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Shelina Bhamani

*Aga Khan University, shelina.bhamani@aku.edu*

Sabeen Jamil

*Institute of Business Management, (IoBM), Karachi*

Falak Zehra Mohsin

*Institute of Professional Psychology, Bahria University,*

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# **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SELF ESTEEM IN YOUNG ADOLESCENTS OF KARACHI**

**Shelina Bhamani<sup>1</sup>, Sabeen Jamil<sup>2</sup> & Falak Zehra Mohsin<sup>3</sup>**

**Abstract:**

The purpose of this research was to explore the self-esteem trends in adolescents of Karachi, Pakistan with regard to gender differences. The insights from previous literature helped to form the hypothesis that there will be a significant gender difference on the self-esteem of adolescents variable. There were a total 224 (96 male and 126 female) adolescents chosen for this study and the Multidimensional Self-Esteem Scale: a 36 item and a 3 Likert response scale was adapted for this study with the consent of the author. The data analysis revealed that there is a significant gender difference on the variable of self-esteem of the chosen adolescents.

**Keywords:** Self esteem, emotional development, elementary children.

**JEL Classification:** Z000

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Education, College of Economics and Social Development, Institute of Business Management, (IoBM), Karachi Pakistan

<sup>2</sup>Department of Media Studies, College of Economics and Social Development, Institute of Business Management, (IoBM), Karachi Pakistan

<sup>3</sup>Institute of Professional Psychology, Bahria University, Karachi Pakistan

### **Introduction and Research Purpose**

Adolescence typically refers to the transitional years of an individual during which one grows or matures from being a 'child' to being an 'adult'. Physical and psychological developments are marked features of the adolescent years. This period of adolescence is usually associated with ones' teenage years. According to Erik Eriksson (1959), a developmental psychologist, the adolescent years are crucial for identity formation. It is during these years that adolescents experiment in life in order to gain independence and form their identity. With the resolution of this stage adolescents develop a sense or strength of fidelity which enables them to find their standing in the society. The development of this strength empowers them to contribute to the society and culture – thus enhancing their view of self.

Self-esteem of adolescents in urban settings in Pakistan has not been given much of the focus in the past. The studies from the diverse western countries background projects gender differences on the variable of self-esteem (Barber, Ball & Armistead, 2003; Galliher, Rostoky & Hughes, 2004; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton & Scheidt, 2001). However, there has been a vacuum of research studies pertinent to self-esteem in the context of Pakistan. Hence, this research study aimed at exploring the phenomenon and also to bridge the gap between the literatures.

### **Literature Review**

Since early adolescence is the period when girls enter puberty, and experience major body changes, it is the most challenging period for girls (Holsen and colleagues, 2001). G. Stanley Hall (as cited by Arnett, 1999), a prominent psychologist, equaled adolescence to 'storm and stress' because this particular stage of life is difficult and problematic. Offer and Offer (as cited by Arnett, 1999), further discussed this 'storm and stress' in terms of self-image. As individuals enter into a new

stage of life, factors, challenges and experiences that accompany the stage are likely to influence their self-image. Individuals might re-evaluate themselves as they take part in and initiate new tasks and take on new responsibilities in which they can either be successful or miss the mark. These self-evaluations can affect their self-esteem.

**I**t is during these years that adolescents make an important transition – from middle school to high school. In their research Harter, Whitesell and Kowalski (as cited by Wigfield, Eccles, Iver, Reuman & Midgley, 1991) have shown that during this stage individuals tend to experience greater anxiety with regard to school and studies. Simmons, Rosenberg and Rosenberg (1973), further showed that once adolescents have moved to high school their self-esteem is in general poorer than that of their juniors – who are still in elementary or junior school. In addition, they also observed that with the transition, their self-consciousness tends to increase.

Self-esteem is ones' own personal evaluation of their worth or worthiness. In general terms, it refers to how one views themselves. This view of self is assessed, reassessed and altered during the adolescent years. It is during these years that one matures physically, socially, emotionally and psychologically. Physical maturation involves the development of the body as well as internal hormonal changes. Females and males both experience these changes and it is these experiences and changes and the acceptance of these changes that affects their perception of self-worth – i.e. their self-esteem.

**A** number of studies have explored this phenomenon and have found significant gender differences in adolescents with regard to self-esteem. Menon (2011) carried out a study on 350 adolescents and found significant gender differences with respect to friendship styles, self-esteem, self-concept and adjustments between girls and boys of England. Likewise, gender differences were found to be apparent with in adolescents with regard to self-esteem, shyness and sociability (Wadman, Durkin & Conti, 2008). An Australian study carried out on

467 adolescents tapping self-esteem has revealed females to have higher self-esteem and career expectations than boys (Patton, Bartrum & Creed, 2004). Numerous researchers have examined, explored and discovered that males have lower self-esteem than the female adolescents (Benjet & Hernandez-Guzman, 2001). However, a study by Powel (2004) in contradiction shows that girls have more issues about self-esteem and self-concept due to which their psychosocial development is affected. This may lead to a later life depression and anxiety disorders.

Mullis and Chapman (2000) in their study explored self-esteem and emotional regulation in young adolescents and observed gender factors to be associated with self-esteem scores. Similarly, a Mexican study investigated psychosocial wellbeing and self-esteem as one of the core variables on the sample of 1102 Mexican adolescent participants.

Amongst the other associated factors of self-esteem in adolescents, studies have found that body dissatisfaction is the most common (Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Perry, & Irving, 2002; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001). This dissatisfaction is found to have caused depressive moods (Bearman, Presnell, Martinez, & Stice, 2006), immediate distress and low self-esteem (Keerya, Berg, & Thompson, 2004; Cash, 2004; Allgood-Merten, Lewinsoh, & Hops, 1990). Stice, 2002 found that there is a positive relation between body dissatisfaction and eating disorders among adolescents. Moreover, the degree of influence on adolescents' self-esteem is found to be associated with gender difference. Gender is believed to influence the development and manifestation or expression of self-esteem. A study by Carlson, Uppal, & Prosser (2000) suggest that as compared to boys, the decline in the level of self-satisfaction is consistent in adolescent girls because they experience dissatisfaction with their physical changes, especially dissatisfaction related to their appearances as compared to the boys of their age. Studies of Hankin & Abramson in 2001 have also indicated

that there is a positive relation between the effect of social pressure and anxiety caused by body image and body shape changes.

In adolescent girls, some studies strongly implicate body dissatisfaction as a significant predictor of low self-esteem and depression (Berg, Wertheim, Thompson, & Paxton, 2002; Wichstrøm, 1999). Studies have also suggested the body dissatisfaction in girls' predicts depressive moods (Johnson & Wardle, 2005; (Rierdan, Koff, & Stubbs, 1989; Stice & Bearman, 2001) and an increase in low self-esteem (Johnson & Wardle, 2005).

Girls are more concerned about pro-social activities, their social lives and their general acceptance by others. As compared to boys, who are more concerned about being disliked. Furthermore, given the importance that girls place on pro-social undertakings, the results of the study predicted that girls who feel that certain social activities are important but they are not good at it, may experience a negative effect on their self-esteem. They also found that boys on the other hand do not have similar discrepancy in ability perceptions and importance ratings for any of the activities, except perhaps for social activities (Eccles, Wigfield, Flanagan, Miller, Reuman, & Yee, 1989).

In longitudinal study carried out over a span of seven years on adolescents moving from elementary and junior school to high school, it was noted that boys in general reported greater levels of self-esteem than their female counterparts (Wigfield, Eccles, Iver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991). The results of another longitudinal study by Brown et al., (as cited in *Developing adolescents: A reference for professionals*, 2002) brought to light similar results, that is, the self-esteem of girls in particular was likely to decrease as they entered into the adolescent stage of life. Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter (2002) reported parallel findings. According to their study, the self-esteem of both genders experiences a fall during the adolescent stage in life; however, this drop is twice as high for girls

than for boys – i.e. the self-esteem of girls falls to a greater extent as compared to boys.

In the light of the literature and empirical observations of the researchers of the research setting, the aim of the current research study is to explore the gender differences on the variable of self-esteem in young adolescents of an urban city of Pakistan. The hypothesis set forward for this study was: “*There will be a significant gender difference on the variable of self-esteem in young adolescents*”.

### **Methodology**

#### **Design**

The quantitative survey method was chosen for this study, this was deemed as best suited method within the context that researchers were aiming at.

#### **Participants**

The participants of the study were randomly chosen by using convenient sampling method. A total of 224 adolescents studying at secondary schools participated in the study out of which 42.9% were male and 57.1% were female adolescents. The mean age of the students were 13.5 and all the participants belonged to the urban settings and were from the middle class families. In addition, all children who participated in the study were from the co-educational English language medium private schools.

#### **Measures**

***Basic Demographic Information Section:*** This consists of a section on four demographic variables (i.e. Gender, Age, SES Status and School Status). The section was added to the actual data collection scale on self-esteem.

***Multidimensional Self-Esteem Scale (Stake, 1979):*** A 36 item with a 3 Likert response scale was adapted for this study with the

consent of the author. The items consisted of the statements reflected from self-management, life management and self-concept. This scale was found highly consistent with the score of .789.

### **Procedures**

Initially, the scale was adapted seeking the author's official permission. The author in this regard was sent initial draft proposal of the research project along with the description of the setting. Upon the agreement of the author, the scale was used. Co-educational English medium schools were identified in the initial phase of the research study. The schools' management was sent a letter of consent by the researchers to seek their consent. The students were asked about their willingness to participate in the study after the permission was given by the school administration. School management and students were explained that their names will be kept anonymous and confidentiality will be stored. In addition to it, both the school management and students were given an orientation of their right of refusal and voluntary participation will be ensured throughout the process. After the data collection, the process of data coding, editing and entry was carried out.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive tests were administered to explore the basic demographic trends in the sample. Descriptive statistics, t-test was applied to test the hypothesis. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was chosen for the data analysis.

### **Results**

The table below reports that there is a statistically significant gender difference on the variable of self-esteem in adolescents of this research study ( $t = -2.45$ ,  $df = 222$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**Table 1: The Mean Difference between Male and Female on the Variable of Self-Esteem**

	Gender	N	M	S.D.	T	df	Sig
Self-Esteem	Male	96	80.2	9.5	-2.45	222	.015
	Female	128	83.2	8.6			

*Note.* According to the results gender difference were found to be significant on the variable of self-esteem between the male and female respondents ( $t = -2.45$ ,  $df = 222$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

As can be seen from the data analysis that female adolescents have scored higher on the variable of self-esteem than the boys and the t-score is negative in scope. This reflects that in the sample of this study female adolescents have shown higher self-esteem than boys.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Gender differences are likely to impact the self-evaluation. Psychologists, researchers and theorists generally believe that gender influences the development and manifestation or expression of self-esteem. A general, widespread viewpoint that exists is that girls are likely to have lower self-esteem during adolescence because they experience dissatisfaction with their physical changes, especially dissatisfaction related to their appearances. Sar Abadani Tafreshi (as cited by Naderi, Abdullah, Aizan, Sharir, & Kumar, 2009) found that significant difference exists between the self-esteem of males and females as did Zareh, who studied self-esteem in high school students. On the contrary, the findings show that there is a significant gender difference in the adolescents. This can be associated with hypothetical and circumstantial aspects. In terms of hypothetical mention, many studies which were carried out in western and eastern countries have shown significant differences in the male and female students in the school. The factors highlighted in the studies support male and female adolescents in their school age go through many biological changes in their psyche which impacts their psycho-social wellbeing to a great extent. During this period, adolescents – i.e. both females and males become conscious of their self-image and their confidence is also

affected to a wider extent. Likewise, this period of adolescent life is considered to be very sensitive and developmental differences amongst boys and girls are apparent. In urban settings, the young adolescents have fairly positive self-esteem because of their exposure to the educational facilities, latest changing trends and social media.

Considering the cultural context of Pakistan, females and males are brought up to identify strongly with their gender roles. These roles are instilled and reinforced in individuals since early childhood, and the process continues throughout life. Boys in this society are taught to identify with and express their masculinity, whereas females are encouraged to be feminine. This, gender-role identity is another related factor that is likely to influence self-esteem. It can be seen that girls in the urban context in the recent years are given opportunities like boys. In Pakistani urban context, girls and their educational priorities have also been given attention. Parents in the urban settings ensure that their girl child also studies under similar conditions as boys. The reason that the girls have scored higher in this study could also be associated with a thought that currently exists in the urban context of Pakistan, where often parents and communities believe that girls are more socially competent and good in studies and hence they receive positive feedback from the families. This could be one of the predictors of girls scoring high on the variable of self-esteem.

### **Conclusion**

Although this study highlights the gender based differences in self-esteem however it has its limitations. The first and foremost limitation of the study was the relatively smaller sample chosen from a single urban city area. Secondly, it was difficult to maintain an equal sample balance between male and female respondents as the data was collected using convenient sampling and lastly, the study is focused on adolescents from the private school background only. In addition to it, the only focused variable was gender and no data pertinent to other demographic variables were collected and analyzed.

In order to validate the findings of the similar phenomenon, it is recommended to have a larger sample comprised of wide range of demographic variables i.e. place of living, socio-economic status, schooling status and number of family members. Considering the mentioned demographic details in the future studies might influence the gender difference results.

Moreover, the study sets out the significance for the school teachers and management to pay importance to this vital phenomenon of gender differences and its impact on adolescents' self-esteem in their schools and accordingly plan curriculum and intervention.

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