

SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-ASSERTIVENESS AMONG ADOLESCENTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GENDER DIFFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a significant phase of development, as it represents a critical period of transition from childhood to early adulthood, spanning approximately from 10 to 19 years. During this period, adolescents undergo significant physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes that shape their identity, self-concept, and interpersonal relationships. In this context, self-esteem and self-assertiveness are two essential constructs that help adolescents to communicate effectively and thrive in their personal and social life.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and self-assertiveness in adolescence while exploring the role of gender. The study included 60 adolescents (30 boys and 30 girls) aged between 15 to 18 years, who were selected from Delhi-NCR. The participants completed two self-report questionnaires, namely the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale and Rathus Self-assertive Scale. The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale is a widely used instrument that measures global self-worth, including both positive and negative self-evaluations. On the other hand, the Rathus Self-assertive Scale measures the degree to which an individual is willing to express his/her feelings, thoughts, and needs to others in various social situations.

The findings of the study revealed a weak positive correlation between self-esteem and self-assertiveness in adolescence indicating the presence of other factors that might influence the relationship between self-esteem and self-assertiveness. Interestingly, the study also found a significant gender disparity in self-esteem levels. Specifically, girls had significantly lower self-esteem than boys, which is consistent with previous research on gender differences in self-esteem. This finding is noteworthy as low self-esteem has been linked with a range of negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, poor academic performance, and risky behaviors. Therefore, it is crucial to address the gender disparities in self-esteem levels to promote positive developmental outcomes in adolescents.

In contrast, no significant gender differences were observed in self-assertiveness. This finding suggests that both boys and girls are equally willing to express themselves in various social situations, indicating that self-assertiveness is a universal construct that is not influenced by gender.

Keywords: *Adolescence, Gender, Self-esteem, Self-assertiveness*

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is the transitional stage of development between childhood and adulthood, typically lasting from ages 10-19. It is marked by physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes that prepare individuals for the demands of adulthood. In this period, adolescents undergo rapid physical changes, such as growth spurts, secondary sex characteristics, and changes in brain development that affect behavior and decision-making. The two important characteristics that shape one's identity during this period are Self-esteem and Self-assertiveness.

Self-esteem is defined as the judgments we make about our worth and the feelings associated with those judgments. It originates early, and its structure becomes increasingly elaborate with age. A child's self-esteem might reflect a belief about whether he or she is intelligent and attractive but that belief has nothing to do with accuracy. On one hand, high self-esteem may refer to accurate, justified perceptions of one's worth as a person and one's successes and accomplishments, but it can also refer to an arrogant,

grandiose and unwarranted sense of superiority over others. In the same manner, low self-esteem may reflect either an accurate perception of one's shortcomings or a distorted, even pathological insecurity and inferiority. Self-esteem in adolescence is affected by many factors ranging from biological to environmental, from social-familial to cultural.

Self-esteem is influenced by gender stereotypes, with adolescent girls feeling less confident about their physical appearance and athletic abilities compared to boys due to experiencing puberty and school transitions at the same time. Girls tend to score higher in language arts self-esteem, while boys score higher in math, science, and physical/athletic self-esteem. However, girls excel in self-esteem related to close friendships and social acceptance. Young adolescent girls who prioritize maintaining others' approval and social relationships may have lower self-esteem than boys. It is commonly believed that boys have higher overall self-worth than girls, which explains why girls tend to experience larger drops in perceived self-worth during adolescence.

Self-esteem is the judgment we make about our worth and the feelings associated with it. It originates early and becomes more complex with age. Factors such as biology, environment, and culture affect self-esteem in adolescence. Erik Erikson believed that the physical, cognitive, and social changes associated with puberty cause a decline in self-esteem in young adolescents. Studies show that perceptions of competency in particular domains decline gradually in adolescence. However, self-esteem becomes more stable in adolescence and early adulthood. Healthy self-esteem in adolescence has various benefits such as making a person more assertive, confident, and resilient. Gender-stereotyped expectations affect self-esteem, with girls having lower self-esteem than boys due to concerns about physical appearance, athletic abilities, and social relationships.

Bhamani, Jamil and Mohsin (2014) aimed to explore the self-esteem trends in adolescents of Karachi, Pakistan regarding gender differences. They reported a significant gender difference in the variable of self-esteem of the chosen adolescents wherein the female adolescents have shown significantly higher self-esteem than boys. In another study done by Minev et al. (2018) aimed to analyze the correlation between successful academic achievement and self-esteem in adolescent students and gender differences in self-esteem. They found that boys have higher self-esteem than girls. Girls were found to regard themselves more negatively than boys and boys regard themselves as more independent and worthy. This difference was explained by the fact that boys tend to be more independent from the opinion of others, while girls are more prone to conformism. In a study by Quatman and Watson (2001), boys were found to demonstrate a slightly higher level of self-esteem than girls.

Assertiveness is considered to be an important communication skill influencing our interpersonal relations. It plays a role in stress management, conflict resolution, and developing a positive self-concept. Self-assertiveness refers to the ability to confidently and courageously state one's views, express feelings, ask for what one wants, and enjoy one's rights. This includes exhibiting assertive behavior, which allows adolescents to act in their own best interest, stand up for themselves without excessive worry, express honest feelings comfortably, and exercise personal rights without infringing on the rights of others. A self-assertive individual displays integrity, honesty, directness, and respect for others. Assertive behaviors help to foster strong relationships with others, even if there is disagreement. Some key traits of assertive

individuals include confidence, effective communication skills, validating others' opinions, honesty, and an understanding of personal boundaries.

During adolescence, being assertive is essential. This skill assists adolescents in creating strategies for assertively managing aggressive behavior. It also helps them become more conscious of their emotional responses to others' behavior and how to handle challenging individuals. Furthermore, it strengthens their capacity to express their thoughts effectively while empathizing with others' emotions.

Parray and Kumar (2016) conducted a study to examine the assertiveness level of undergraduate students about their gender, residence, and stream of study. The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (1978) was used to assess the assertiveness of the students. The results of the study revealed no significant gender difference between students in their level of assertiveness.

Assertiveness and self-esteem in adolescents are the instruments for expressing themselves without any psychological disturbances in different situations. It is essential for better emotional well-being and to maintain socially supportive relationships. In a study by Sarkova, Slekova & Orosova, (2013), carried out to study the associations between assertiveness, psychological well-being, and self-esteem in adolescents, it was seen that both the dimensions of assertiveness- distress, and performance- used for the study, were associated with psychological well-being and self-esteem. Shanmugam and Kathyayini (2017) studied assertiveness and self-esteem in Indian adolescents. Rathus' assertiveness schedule and Rosenberg's self-esteem scale were used to assess assertiveness and self-esteem in adolescents. The results indicated a positive correlation between the assertive behavior and self-esteem of the adolescents.

Keeping the results of the past research in mind, which looked into the correlation between self-esteem and self-assertiveness, and gender differences in self-esteem and self -assertiveness, the present study aims to find out the relationship between assertiveness and self-esteem and to study the role of gender on self-esteem and self-assertiveness among adolescents in the age group of 15 to 18 years.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present study are:

- To study the relationship between Self- esteem and Self Assertiveness of adolescent boys and girls.
- To study the role of gender in Self-esteem.
- To study the role of gender in Self-assertiveness.

HYPOTHESES

Based on the above objectives, the following hypotheses were developed:

- There is no correlation between self-esteem and self-assertiveness for both boys and girls.
- There is no significant difference in the self-esteem of boys and girls.
- There is no significant difference in the self-assertiveness of boys and girls.

METHOD

Participants

The sample of the present study consisted of 60 participants (30 boys and 30 girls) in the age range of 15 to 18 years. They belonged to middle socio-economic status and went to public schools.

Tools Used

Two tools have been used in the present study- Self Esteem Questionnaire by Rosenberg and Rathus Self Assertiveness Scale.

Procedure

The study aimed to see the correlation between self-esteem and self-assertiveness among adolescents. The aim was also to look at the gender (male and female) differences concerning self-esteem and self-assertiveness. Two scales were used for this purpose- the Rosenberg self-esteem questionnaire and a short form of the Simple Rathus self-assertiveness scale. The participants were approached purposely and were briefed about the study. Participants were also told that they had the right to withdraw at any time and that their information and data collected would be kept anonymous. After getting their consent, they were given the questionnaires. After the completion of the scales, they were thanked. The scoring of the scales was done accordingly. The obtained results were analyzed using the Pearson correlation method. To understand the gender differences in self-esteem and self-assertiveness, mean and the values will also be calculated.

RESULTS

The results obtained in the study are presented in the form of tables (table 1 and 2) and a graph (graph 1).

Table 1: Correlation Obtained Between Self-esteem and Self-assertiveness for Boys and Girls.

	r values
Boys	+0.24
Girls	+0.0839
Total	+0.187

Table 2: Mean, SD, and t-value for Self-esteem and Self Assertiveness for Boys and Girls

	Group	Mean Score	SD	df	t value
Self-esteem	Boys	30.33	5.09	58	-2.152*

	Girls	27.93	3.39		
Self-assertiveness	Boys	5.37	13.41	58	1.627
	Girls	-1.17	17.43		

a* = .05

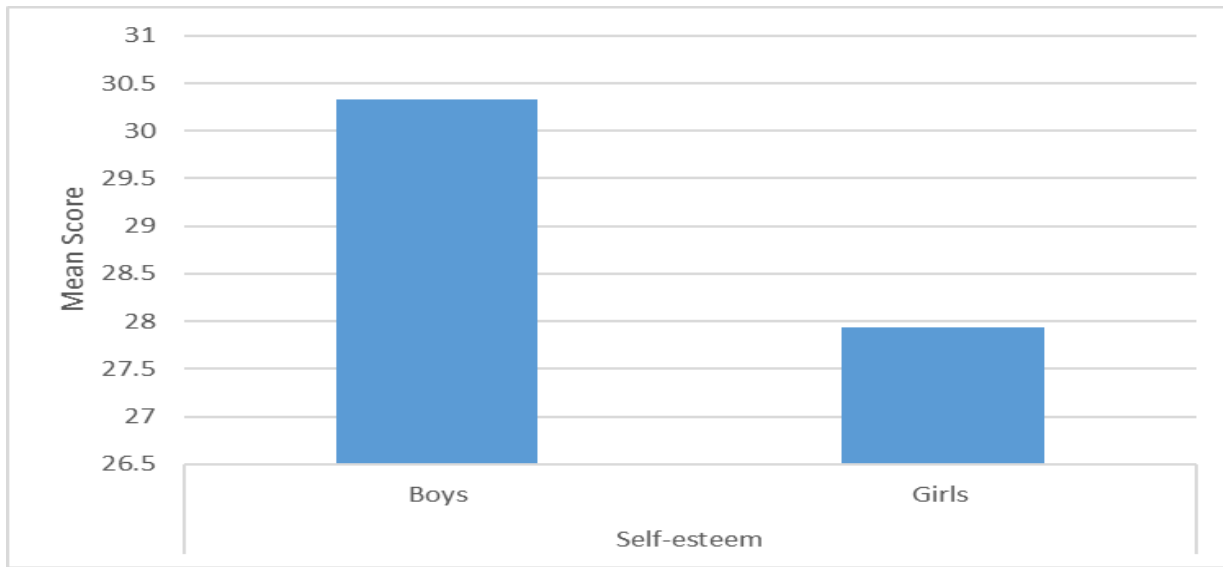


Figure 1: Means Obtained for Self-esteem of Males and Females

DISCUSSION

The present study aims to understand the relationship between self-assertiveness and self-esteem among adolescents in the age group of 15 to 18 years. The study also looks into the gender differences between boys and girls with respect to self-esteem and self-assertiveness. Using Google Forms, two scales were administered to sixty participants. The two scales used were the Rosenberg self-esteem questionnaire and the Simple Rathus self-assertiveness scale. After having obtained the data from the participants, the results were formulated in the form of tables (Tables 1 and 2) and Figure 1.

The first objective was to study the relationship between self-esteem and self-assertiveness among adolescent boys and girls. In the context of this objective, the hypothesis framed was, “There is no correlation between self-esteem and self-assertiveness for both boys and girls”.

The results obtained showed a positive correlation of +0.187 between self-esteem and self-assertiveness among adolescents. A positive correlation indicates a direct relationship, however, since the correlation value is small, it indicates a weak relationship. This may point out that self-esteem and self-assertiveness are conceptually very different aspects of a person. Self-esteem may refer to how a person evaluates and

thinks about their internal self, whereas self-assertiveness mostly refers to how a person expresses himself/herself. Both of them are important for a person as they enable him/her to make better life decisions and help them in their career and interpersonal relationships. However, both constructs are independent and share the least chance of influencing each other.

The weak correlation may also be explained in terms of the factors influencing them. Both self-esteem and self-assertiveness are influenced by different factors. Self-esteem is affected by factors such as peer influences, parenting styles, the culture one lives in, and biological and personality factors. Self-assertiveness on the other hand can be influenced by factors such as culture, values, level of education, confidence levels, and personality factors.

The correlation between self-esteem and self-assertiveness among boys and girls was also observed. It was observed that the correlation between self-esteem and self-assertiveness among boys was +0.24, which was comparatively higher as compared to the girls, where the correlation came to be 0.08. According to a study by Bronstein (2006), in many cultures, mothers conform to cultural and social norms and teach their daughters to be more obedient and responsible as compared their sons. They place more restrictions on daughters' autonomy. Fathers show more attention to sons than daughters, engage in more activities with sons, and put forth more effort to promote their son's intellectual development. Similarly, teachers also act in ways that maintain and even extend gender roles taught at home. As early as kindergarten, teachers give more overall attention to boys than to girls. All these external or environmental influences play a huge part in an adolescent's life and reinforce the type of behavior they form in their life. Therefore, it has been observed that boys are higher on the aspect of self-assertiveness and self-esteem because they are encouraged to be a part of situations that include competition, conflict, power, and excitement as compared to girls who encounter situations of intimacy, self-disclosure, and support.

The second objective of the study was to understand the role of gender in self-esteem and self-assertiveness. Accordingly, it was hypothesized that there is no significant difference in self-esteem between boys and girls. The mean score on self-esteem for boys is 30.33 and for girls is 27.93. From Table 2, it is also observed that the *t* obtained is -2.15. Thus, it can be deduced that the hypothesis is rejected. A significant difference in gender is observed where the self-esteem of boys is better as compared to girls.

Self-esteem is a component of self-concept and is defined as the judgments we make about our worth and the feelings associated with those judgments. Gender differences could be counted on many biological, cognitive, and especially social and environmental factors that influence an adolescent's personal development and self-esteem. Parents from childhood hold different perceptions and expectations from their sons and daughters, which plays a huge part in creating gender differences. They actively reinforce independence in boys and closeness and dependency in girls. It has also been observed that many adolescent girls have more negative assessments of their physical characteristics and intellectual abilities than boys which tends to lower their self-esteem. The existence of gender differences in self-esteem was also proven in a study by Minev et al. (2018) that aimed to analyze the correlation between successful academic achievement and self-esteem in adolescent students and gender differences in self-esteem. It

was found that boys had higher self-esteem than girls. Girls were found to regard themselves more negatively than boys who regarded themselves as more independent and worthy.

The parenting styles and the sensitivity of parenting during early childhood influences positive and negative constructs of self. Children and adolescents whose parents are warm and supportive, set clear standards for them to live up to engage in positive problem solving and allow them to make decisions that affect them personally, have higher self-esteem than children and adolescents whose parents are more authoritative and stricter towards them (Gutman & Eccles, 2007). Such parents often help or make decisions for their children and therefore, communicate a sense of inadequacy to the children. It is often observed in the Indian context, whether in rural or urban settings, boys are allowed a greater sense of independence, freedom, and authority. In contrast, for females, more rigid rules and obligations are followed. Having parents who are repeatedly disapproving, and insulting is also linked to low self-esteem (Kernis and Paradise, 2002). Children of such parents may need constant reassurance, and many rely heavily on peers to affirm their self-worth (Donnellan et al., 2005). Overly tolerant, indulgent parenting is linked to unrealistically high self-esteem, which also undermines development. In many parts of India, the birth of boys is celebrated as a joyous occasion and they are given a position of power from early on, which helps boost their self-esteem. Parents are more interested in giving a more comfortable and suitable future to their sons in terms of education and business, whereas women in most parts are still groomed for a future as suitable wives. Although there is a considerable change concerning the representation of women at the national and international level, there are still many hindrances that deter women from fulfilling their ambitions. They are more likely to be subjected to scrutiny and ridicule when they charter into largely male-dominated fields.

It has also been revealed in various research that girls mature faster than boys as they get more strictly monitored and reprimanded for their behavior. Because girls mature faster than boys, they are more likely to be experiencing school transitions and pubertal changes at the same time. Girls are more likely than boys to be dissatisfied with their bodies and physical appearance during their adolescent years (Knauss, Paxton and Alsaker 2006 ;). And girls, who are more concerned with maintaining others' approval (Rose and Rudolph 2005) are bothered more by hassles with family members and peers than boys are (Gutman & Eccles, 2007). Perhaps more girls than boys become depressed during adolescence (Stice & Bearman, 2001) and why adolescent girls tend to show more sizable drops in perceived self-worth than adolescent boys (Robins and Pals, 2002).

During adolescence, the influence of peers on one's self-esteem becomes increasingly evident. If young teenagers receive balanced and substantial social support from both peers and parents, they tend to exhibit high levels of self-esteem and minimal problematic behavior (DuBois, Holloway and Valentine, 2002). The quality of adolescents' relationships with their close friends has the most significant impact on their self-evaluation. When reflecting on experiences that affected their self-esteem, young adults often mention experiences with friends and romantic partners, rather than parents and family members (McLean & Thorne, 2003).

It was also hypothesized that there is no significant difference in the self-assertiveness of boys and girls. As seen in Table 2, the mean obtained by boys is 5.37, and for girls is -1.17. No significant difference is observed. Self-assertiveness is having or showing confidence and courage in stating one's views,

expressing one's feelings, asking for what one wants, and enjoying their rights. This result can also be corroborated by a study conducted by Muragod (2017) and Parray and Kumar (2020). The mean difference shows that boys are more assertive as compared to girls. The result can also be further explained as both adolescent boys and girls assert themselves in an equal measure. Society expects rebelling and asserting opinion as a behavior more commonly associated with boys and is seen as unacceptable for girls.

Therefore, this study observed a weak correlation between self-esteem and self-assertiveness among adolescents for both boys and girls. A significant difference between adolescent boys and girls concerning self-esteem was noticed.

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