

Domain Specific Self-Esteem of Adolescent Students: Does the Socioeconomic Position Matter?

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Self-esteem is the widely studied construct in the field of psychological health, however still new perspective and the significance of the construct holds attention of the researchers toward it. There is a dire need to understand that how various factors such as socio-economic conditions of the family influence individual's overall evaluation of self or specific aspects of the self. 512 randomly selected school/ college going adolescents (lower SES=153, middle SES=230 & upper SES=129) between ages of 13 to 18 years were interviewed and assessed through Urdu version of Adolescent form of Culture Free Self Esteem Inventories-3 (CFSEI-3; Imran & Ahmad, 2011), originally developed by Battle in 2002. Analysis of Variance was computed and findings divulge significant differences on all domains of self-esteem i.e. personal [$F(2,509) = 47.127, p < .001$], social [$F(2,509) = 44.598, p < .001$], academic [$F(2,509) = 4.88, p < .01$], parent / home [$F(2,509) = 9.521, p < .001$], general [$F(2,509) = 17.379, p < .001$], and overall self-esteem scores [$F(2,509) = 35.451, p < .001$]. Further Post Hoc analysis indicated disadvantage associated with those belonging to lower SES in all domains as compared to upper and middle socioeconomic class except on the domain of academic self-esteem.

Keywords: Self-esteem, domain specific, adolescents, students, SES

Self-esteem is a notion of utmost importance as it is suggested as a disposition affecting goals sought within the human capabilities and characteristics foundational to self-care. Thus due to such importance of this topic it would be beneficial to study those variables which could have strong impact on this important

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construct, especially in adolescents as it is a critical time for development of lifelong perceptions, beliefs, values, and practices. This is the struggling period in which a child goes through the challenges of developing an identity, separating from family, experiencing changes in physical characteristics, becoming a contributing member of society and facing a pressure to select a vocation. Self-esteem is important to help individuals to cope up with these changes. The distress experienced in this crucial period often has an impact on global self-esteem as well as academic and social domains of perceived self-competence (Fenzel, 2000).

Research evidences on self-esteem in different developmental periods are quite inconsistent, making it difficult to reach clear conclusion. There are numerous studies reflecting a rise in self-esteem during adolescence (Marsh, 1989; Mullis, Mullis, & Normandin, 1992), while numerous are not in consistency with this phenomenon (Chubb, Fertman, & Ross, 1997; Zimmerman, Copeland, Shope, & Dielman, 1997). The inconsistent findings may be explained by the existing individual differences associated with culture, environment or values and norms. A complementary notion of self-esteem is collective self; the self-defined in terms of the social group, of belonging, of identifying with a community (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Brewer, 2003; Hogg, 2003). Our environment shapes the person that we are and our viewpoints concerning different essential aspects of life (Minggang & Yuan, 2004), as well as about our self. Various demographic variables are considered crucial in generating a self-explanation as well as in establishing the way an environment influences individual; among which socioeconomic status holds a significant place. Socioeconomic status not only has its significance in defining the way people view their self, but also is very responsive to cultural differences.

Thus there is a need to view construct of self-esteem within various socioeconomic status, through the lens of culture and consider that there might be cultural differences in the knowledge about this important construct. There is little, if any research conducted on the variable of self-esteem in Pakistan that has

examined the difference in specifically domain specific self-esteem by social class. The present study seeks to address this gap in the existing body of literature on self-esteem in under developed countries like Pakistan, among adolescents by analyzing results by social class.

Numerous studies have identified the existence of a link between individuals' health and their socio-economic situation (Davey, 2003; Leclerc, Fassin, Grandjean, Kaminski, & Lang, 2000; Whitehead, 1992) and found socioeconomic status (SES) as a powerful predictor of almost all important life outcomes (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

Self-esteem is considered to be comprised of three components which determine the level of esteem one attaches with his or her self, these are a reflected appraisals (that is, the perception or evaluation of someone by society), self-perception, and social comparison. In adolescents the socioeconomic status plays a vital role in their self-perception as well as their perception of the external world. Investigations of Rosenberg and Pearlman (1978) indicated that children and adults learn their worth by evaluating themselves in comparison with others and their self-attitude largely depends upon the attitudes of others. SES influence the way others treat an individual and thus reflect itself in self-esteem. If others see an individual as belonging to lower class and status, he/she is likely to see him/herself that way and experience lower self-esteem (Wiltfang & Scarbecz, 1990). People with high education, high job status and high income usually enjoy respect and honor and consequently a higher self-esteem (Twenge & Crocker, 2002).

Several studies on self-esteem with reference to socioeconomic status (SES) reported findings in favor of people with high socioeconomic status. It is suggested generally, that individuals with high SES have higher levels of self-esteem as compared to lesser SES counterparts (Baharudin & Luster, 1998; Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling & Potter, 2002), specifically Robins et al. (2002) suggested that for all age groups. Whitbeck et al. (1991) suggest that SES as having an indirect effect on self-esteem of adolescents.

They discussed that lower SES is a factor which may result in lesser support and involvement from parents; and instead of family's economic condition itself, it is the resulting parent-child interaction which makes the difference.

“Socioeconomic position” refers to the social and economic factors that influence what positions individuals or groups hold within the structure of a society (Lynch & Kaplan, 2000). There is no single best indicator of SES suitable for all study aims and applicable at all time points in all settings. Each indicator assess different though many times related aspects of socioeconomic classification and may be either more or less relevant to different health outcomes (Galobardes, Shaw, Lawlor, Lynch & Davey, 2006). Besides the lack of consensus regarding how to define and measure the construct of SES, traditionally monthly income is one of the most commonly used criteria for assessing one’s social position. While some research suggests that occupation is the best single indicator of socioeconomic position (Powers, 1981). Nam and Terrie (1981) suggested that by focusing on other related information such as educational level of parents, employment status, residential status and income may help in assessment of the construct more completely. Thus several different indicators of socioeconomic position used in various studies include occupational social class, education (amount and type), employment status and prestige, income, access to or ownership of various assets, and indices based on residential area characteristics (Davey, Shipley & Rose, 1990; Liberatos, Link & Kelsey, 1988), are utilized in present study.

Method

Participants

In the present study systematic random sampling technique was used. Initially 650 adolescents with educational level ranged from 7 to 12 years, were approached from the schools and colleges of Karachi registered with the Ministry of Education of the province of Sindh, Pakistan. Only 512 adolescents between 13 – 18 years of age

(mean age=14.5 years) fulfilled the predetermined inclusion criteria for participants in research. Only students with at least one year stay in the same school/college were selected. The further inclusion criterion was that the participants must be regular students, Muslims, Pakistani nationals, having both parents living together. The entire sample was further divided into three groups, that is, 153 participants (Male= 69; Female=84) from lower SES with mean age of 14.6 years, 230 participants (Male= 131; Female=99) from middle SES with mean age of 14.3 years; and 129 participants (Male=73; Female=56) from upper SES with mean age of 14.5 years.

On the basis of ongoing disagreement about conceptual meaning and empirical measurement of SES, in current research a diverse array of SES indicators instead of only using indicator of monthly income was used. For an accurate judgment of socioeconomic status of adolescents a method as used by Ahmad, Riaz and Khanum (2005) in Pakistan was adapted. They had selected following major components that composed the socioeconomic status: Father's occupation, Mother's occupation and total monthly income of the family, residential area, number of siblings, Father's level of education, Mother's Level of education, family structure (nuclear or joint) and school system (government & private).

Measures

A Demographic Information Form was developed including question related to mainly three areas i.e., personal information; school related information and parent related information.

Adolescent Form of Culture Free Self Esteem Inventories. Urdu version CFSEI- 3 (Imran & Ahmad, 2011) originally developed by Battle (2002) was used in the present study. Originally this form was designed for age group of 13 through 18 years old adolescents. Responses are simply in "yes or no" format and have reverse scoring criteria. It comprises of 67 items divided in five subscales namely Academic, General, Parental / home, Social and

Personal. The subscale standard scores are summed to create General Self Esteem Quotient. Recommended cutoff score for Defensiveness scale on adolescent form is 4 out of 8. Reaching or exceeding to this limit would invalidate the protocol. Reliability estimate of CFSEI-3 (Adolescent form) is .98 in test retest and .92 for Cronbach's alpha. In present study with Urdu version test retest reliability was estimated as .819 and Cronbach Alpha as .851.

Procedure

The sample was gathered from different schools/colleges located in the city of Karachi, Pakistan. After survey of educational organizations, 24 schools were randomly selected from a list of schools and organizations belonging to different socioeconomic areas. They were invited for participation in the research however authorities of only 20 schools and colleges gave their consent for data collection. Participants were approached through the assistance of teaching staff and were instructed in detail about the study and its benefits. SES was assessed by taking information through a brief interview and demographic form administered individually. Adolescent form of Urdu version of CFSEI-3 (Imran & Ahmad, 2011) was administered in group setting.

Statistical Analysis

In order to interpret the data in statistical terminology descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviations and frequencies were used for getting a better statistical view of characteristics of sample in a summarized way. One way analysis of variance was computed to explore the differences in the various domains of self-esteem among adolescents belonging to low, middle and upper socio-economic status.

Results

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Sample Characteristics Across Three Socioeconomic Classes

Sample Characteristics	Lower SES	Middle SES	Upper SES
Gender			
<i>Males</i>	69	131	73
<i>Females</i>	84	99	56
<i>Total</i>	153	230	129
Age groups			
<i>13 years</i>	41	84	43
<i>14 years</i>	31	59	39
<i>15 years</i>	40	43	18
<i>16 years</i>	24	31	16
<i>17 years</i>	12	9	9
<i>18 years</i>	5	4	4
Mean age	14.6 years	14.3 years	14.5 years
Educational level			
<i>7th</i>	28	44	19
<i>8th</i>	33	66	27
<i>9th</i>	67	80	46
<i>10th</i>	22	31	14
<i>11th</i>	2	5	15
<i>12th</i>	1	4	8
Family System			
<i>Joint</i>	21	57	42
<i>Nuclear</i>	132	173	87

Table 2

Most Observable Characteristics Across Three Socioeconomic Classes of the Sample

	Lower SES	Middle SES	Higher SES
Average Monthly Income	Rs.6000 to Rs. 18000	18000 to 35000	35000 & Above
Parent's level of education	Nil / Primary / Middle / Matric / Skilled Vocational	Intermediate / Bachelor / Master Degree	Bachelor / Master Degree

Most common occupation of Parents	Clerical / Sales / Service Drivers / Peon / Soldiers/ Laborers	Business personnel/ Lecturers / Teachers / Doctors	Professional Business Personnel Bureaucrats
Common School System of the Children	Government Rental houses Extended / Joint	Government / Private	Private
Residential Status		Rental / Personal Property	Personal Property
Family System		Joint / Nuclear	Nuclear

Table 3
One Way ANOVA Showing Differences in Domain Specific & Overall Self-Esteem among Lower, Middle and Upper Classes (df =2, 509)

Domains	SES	M	SD	F	p
Personal	Lower	5.15	2.35	47.127	.000
	Middle	7.01	2.71		
	Upper	8.15	2.84		
Social	Lower	7.03	1.92	44.598	.000
	Middle	8.51	2.04		
	Upper	9.20	2.01		
Academic	Lower	6.90	2.38	4.882	.008
	Middle	7.17	2.37		
	Upper	6.32	2.80		
Parental & Home	Lower	8.91	1.79	9.521	.000
	Middle	9.66	1.68		
	Upper	9.66	1.90		
General	Lower	6.79	2.11	17.379	.000
	Middle	7.64	2.15		
	Upper	8.22	1.85		
Overall	Lower	34.80	6.93	35.451	.000
	Middle	40.00	7.30		
	Upper	41.57	7.64		

N = 512, SES = Socioeconomic status

Table 4.

Post Hoc (Tukey's HSD) Analysis for the Mean Difference Between Three Socioeconomic Groups on the Variable of Domain Specific & Overall Self Esteem

Self Esteem	SES Groups	MD	S.E	<i>p</i>
Personal	L – U	-3.005*	.317	.000
	L – M	-1.862*	.275	.000
	U – L	3.005*	.317	.000
	U – M	1.143*	.291	.000
	M – L	1.862*	.275	.000
	M – U	-1.143*	.291	.000
Social	L – U	-2.163*	.239	.000
	L – M	-1.475*	.208	.000
	U – L	2.163*	.239	.000
	U – M	.687*	.220	.005
	M – L	1.475*	.208	.000
	M – U	-.687*	.220	.005
Academic	L – U	.588	.298	.121
	L – M	-.268	.259	.555
	U – L	-.588	.298	.121
	U – M	-.857*	.274	.005
	M – L	.268	.259	.555
	M – U	.857*	.274	.005
Parental & Home	L – U	-.749*	.212	.001
	L – M	-.747*	.185	.000
	U – L	.749*	.212	.001
	U – M	-.001	.195	1.000
	M – L	.747*	.185	.000
	M – U	-.001	.195	1.000
General	L – U	-1.435*	.247	.000
	L – M	-.849*	.215	.000
	U – L	1.435*	.247	.000
	U – M	.585*	.227	.028
	M – L	.849*	.215	.000
	M – U	-.568*	.227	.028
Overall	L – U	-6.766*	.872	.000
	L – M	-5.204*	.759	.000
	U – L	6.766*	.872	.000
	U – M	1.561	.802	.127
	M – L	5.204*	.759	.000
	M – U	-1.561	.802	.127

Discussion

Results are indicative of significant difference among adolescents belonging to different socioeconomic groups in scores on various domains as well as overall self-esteem. Further Post Hoc analysis for inter class differences is reflective of disadvantage associated with those belonging to lower SES in almost all domains in comparison to middle and upper class counterparts, except on the domain of academic self-esteem. For academic self-esteem, the differences were observed only between middle and upper SES groups, where adolescents from middle socioeconomic group out scored their upper class counterparts. Thus, SES seems to be an important source of variation for domain specific self-esteem in adolescents. These differences could be subjected to the variation in individual needs and values associated with one's social status that might lead to the differences in sensitivity towards various sources and criteria of self-evaluation.

Mann, Hosman, Schaalma and Devries (2004) stated that "development of self-esteem during childhood and adolescence depends on a wide variety of intra-individual and social factors". Individual occupying unique social spaces develop unique sense of self. The unequal distribution of social advantages, resources, opportunities, as well as a consistent economic family hardship bring a variety of stressors to a family which directly and indirectly might influence children's self-esteem (McLoyd, 1990). The stressors may directly influence children either by exposing them to a difficulty accessing those resources and opportunities which are in approach of their other economically advantaged counterparts, or they may indirectly influence their sense of self. The indirect influence may range a host of variables associated with poverty, e.g. in case of economic hardships, the adults in the home may have strained relationships which may also influence their parenting practices, resulting in the psychological wellbeing of a child (see Destinet, 2010).

Twenge and Campbell in 2002 delineated three models most relevant to SES and self-esteem in their study, two of them would be

relevant to discuss there. The first one is Social Indicator or Saliency Model which says that because SES is an indicator of status within social group, elevated self-esteem should result from elevated SES (Rosenberg & Pearlin, 1978 as cited in Twenge & Campbell, 2002). Similarly the individual who does not achieve social status may suffer from lowered self-esteem. Problems and daily hassles encountered by individuals belonging to lower SES group are mostly related to the structural constraints which create hindrances in availability of basic needs related to healthy food, healthy environment, shelter etc. Thus, the battle of "survival" limits their efforts to enhance their status within the social group, which in turn shatter their esteem needs. While those people with higher and middle socioeconomic status have opportunities enabling them to invest all of their energies in upgrading their status and avail maximum opportunities to fulfill their esteem needs.

Reflected Appraisal Model while states that we internalize other's perception of ourselves (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934 as cited in Twenge & Campbell, 2002). As SES influences the way others treat us, it is reflected in one's self-esteem. This process of "Internalization of Stigma" determines person's level of self-esteem. The sense of belonging to lower class group and the associated perception and thinking in the environment related to that group in terms of "stigma of inferiority" is highly influential on a person's own self-evaluation and adds a threat to the integrity of their esteem. Conversely, people with high income and education, and with better prestige, hired on higher prestige occupations receive respect and consideration, thus leading to higher self-esteem. While discrimination towards socially devalued or less privileged groups by members of high-status social groups can be considered as a form of social rejection (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999), which may influence belongingness to others and the way a person responds to the society, which either manifested as acting out or withdrawn behavior both of which may be associated with lower level of self-esteem.

To put it simple higher socioeconomic status individuals have greater resources with respect to their counterparts, which enhance

positive self-appraisal. Greater approval and support, especially from parents strengthened the self-perceived competence of children belonging to higher SES and serve as the main determinant of self-esteem.

An interesting finding related to domain of academic self-esteem was found where no significant differences of lower with middle and upper SES groups were observed; however differences exist between middle and upper SES group. These results underlie the differential significance attached to the academic sources of self-evaluation among lower, middle and upper SES groups depending on needs and values associated with one's social status. Lower SES group usually places education to a secondary position because they hardly have enough money to bear their food and living expenses, and are already burdened with financial issues. They have to engage in a life long struggle for survival which keeps them far away to think about investing their limited money on education, thus academic domain might be not self-relevant for them. According to Tesser's theory of "self-evaluation maintenance" (1988), "self-esteem will only be threatened when one performs worse than another in a domain that one regards as self-relevant". On the other hand Children belonging to upper class are provided with all advanced facilities like individual tuitions, access to extended text and latest technology. The importance of academics to them is generally a necessity of their social structure, while they may have some other criteria to evaluate their self (for e.g. Personal, social or general self-esteem). Harter (2003) stated that "self-esteem is much stronger for domains that are self-defining than domains that are not". Thus poor performance in a domain that is defined as less central to the self will not have negative implications for self-esteem (Harter & Whitesell, 2001). The children from upper socioeconomic status may find more significance in other domains of self-esteem and academic self-esteem may be not self-defining for them.

However in middle SES group, children emphasize the importance of educational success as a mean to attain a higher status within the social group and usually their accomplishments in the

domain of academics are very worthwhile for their self-evaluation. Thus, as they regarded this domain as self-relevant and self-defining, in comparison to their counterparts, showed greater academic self-esteem in present research.

Conclusion and Implications

Conclusively, SES seems to be an important source of variation for domain specific self-esteem in adolescents. Variation in individual needs and values associated with one's social status, might lead the differences in sensitivity towards various sources and criteria of self-evaluation.

People with high self-esteem are psychologically better adjusted and have better coping skills to restore their functioning in face of failures in life. In present study lower self-esteem is found in almost all domains of self-esteem of the adolescents belonging to lower SES group. As low self-esteem is perceived as one of the key risk factors for deviant behavior and thus is crucial for healthy development of children and adolescents. Results of this study depict that children and adolescents belonging to low SES need the consideration of both social scientists and policy makers for the enhancement of adolescents' personal well-being (self-esteem) across Pakistan.

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