 0.025) (Akın and Eker, 2011). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was re-calculated for this research, and the value was found to be 0.71.

**Alienation Scale:** The Alienation Scale used in the research was developed by Dean (1961). The original scale consists of 24 items and three subscales, which are powerlessness, social isolation, and normlessness. The scale was designed in the Likert type. Gügerçin and Aksay (2017) adapted the scale to Turkish language. KMO value of the scale was found to be .87 in the exploratory factor analysis, and the Bartlett's test for sphericity reached a significant result. As for the reliability values of the scale, Cronbach's alphas calculated for each subscale were .88 for social isolation, .86 for powerlessness, .84 for normlessness, and .88 for the whole scale. According to the confirmatory factor analysis results of the scale, the scale is composed of three subscales (social isolation, powerlessness, normlessness), its standardized regression coefficients differ between 0.59 and 0.90, and the fit indices of the items are within acceptable limits. Higher scores in the scale indicate high level of the idea of alienation (Gügerçin and Aksay, 2017). In this research, the Cronbach's alphas were re-calculated and found to be 0.62 for social isolation, 0.71 for powerlessness, 0.73 for normlessness, and 0.81 for the whole scale.

### Procedure and Data Analysis

Before collecting the research data, required ethical permit is received from İstanbul Sabahattin University Ethics Board on 30.11.2022 numbered 2022/10. The undergraduates were informed of the purpose of the research. Next, the instruments were applied to the undergraduates who volunteered for the research. It was seen that the undergraduates answered the instruments in about 40 minutes.

Pearson's Product Moment correlation coefficient was calculated to test the relationship between binary variables. "Ordinary Least Squares Regression" developed by Hayes (2012) was utilized to test the mediating role of the model, the bootstrapping was performed to see whether the data were significant. This process allows for keeping the factors that are likely to affect the relationship between variables under control (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). Bootstrap analyses were conducted using "Model 6" with PROCESS Macro. Variables like gender and age with the likelihood of affecting the research findings were not included in the analyses. The analyses were conducted in SPSS 25 software.

### Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation values of the scores of alienations and its subscales, psychological vulnerability, and self-liking/self-competence.

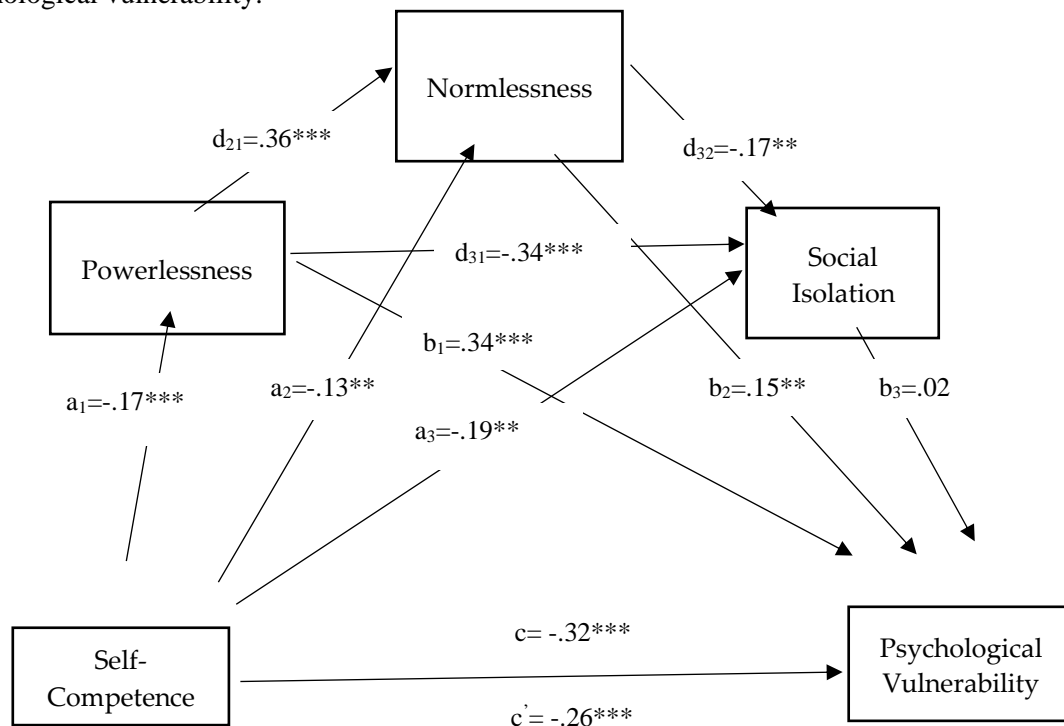
**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Values of the Scales Used in the Research

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5. Psyc. Vulnerability	17.36	3.98	0.30**	0.17**	0.34**	0.18*	--	
6. Self-Competence	24.02	3.97	-.21**	-.24**	-.29**	-.20**	-.33**	-

N=300, \*\* $p < .01$

As seen in Table 1, positive correlations were found between psychological vulnerability scores and alienation subscales of social isolation ( $r = .17, p < .01$ ), powerlessness ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ) and normlessness ( $r = .18, p < .01$ ). However, a positive correlation was found between psychological vulnerability scores and alienation total scores ( $r = .30, p < .01$ ). There were negative significant correlations between self-competence scores and alienation subscales of social isolation ( $r = -.24, p < .01$ ), powerlessness ( $r = -.29, p < .01$ ) and normlessness ( $r = -.20, p < .01$ ). There was also a significant correlation between self-competence scores and alienation total scores ( $r = -.21, p < .01$ ). A negative correlation was found between psychological vulnerability scores and self-competence scores ( $r = -.33, p < .01$ ).

Figure 1 shows the analysis results concerning the multiple mediation of alienation subscales (social isolation, powerlessness, normlessness) in the relationship between self-competence and psychological vulnerability.



**Figure 1** Multiple Mediation of Alienation Subscales in the Relationship between Self-competence and Psychological Vulnerability and Non-standardized Beta Values, \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

As seen in Figure 1, self-competence's total effect on psychological vulnerability ( $c = -.32, S_h = .06, t = -5.22, p < .001$ ) was significant (Step 1). Direct effects of self-competence were also

significant on the mediator variables of powerlessness ( $B = -.17$ ,  $S_h = .05$ ,  $t = -3.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ), normlessness ( $B = -.13$ ,  $S_h = .04$ ,  $t = -3.01$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and social isolation ( $B = -.19$ ,  $S_h = .06$ ,  $t = -3.84$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Step 2). As for the direct effects of the mediator variables on psychological vulnerability, effects of powerlessness ( $B = .34$ ,  $S_h = .07$ ,  $t = 4.58$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and normlessness ( $B = .15$ ,  $S_h = .07$ ,  $t = 3.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ) scores were found to be significant. However, social isolation scores ( $B = .02$ ,  $S_h = .05$ ,  $t = .26$ ,  $p > .05$ ) were not found to be significant on psychological vulnerability (Step 3). When self-competence and all mediator variables were included in the model at the same time (Step 4), the relationship between self-competence and psychological vulnerability was reduced in terms of direct effect, but the significance value remained at the same level ( $c' = -.26$ ,  $S_h = .06$ ,  $t = -4.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Accordingly, two of the mediator variables were observed to have the mediating role through psychological vulnerability. Moreover, it was found that the whole model was significant, ( $F(4, 269) = 14.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and explained 18% of the total variance on psychological vulnerability.

Indirect effects and specific indirect effects of undergraduates' self-competence on psychological vulnerability through the mediation of alienation subscales (powerlessness, normlessness, social isolation) are provided in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Comparison of Indirect Effects of Undergraduates' Self-competence on Psychological Vulnerability through the Mediation of Alienation Subscales

Effects	Point estimate	SE	z	p	BOOTSTRAP	
					95% BCa Confidence Interval	
					Low	High
<b>Total indirect effect</b>	-0.3259*	0.0623			-0.1270*	-0.0124
<b>Powerlessness</b>	-0.1745	0.0544	-3.2058	0.0015	-0.2817*	-0.0673
<b>Normlessness</b>	-0.0302	0.0494	-2.6126	0.5406	-0.1275	-0.0669
<b>Social isolation</b>	-0.0893	0.0639	1.3969	0.1635	-0.0365	0.2153

The indirect effects of the variables in the research were tested using 5000 bootstrap samples, the estimates were evaluated within the 95% confidence interval, bias error was corrected by elimination, and the results were given in Table 2. According to Table 2, total indirect effect of self-competence together with alienation on psychological vulnerability was statistically significant (point estimate =  $-.3259$  and % 95 BCa CI  $[-.1270, -.0124]$ ). When addressing three variables that mediated the indirect effects of self-competence on psychological vulnerability individually, mediating effect of powerlessness (point estimate =  $-.1745$  and % 95 BCa CI  $[-.2817, -.0673]$ ) and normlessness (point estimate =  $-.0302$  and % 95 BCa CI  $[-.1275, -.0669]$ ) was found significant. Furthermore, mediation of social isolation (point estimate =  $-.0893$  and % 95 BCa CI  $[-.0365, .2153]$ ) on psychological vulnerability was found significant. Regarding the paired comparison of indirect effects of the variables that mediated psychological vulnerability, it was observed that powerlessness was a stronger variable than normlessness.

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### Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the research findings, there was a negative relationship between self-competence and psychological vulnerability, and self-competence was found to have a direct and negative effect on psychological vulnerability in the mediation analysis. In other words, those with higher self-competence had lower levels of psychological vulnerability. Previous studies show that individuals with low perceived subjective well-being experience stress more intensively, have problems with their social relationships and self-confidence and are more prone to psychological vulnerability (Hobfoll, 1989; Ingram et al., 1998; Ingram and Luxton, 2005; Satici, 2016). Similarly, individuals with positive feelings (Ong et al., 2006), high self-competence (Keye and Pidgeon; 2013; Masten and Coatsworth, 1998) and high self-esteem (Haddadi and Besharat, 2010) also have high levels of psychological resilience. Craig (1998) found a negative correlation between positive self-perception and depression.

There were significant relationships between self-competence and powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation, and direct effects of self-competence on those variables were found to be significant and negative. In agreement with the findings achieved in the research, previous studies show that in the absence of social support, self-competence is low (Adler et al., 2013) and those with low self-competence have difficulty making decisions (Arntz, 2012; Beck et al., 2003), and frustrations in children's own decision making lead to powerlessness, which cause loss of self-confidence (Borstein, 1992).

Direct effect of self-competence on normlessness was found to be significant. Considering that normlessness is defined as one's belief in the necessity of normless actions to achieve their goals (Brown et al., 2003), individuals need to have self-competence to a certain extent to achieve and realize their goals. Otherwise, norms will lose their influence, and the individual may get around them. Previous research has shown that there is a negative relationship between self-competence and risky behaviors that which are not approved by society (Caprara et al., 2004; Valois et al., 2013), individuals with low self-competence experience adaptational problems (Meece et al., 1990) and exhibit destructive (Alves-Martins et al., 2002), maladaptive (Hamill, 2007), and angry and aggressive (Willemse, 2008) behaviors.

Direct effect of self-competence on social isolation was also found to be significant. Defined as not being involved in a community, social isolation (Czapinski and Panek, 2013) is thought to be associated with individual's self-structure. It is thought that individuals' lack of confidence in themselves about doing things and solving problems cause them to be negatively perceived in friend groups, and therefore, to be excluded from the group and become isolated. Indeed, social relations (Schunk and Meece, 2005) and social support (Bandura, 1993) are highly important in the development of self-competence. Research shows that social support increases self-competence (Tirone et al., 2014), there is an interaction between self-competence and social relations, and social phobia is negatively correlated with self-competence (Muris, 2002).

According to the research findings, there were positive relationships among alienation subscales of powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation levels, and direct effects of those variables on each other were found to be significant in the mediation analysis. It is thought that how individuals do not play a decisive role in regulating their own experiences (powerlessness) causes them to live outside the norms in reaction to such situation (normlessness), and consequently, such individuals get excluded from the society. Overall, previous research has achieved similar results (Calabrese, 1989; Dean, 1961; Moon and Pearl, 1991; Rovai and Wighting, 2005). The study performed by Moyer and Motta (1982) found that individuals with social adaptation, which is the opposite of the concepts of normlessness and social isolation, experienced the sense of alienation.

The starting point of the present research was to determine whether alienation subscales of powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation play a mediating role in the relationship between

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self-competence and psychological vulnerability. The findings show that indirect effects of powerlessness and normlessness on psychological vulnerability were significant in the relationship between self-competence and psychological vulnerability whereas mediating role of social isolation was not found to be significant. The paired comparison performed to find out which of those variables had the stronger mediating role concluded that powerlessness was a stronger mediator than normlessness. It is thought that individuals with low self-competence rely on others in making decisions and regulating their lives and that the consequent stress and anxiety lead to psychological vulnerability. In line with the findings of the present research, it is seen those with low self-efficacy have lower performance (McDonald and Siegall 1992), have difficulty solving their problems (Pajares, 2002), and therefore, they become lonely within the group, and there is a negative relationship between self-competence and alienation. Tarquin and Cook-Cottone (2008) found a reverse relationship between self-esteem and alienation.

The research findings indicated that normlessness was a mediator in the relationship between self-competence and psychological vulnerability. Normlessness is the state of connections between individuals and society becoming broken (Seeman, 1975), and according to Durkheim (1992), this is a social incident and is imposed on the individual from outside (as cited in Tükel, 2012). To human, who is accepted as a psycho-social being, social relationships and connections are of great importance. Undoubtedly, rules that have been put forth by society are also highly important in the regulation of human relations, the achievement of healthy socialization, and the prevention of conflicts. Individuals with high self-competence are aware of the importance of social regulations and rules for the healthy operation of the society, and accordingly, it can be argued that they are psychologically healthier as they do not experience problems in social relationships much. Lin and Gorrell (2001) found self-competence levels of teachers to be affected by cultural factors and stated that societal perspective has an impact on self-competence.

It can be inferred from the mediation analysis that low self-competence leads to the sense of alienation, the consequent stress and anxiety renders individuals weaker in coping with psychological problems and increases psychological vulnerability. In previous research, the behavioral problems observed among individuals who have problem following social rules, hereby socializing and get the sense of alienation include depression, introversion, somatic complaints (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2012), negative emotions (Tsang, 2018), violence (Gibbs, 2004) and criminal tendency (Williamson and Cullingford, 2006), and negative school attitudes (Hascher and Hadjar, 2018). Levine (2004) explored that those who found themselves incompetent in adapting to social relationships exhibited psychologically vulnerable characteristics.

Today, research for determining and overcoming the conditions and variables which lead to behavioral problems rather than for solving the behavioral problems has gained further importance. Consequently, it is observed in the light of the findings achieved in the research that individuals with high self-competence are better at solving their problems as they have positive feelings of themselves, which lead them to exhibit psychologically more resilient behaviors. Moreover, their psychological resilience is improved with the integration with the society, adherence to social rules and socialization. When there is no social integration, individuals' vulnerabilities would tend to increase. According to Horney (2017), each neurosis occurs as a result of alienation. Personality dissociation and identity diffusion are observed in the alienated individual (Fromm, 1996). As a socio-psychodynamic being, a human is expected to show strong behaviors in social relationships, which help them find a place within the society. Psychologically vulnerable individuals who tend to alienate from the society cannot develop in a healthy manner. In this context, it is regarded as important to identify factors that cause youngsters to have mental breakdowns and prevented them from integrating with the society and to take necessary measures. Hence, it is important to carry out studies for improving self-competence of students at schools and informing them of the importance and nature of social expectations and rules. Furthermore, it can be recommended that research be

conducted on family, culture and psychological factors which may cause the sense of alienation and psychological vulnerability among students. The research was conducted in the correlational model. Accordingly, it can be recommended that qualitative research for in-depth investigation of the reasons for alienation and psychological vulnerability and research using structural equation modeling for testing the effect of multiple variables be carried out.

Determining the mediating effects and roles of alienation subscales in the relationship between self-competence and psychological vulnerability is the strength of this research. However, the fact that the research data were obtained from undergraduates attending a foundation university is a limitation of the research. Thus, one should take caution when generalizing the research results. Future studies can be performed to see whether similar variables will provide similar results in different sample groups.

### **Disclosure Statements**

1. Contribution rate statement of researchers:

1. First author 50%,
2. Second author 25%
3. Third author 25%

2. No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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