

## Gender Based Level of Self-Esteem among Adolescents

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### Abstract

**Background:** Teens undergo major changes in their lives and their self-esteem can often become fragile. Teenagers' self-esteem is often affected by the physical and hormonal changes they experience, especially during puberty. The study aimed to assess the level of self-esteem and identify gender based differences among adolescents.

**Materials and Methods:** The descriptive study design was adopted. Through a non-randomized convenient sampling technique, one hundred twenty students in the age group of 15-18 years were enrolled. The data were collected through the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale through the interview method. The collected data were analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics.

**Results:** Out of 120 adolescents, 32% had low self-esteem and 14% had high self-esteem. Overall, the level of self-esteem was low among males (63%) as compared to female (37%) adolescents. The chi-square value depicts that age, sex, education, and residence had a significant association with low and high self-esteem.

**Conclusion:** Adolescents with low self-esteem, irrespective of gender face lot of difficulty in managing obstacles and preventing issues. Thus, there is an urgent need for a holistic approach and assertiveness training is required to strengthen emotional and psycho-social development and aid in achieving whole adolescent health.

**Keywords:** Self-esteem; Adolescents; Gender based differences; Holistic approach; and Assertiveness.

## INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is the way; individuals think and feel about themselves and how well they do

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things that are important to them. Self-esteem comes from different sources for children at different stages of development. The development of self-esteem in young children is heavily influenced by parental attitudes and behavior.<sup>1</sup> Currently, school age youngsters spend more time with their friends than they spend doing homework, watching television, or playing alone. In addition, the amount of time in which they interact with their parents is greatly reduced from when they were younger. At this stage, social acceptance by a child's peer group plays a major role in developing and maintaining self-esteem.<sup>2</sup> Peer acceptance and relationships are important to children's social and emotional development and their development of self-esteem,



self-confidence, and self-acceptance. It is the way that individuals perceive themselves and their self-value that allows for self-exploration, emotional growth, and moral development.<sup>3</sup>

Infants start to build self-esteem as soon as they are born. Their self-esteem is first built by having their basic needs met, including the need for love, comfort, and closeness. They gradually learn that they are loved as the people who care for them consistently treat them gently, and makes comfort them when they cry, and show them attention. How their parents or primary caregivers treat them slowly leads to the later development of self-esteem.<sup>4</sup> They are usually extremely concerned about how they look and how they are perceived and accepted by their peers. Teens who set goals in their lives have higher self-esteem than those who do not. High self-esteem is also directly related to teens who have a very supportive family.<sup>5</sup>

### *Need for the study*

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Body image is a major component in teenagers' self-esteem, teens who have high self-esteem like the way they look and accept themselves the way they are. Teens with low self-esteem usually have a poor body image and think they are too fat, not pretty enough, or not in a masculinenature.<sup>6</sup> The physical and emotional changes that take place in the adolescence stage, especially early adolescence, present new challenges to a child's self-esteem. Boys whose growth spurt comes late compare themselves with peers who have matured early and seem more athletic, masculine, and confident. In contrast, early physical maturation can be embarrassing for girls, who may feel gawky and self-conscious in their newly developed bodies. Both boys and girls expend inordinate amounts of time and energy on personal grooming, spending long periods in private rooms trying to achieve success in their lives. Parents can enhance teenagers' self-esteem by asking for their help or advice and listening to their opinions.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the researcher had an insight to identify the level and gender differences in self-esteem among middle adolescents.

### *Statement of problem*

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Assess the Gender Based Level of Self-Esteem among adolescents in selected schools in Chennai

### *Objectives*

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1. To assess the level of self-esteem among

adolescents.

2. To compare gender based levels of self-esteem among adolescents.
3. To associate the level of self-esteem with selected demographic variables of adolescents.

## **MATERIALS & METHODS**

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The univariable, descriptive cross-sectional research design was adopted for this study. Through a non-randomized convenient technique, a total of 120 adolescents in the age group of 15-18 years were enrolled in selected schools, in Chennai. The data were collected through the Rosenberg Self-Esteem (RSE) Scale through the interview method.

### *Tools Description*

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The 10 item RSE scale was designed to measure the self-esteem of adolescents. However, a 4 point Likert scale was used, Low self-esteem responses were "disagree" or "strongly disagree" on items 1, 3, 4, 7, 10, and "strongly agree" or "agree" on items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9. The scale can also be scored by individual 4 point items after reverse scoring the negatively worded items. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem. The RSE scale coefficient of reproducibility of .92, indicating excellent internal consistency. Test retest reliability over a period of 2 weeks reveals correlations of .85 and .88, indicating excellent stability.

### *Ethical Considerations*

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The study was approved by the Hindu Mission College of Nursing, Chennai. The necessary permission from the school was obtained, before data collection, written consent was obtained from the guardian of the samples and assent was obtained from the samples. Individual anonymity was maintained throughout the study.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

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After formal permission was obtained from the school, the self-administered questionnaire was given to the students and they were informed about the importance of responding very carefully to each statement of the questionnaire. The data were collected approximately 20-25 students per day. The approximate time taken to complete the questionnaire was 15-20 minutes, The collected data were analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics.

## RESULTS

**Table 1:** Frequency and percentage distribution of adolescents  
(N=120)

Demographic Variables	Number	Percentage
<b>Age (Years)</b>		
14-15	39	32.5
16-17	40	33.3
18-19	41	34.2
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	58	48.3
Female	62	51.7
<b>Education</b>		
9th	21	17.5
10th	33	27.5
11th	38	31.7
12th	28	23.3
<b>Occupation - Father</b>		
Daily wages	36	30.0
Agriculture	52	43.3
Private	18	15.0
Business	14	11.7
<b>Occupation - Mother</b>		
Housewife	35	29.2
Agriculture	50	41.7
Private	25	20.8
Business	10	8.3
<b>Family Income</b>		
Below 10,000	34	28.3
10,001-25,000	39	32.5
25,001-50,000	44	36.7
More than 50,000	3	2.5
<b>Residence</b>		
Urban	48	40.0
Rural	30	25.0
Semi Urban	42	35.0
<b>Religion</b>		
Hindu	78	65.0
Christian	30	25.0
Muslim	12	10.0

Regarding Table 1 of demographic variables, among 120 adolescents, all the age groups were equally distributed an average of 32-34%, and nearly 51% were females and the remaining 48% were male. Concerning education, 32% were studying in 11th standard, 43% of parents' occupational status was agriculture, 37% had in baseline salary of Rs 25,000-50,000 and nearly 40% stayed in an urban

area with a maximum of 65% belonging to Hindu religion.

**Table 2:** Assess the level of self-esteem of adolescents  
(N=120)

Level of Self-esteem	No	Percentage
Low (Below 15)	38	31.7
Normal (15-25)	65	54.2
High (Above 25)	17	14.1
Total	120	100

Table 2 depicts that, nearly more than half of the percentage i.e., 54% of adolescents were in normal self-esteem, and the remaining percentage 14% were in a high level of self-esteem and 32% were in a low level of self-esteem.

**Table 3:** Comparison of the Gender Based Level of Self-Esteem of adolescents.

Gender	Level of Self-esteem					
	Low (38)		Normal (65)		High (17)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Male (58)	24	63.2	27	41.5	7	41.2
Female (62)	14	36.8	38	58.5	10	58.8

Table 3 reveals that the Gender Based Level of Self-Esteem of adolescents i.e., nearly 63% of males and 37% of females had a low level of esteem whereas, in the opposite view, 59% of females and 41% of males had a high level of self-esteem.

**Table 4:** Association between the level of self-esteem among adolescents with their demographic variables  
(n=120)

Demographic Variables	Level of Self-esteem				Chi-square Test
	Low (38)		High (17)		
	No	%	No	%	
<b>Age (Years)</b>					
14-15	19	50.0	3	17.6	4.09
16-17	11	28.9	5	29.4	P=0.04
18-19	8	21.1	9	53.0	
<b>Sex</b>					S 2.48
Male	24	63.2	7	41.2	P< 0.02
Female	14	36.8	10	58.8	S
<b>Education</b>					
9th	16	42.1	3	17.6	5.45
10th	13	34.2	4	23.6	P < 0.02
11th	5	13.2	5	29.4	S
12th	4	10.5	5	29.4	

table cont...

Residence					
Rural	12	31.6	3	17.6	4.64
Semi-Urban	12	31.6	5	29.4	P < 0.03
Urban	7	18.4	9	53.0	S

*P>0.05 Significant*

Table 4 shows an association between the level of self-esteem among adolescents with their demographic variables of age, sex, education, and residence had a significant association between level of self-esteem in  $p>0.05$  whereas there is no significant association found between family income and religious variables.

## DISCUSSION

Self-esteem is an essential feeling for adolescents to live their lives and integrate into society. The major aspect in building the personality of an individual lead by self-esteem. The findings of the study are discussed based on objectives. The first objective identified that 14% had a high level of self-esteem and 32% of adolescents had low self-esteem. The results of the present study are supported by a similar cross-sectional study conducted in Minia City among 298 students, 27.5% identified with low self-esteem.<sup>8</sup> Another cross-section study, conducted in urban and semi-urban areas of Vietnam among 1,149 secondary students found that low self-esteem was detected at a prevalence of 19.4%.<sup>9</sup>

The second objective of determining gender based self-esteem found that nearly 63% of males and 37% of females had low self-esteem whereas high self-esteem found that, the reverse view of 59% of females and 41% of males. In a controversial view, the comparative study was conducted in Karachi among 356 students in the age group of 15-21 (mean=18.24) years and reported that males significantly had higher self-esteem ( $M=27.1$ ,  $SD=6.53$ ) than females. ( $M=25.13$ ;  $SD=6.01$ ).  $t=3.425$ ,  $p<.01$ .<sup>10</sup> The same controversial view in the review article also stated that gender roles influence adolescents' self-esteem. i.e., self-confidence is a stereotypical male feature, whereas in girls the performance of self-confidence is considered a breach of traditional gender roles. Therefore, it's reported that boys had higher self-esteem than girls.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the null hypothesis of H01 in the present study stated that there is no significant difference between the gender based self-esteem was rejected.

The third objective was to associate the level of self-esteem with selected demographic variables of

adolescents. The present study found a significant association between the level of self-esteem with their demographic variables of age, sex, education, and residence. In age, half of the percentage of middle adolescents the age of 15-16 years studying in 9 and 10th grade had low self-esteem whereas, as age increases late adolescents in the age of 18-19 years and moving to higher secondary more than half of the percentage had high self-esteem. Considering gender roles in this study, the majority of males had low self-esteem when compared to females it may be due to less social participation and physical problems causing the withdrawal from regular work. The controversial view in the cross-cultural examination study by using a large internet sample (N 985,937) across 48 nations, found that age increases self-esteem from late adolescence to middle adulthood and significant gender gaps, with males consistently reporting higher self-esteem than females.<sup>12</sup>

Another study conducted among 348 adolescents in Pokhara Metropolitan City found that adolescents who experience higher education, and social/family support are likely to have higher self-esteem.<sup>13</sup> Lee D, Lee S. (2023) in his study concluded that the controversial view of female adolescents is at a higher risk of low self-esteem than male adolescents.<sup>14</sup> In the present study findings, regarding the residence part, the adolescents who are residing in rural areas had low self-esteem when compared to the adolescents who reside in urban areas. Because the lifestyle pattern of urban creates many exposures that lead to self-confidence and increase the level of self-esteem.<sup>15</sup> Hence, the null hypothesis of H02 stated that there is no significant association between the selected variables like age, gender, education, and residence was rejected, and accepted for the other variables like family income and religion.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Adolescence is the stage when self-esteem may head in positive or negative directions and there are various factors responsible to influence for the development of self-esteem. School based counseling efforts should be made to enable these students to learn how to face life challenges, teach skills to build confidence, and increase their resilience. A similar study can be conducted with larger samples and a comparative study can be conducted in different settings of rural and urban areas for better generalization.

## CONCLUSION

Global self-esteem, an individual's overall evaluation of self, is one of the most studied constructs in the social sciences. Self-esteem development depends on the various factors and areas in which children are nurtured. Low self-esteem makes adolescents irrespective of gender face a lot of difficulties in managing obstacles and preventing issues. School intervention programs should be in consideration to enable these students to learn how to face life challenges, and teach skills to maximize confidence and capacity building regarding their resilience. These results therefore suggested the need for a school based or web based provision aimed at proactively increasing students' self-esteem and skills for dealing with academic stress and overall development.

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