

## GENDER DIFFERENCE IN PRE-ADOLESCENTS' SELF-ESTEEM

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the present investigation was to study the self-esteem of the pre-adolescent children and to see the gender differences between males and females in that early age. One hundred students (50 males and 50 females), with ages between 9 and 12 years (group mean  $\pm$  S.D., 10.3  $\pm$  1.2 years) were selected as the participants for this study. All of them were students who were studying in std. fifth to std. seven, in a school in the north India. For the baseline assessment of self-esteem, Indian Adaptation of Battle's Self-Esteem Inventory for Children was used. The study was a onetime assessment, with a cross-sectional design. Signed consent was taken from the teachers of participants before data collection. Data of male and female students was compared by unpaired t-test. Significant differences were not found in total, social, academic and parental self-esteem when data of male participants were compared with the female participants but the general self-esteem of females was found to be higher than males ( $p < 0.05$ ). In conclusion, there wasn't any gender differences found in the overall self-esteem in the pre-adolescence period.

**KEYWORDS:** Self-esteem Pre-adolescence Gender differences

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### Introduction:

In social psychology, self-esteem is an important measure because researchers have conceptualized it as an influential predictor of various outcomes, such as academic achievement and behaviour. According to **Branden (1987)**, self-esteem is the sum of self-confidence and self-respect. It can be understood as a consequence of the subjective judgment that every person makes of his ability to face life's challenges, to understand and solve problems, and his right to achieve happiness, and be given respect. Moreover, self-esteem has also been thought as an important outcome due to its close relation with psychological well-being of children (**Branden, 1987**).

Subjective experiences in a person's life are chief contributors in self-esteem development. The good and bad life experiences create attitudes toward the self which can be favourable and develop positive feelings of self-worth, otherwise same can be unfavourable and develop negative feelings of self-worth. In the initial years of a child's life, parents cause the most significant influence on the self-esteem and remain the chief source of positive and/or negative experiences a child will have. The emphasis of unconditional love from the parents has

high importance in child developing a stable sense of being cared for and respected. These feelings translate into later effects of self-esteem as the child grows older (Olsen et al., 2008).

### **Development of self-esteem in children:**

During the early school years, academic achievement is a significant predictor of self-esteem development. Academic achievement becomes the first identity with which a child relates himself. A student's achieving success or consistently failing, strongly affects their individual self-esteem (Crocker et al., 2002). Social experiences are another important contributor for it. As children go through school they begin to understand and note various differences between themselves and their classmates. By using social comparisons, children learn to judge whether they are better or worse than classmates in different activities. These comparisons play an important role in moulding the child's self-esteem and influence the development of positive or negative feelings they have about themselves (Butler, 1998; Pomerantz et al., 1995). As children go through adolescence peer influence becomes much more important, as adolescents make assessment of themselves based on their relationships with close friends (Thorne & Michaelieu, 1996). A successful peer relationship is very important for the development of high self-esteem for children. Social acceptance brings about self confidence and produces high self-esteem in them, whereas rejection from peers and loneliness brings about self-doubts, poor self image and produces low self-esteem (Leary & Baumeister, 2000).

Parenting can also play an important role in self-esteem development of children. Students in elementary school who have high self-esteem have parents who are caring and supportive, who put high standards for their child and encourage them to voice their opinion in decision making (Lamborn et al., 1991). Although studies are very limited in this regard but the common finding is that warm, supportive parenting has a high correlation with high self-esteem in children. It could easily be thought of as being a causal effect in self-esteem development (Coopersmith, 1967; Isberg et al., 1989).

Childhood experiences that contribute to healthy self-esteem also include talking to them and let them talk respectfully, providing appropriate attention and affection and recognizing their accomplishments and mistakes or failures. Experiences that are responsible for low self-esteem in children include being harshly criticized, being physically, sexually or emotionally abused, being ridiculed, ignored or being expected to be "best and perfect" all the time.

There is hardly any research for the gender difference in the children for the self-esteem or self-concept. Still some research exists that found gender difference in adults for self-concept and self-esteem. Early research inspired by the differences in self-concept across culture suggested that men tend to be more independent universally while women tend to be more dependent on each other i.e. they need some other women for their support and development (Cross & Madson, 1997). Being independent in self concept means that assessment of others are not affecting the self. Interdependent self-construct refers to the fact that assessment of others becomes the self assessment (Cross & Madson, 1997). However, more recent research (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999) has shown that, while men and women do not differ much between independence and interdependence generally, they do differ between relational and collective interdependence. Men are known for collective interdependence while women for relational interdependence. In other words, women identify more with dyadic (one-on-one) relationships; whereas men identify themselves more often within the context of larger groups (Boesch & Boesch, 2000). Research also shows that as gender roles are dissolving in Western society (e.g.,

more men are staying at home and women are being empowered in the workplace), these differences may change very quickly (**Cross & Madson, 1997**).

Women have often been expected and labelled as being more emotional than men. This area of gender differences is important to research, as self-esteem or self image that encompass gender may also encompass the self-conscious emotions or tendencies associated with gender. Women, for example, are expected to show more guilt, shame and embarrassment whereas men are accused to show more pride, but research shows that women in fact do show more guilt, shame and embarrassment than men but that men and women show the same amount of pride (**Else-Quest et al., 2012**). Furthermore, gender differences in self-conscious emotions are different between ethnicities and are greatest within white populations when compared to other cultures like Black or African, Asian, and Latin American samples. More research in this area is needed to bring light on the gender differences across different cultures and ethnicities, as most of the samples used in gender studies are collected from white cultures only. This reliance on a specific sample can lead researchers to overestimate the magnitude of gender differences in terms of self conscious emotions of women in comparison to men (**Else-Quest et al., 2012**).

A study done in the University of Basel examined the development of self-esteem in adolescence and young adulthood. The aim of the study was to determine the direction of self-esteem development; as in when does self-esteem development occur in life and in what direction. Another aspect of the study was to discover potential factors of individual differences in self-esteem development after recording trajectories. It was expected that self-esteem development would continuously increase during adolescence and young adulthood as previous studies' reported (**Erol & Orth, 2011**). But interestingly it was found that self-esteem increases moderately through adolescence and continues to increase in young adulthood at a much slower rate. A high sense of skill, low risk taking and better overall health predicted higher self-esteem in participants at each age level. Emotionally stable, extroverted and self aware participants experienced higher self-esteem as well (**Erol & Orth, 2011**). An individual's subjective sense of mastery proved to be an important moderator of self-esteem direction for all participants. This study didn't show any results of a significant difference between self-esteem directions of men and women. Erol and Orth's study point out to the importance of adolescence as a possible critical period for self-esteem development. The results of these studies can lend themselves to the implementation of self-esteem improvement interventions in young children.

Objective of the present research was to study the self-esteem of the pre-adolescent kids at various sub dimensions and to see if there was any difference between males and females from that early age.

### **Research methodology:-**

#### **Participants:**

Participants were 100 students (50 males and 50 females), with ages between 9 and 12 years (group mean  $\pm$  S.D.,  $10.3 \pm 1.2$  years;  $10.5 \pm 1.2$  years for male students;  $10.2 \pm 1.1$  years for female students). All of them were students who had read in std. fifth to std. seven, in a school in the north India. Signed informed consent was taken from the teachers of participants before starting the actual study.

#### **Design:**

The study was a onetime assessment, with a cross-sectional design. The assessment was carried out once.

**Assessment:**

The Indian Adaptation of Battle's Self-Esteem Inventory for Children was used to assess self-esteem at the moment of testing (Kumar, 1988). The SEIC (Self-Esteem Inventory for Children) has fifty items, each of which has two possible choices. These are: (a) yes (b) no. Four subscales comprise the SEIC. These are: (a) general self-esteem (20 items), (b) social self-esteem (10 items), (c) academic-self-esteem (10 items), and (d) parental self-esteem (10 items). Following instructions, the SEIC was administered to the participants. The participants had taken about 20 minutes to complete the SEIC. After completion, the SEIC questionnaire was collected from the participants.

**Data Extraction:**

The total raw score for the SEIC and raw scores for the four sub-scales of SEIC i.e. (a) general self-esteem (b) social self-esteem (c) academic self-esteem and (d) parental self-esteem; were calculated with the help of manual.

**Data Analysis:**

Data of male and female school students was compared by unpaired t-test.

**Results:**

There was no significant difference in the total, social, academic and parental self-esteem of males and females ( $p > 0.05$ ), but the general self-esteem of females was found to be higher than males ( $p < 0.05$ ). The results are mentioned below in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Self-esteem scores in school students, values given in Mean  $\pm$  SD

Variables	Males	Females
	Mean $\pm$ SD	Mean $\pm$ SD
Total scores of self-esteem	36.5 $\pm$ 5.2	36.3 $\pm$ 5.4
General self-esteem	12.8 $\pm$ 2.3	13.6 $\pm$ 2.5*
Social self-esteem	6.5 $\pm$ 1.5	6.3 $\pm$ 1.7
Academic self-esteem	8.3 $\pm$ 1.5	8.2 $\pm$ 1.6
Parental self-esteem	8.7 $\pm$ 1.4	8.5 $\pm$ 1.4

\*  $p < 0.05$

**Discussion and interpretation:**

It is evident from the above table that there was no real difference between boys and girls of pre-adolescent age for the majority of the sub-scales of self-esteem. Self-esteem in total was also not significantly different. The only real difference was observed for the general self-esteem. Surprisingly the girls possessed higher general self-esteem at this age group. There are various underlying factors for these findings. Firstly these results point out that at this age children didn't perceive any differences in their social identity and academic capacities. It points

that social stigmas (**Rangamuthia, 1997**) associated with the girl child in India doesn't really exist on the real ground any more. Children themselves don't perceive any difference at least at this age. The young boys and girls find that society doesn't have different norms and ways for treating them. This is a welcome change. Another important finding was that parental self-esteem was also comparable and no real difference existed for the same. Again it means that young boys and girls at pre-adolescent age were receiving same amount of love, care, affection and nurturance from their parents. This was expected. Even after the so much speculation about the discriminatory parental behaviour against girls (**Menon-Sen & Shivakumar, 2001**), usual understanding is that most of the educated young parents don't have different measures for their children at any early age. Of course some different measures by the same parents can still be expected in the later years of teenage, when girls are not given same freedom and some discrimination against them is clearly visible (**Menon-Sen & Shivakumar, 2001**). Academic self-esteem was as expected similar and no real difference was noted here too. Of course these findings are against some previous investigation carried out twelve years back (**Menon-Sen & Shivakumar, 2001**). Now even girls are getting the same quality of education and attention from their parents and teachers. So again it was a welcome finding and against the expectations of many people looking at India from outside. The only real difference was found when the girls possessed higher general self-esteem as compared to their boys' counterparts. The reason could be that at young age parents and teachers show an extra affection towards the small girls and in a country like India (there are many a contradictions) small girls get some extra benefits. Who doesn't like to play with a beautiful small girl? It doesn't mean that boy kids don't have many admirers but the girls with their extra charm beat them easily. Still the total scores on self-esteem scale collectively was not any way different. In conclusion, the research findings show that boys and girls at an early age possess the same level of self-esteem.

### **Limitations and Suggestions:**

This research didn't consider the economic, educational, religious and social backgrounds of the parents of children. In further research these factors can also be considered.

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