

## A study of gender differences on mental health and self-esteem among school children of Jammu city

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### ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a period in which children are at very sensitive age of their life and show more risk-taking behavior. It is critical stage of developmental task as it includes creation of an organized and encouraging sense of self. The aim of the present is to find out the gender differences and relationship on the domains of mental health and self-esteem among school children. A total sample of 200 school children was collected for the present study. Convenience sampling technique was used for the data collection. Rosenberg's self-esteem scale was used for measuring self-esteem and general health questionnaire (GHQ-12) was used for mental health. Pearson correlation and t-test were applied for statistical analysis. Findings of the study revealed there was non-significant gender difference on the variable of self-esteem, but mean value show minor difference on the variable. The mean score of boys was higher on self-esteem than girls. While the domain of mental health shows significant difference in the score and mean score of boys was higher than girls. Mental health has positive correlation with self-esteem.

**Keywords:** *Mental health, Self-esteem, Adolescence*

**M**ental health is a concept that comprises subjective well-being, self-efficacy, independence, capability, inter-generational dependence and acknowledgment of the ability to realize one's intellectual and emotional potential, it has also been defined as a position of well-being in which individuals recognize their abilities, are able to deal efficiently with the normal uncertainties of life, work successfully and effectively and make a contribution to their communities (World Health Organization, 2002). It is also defined as a positive sense of being emotionally and spiritually well that regard the value of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity (Canadian Institute for Health Research, 2009). Poor mental health is strongly associated with other health and development problems such as lower academic achievements, substance abuse, violence, and poor reproductive and sexual health, mental health problems can affect an individual's functional and working capacity in various ways, it also depends on an individual's age at

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the onset of a mental health problem, it can significantly reduced person's working capability, it affects individual as well as entire community (Gabriel & Liimatainen, 2000).

Self-esteem is the evaluation of one's self-concept that is comparable to an overall perspective of the self as worthy or unworthy (Baumeister, 1998). It is defined as favorable or unfavorable attitude toward oneself (Rosenberg, 1965). It is also defined as the evaluation and dimension of the self-concept, and is regarded as alternative to self-regard, self-estimation and self-worth (Harter, 1999). It can be defined as a person's global evaluation of his/her positive or negative value, based on the scores that a person grants him/herself in different roles and domains of life (Rogers, 1981; Markus and Nurius, 1986). Person with high self-esteem assess himself or herself positively, show high self-efficacy, are self-worthy, believe in capacity to solve problems, they usually take on those tasks and responsibilities at which they feel have a chance of succeeding, hoping to secure feelings of efficacy (Rosenberg, 1979, 1981), on the other hand people with low self-esteem are low on self-efficacy, have unfavorable view of self and are self-criticize.

From literature it was found that high self-esteem is related to an overall sense of welfare during adolescence, low self-esteem has been linked to risk behaviors and unhelpful developmental outcomes. For instance, young people with low self-esteem are at higher risk for attempting suicide. A number of studies have shown that adolescents with low self-esteem have high levels of suicidal ideation and negative attitude toward future (McGee, Williams, & Nada-Raja, 2001; Overholser et al., 1995). Self-esteem can be important in terms of how one thinks, feels, and respond to stressful life events (Overholser et al., 1995). Research has also revealed an association between low self-esteem and feelings of depression and hopelessness in adolescence. During adolescence, a person may experience improved stress in relation to school, friends, and family, as well as new tasks and interests (Overholser et al., 1995). Several factors are associated to self-esteem enlargement in adolescence, previous research has paying attention on academic ability, social reception, gender differences, school environment, media influences, socioeconomic status, relationship with family, age, and ethnicity (Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997). An adolescent's environment, especially school, can have a considerable effect on self-esteem development (Chuhh et al., 1997).

### ***Gender Differences***

Prior research on gender, in association to self-esteem, has been moderately constant. The majority of studies have found that during adolescence female state lower self-esteem (Cairns et al., 1990; Chubb et al., 1997; Martinez & Dukes, 1991; Quatman & Watson, 2001) and higher depressive mood (Marcotte, Fortin, Potvin, & Papillon, 2002) in comparison to males. Some research has also shown that not only do adolescent females state lower self-esteem, but their self-esteem decline and depressive symptoms increase over time as compared to males (Robins et al., 2002). Maehr and Nicholls (1980) suggested that some gender differences in self-esteem may be because of response bias, in that girls have been found to be more humble in self-report measures than boys.

### ***Self-esteem and mental health***

Positive self-esteem is not only seen as a basic attribute of mental health, but also act as a preventive factor that bring better health and positive social behavior by acting as a barrier against the negative impact, it promote healthy functioning that are displayed in life aspects such as achievements, success, satisfaction, and the ability to cope with diseases like cancer

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and heart disease, where as an unstable self-concept and poor self-esteem can play a role in the development of mental disorders and social problems, such as depression, anorexia nervosa, bulimia, anxiety, violence, substance abuse and high-risk behaviors (Mann et al., 2004).

Studies point out that self-esteem is the foremost psychological factor that contributes to health and quality of life (Evans, 1997). Several studies indicate that individual well-being is remarkably correlates with high self-esteem and self-esteem reports significant differences in both mental well-being and happiness (Zimmerman, 2000). Low self-esteem leads to maladjustment, while positive self-esteem contributes to wellbeing (Garmezy, 1984; Glick and Zigler, 1992). Research indicates that high self-esteem individuals are more likely than low self-esteem individuals to endure or persevere in the face of failure (Baumeister et al., 2003) this persistence leads into greater academic and occupational success over the longer period of time particularly in case of challenging educational and labor market conditions. In addition to this, there are also evidences that show association of high self-esteem to security and closeness in relationships (Murray, 2005), which in turn endorse future mental health and social connectivity.

Children with low self-esteem emerge with more mental health problems during adulthood than those with high self-esteem and are more likely to develop major depression disorder, anxiety disorder, and tend to be dependent on tobacco during adulthood (Trzesniewski, Moffitt, Poulton Donnellan, Robins and Caspi, 2006). Adolescents with higher self-esteem exhibit more better mental health and are more resilient in the face of difficulties compared to those low in self-esteem (Compas et al., 1995; DuBois et al., 2002). Self-esteem benefits adolescent mental health by playing the role of a psychological buffer from negative environmental stressors (Compas et al., 1995). High self-esteem helps adolescents in becoming more emotionally resilient and makes them capable to overcome difficulties (Mann et al., 2004).

Several modern theorists classify self-esteem as the sentimental and evaluative aspect of one's self-concept. It basically refers to one's comprehensive assessment of their constructive or unconstructive attributes across diverse domains (Harter, 1999). Adolescents with higher self-esteem tend to have enhanced mental health and are much resilient during the time of difficulty compared to those with low self-esteem (Compas, Hinden, & Gerhardt, 1995; DuBois et al., 2002). Research suggests that self-esteem act as a most significant during the conversion to adolescence (Greene & Way, 2005). One study of self-esteem using growth curve investigation found that self-esteem enlarged in pre adolescence, begins to decrease in early adolescence, and increased again during late adolescence (Baldwin & Hoffman, 2002). The verification suggests that self-esteem significantly changes from early adolescence to later adolescence (Mandara & Gaylord-Harden, 2009).

### ***Objectives***

1. To study the gender differences on the variables of self-esteem and mental health among school children.
2. To study the relationship of self-esteem with mental health among school children.

### ***Hypotheses***

1. There will be significant gender differences on the variables of self-esteem and mental health among school children.

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2. Mental health will have significant positive relationship with self-esteem among school children.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Sample*

A sample of 200 school children was collected for the purpose of the present study. Convenience sampling technique was employed for the collection of data. The sample was collected from the Jammu city. Before collecting data, the consent of the participants was taken and they were asked about the importance of the study. The detailed description of the measures was also given and was asked about both the variables of mental health and self-esteem. The nature of the study was explained to them. The participants were asked about the confidentiality of data.

### *Measures*

1. **Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale:** Self-esteem was measured by applying Rosenberg self-esteem which consists of 10 items that measure global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. All items of the scales are answered on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agrees to strongly disagree.
2. **General Health Questionnaire 12:** Mental health was measured by general health questionnaire (GHQ-12). It comprises of total 12 items, each item of the scale assess the severity of mental health problems over the past few weeks. It is a 4 point Likert scale ranging from 0-3, the total score range from 0-36. The positive items were scored from 0 (always) to 3 (never) and the negative items were scored from 3(always) to 0 (never). High scores indicate poor health.

### *Statistical analyses*

Data collected from the participants was primarily analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 23. Following statistics were applied:

1. Independent t-test
2. Pearson's product moment method

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

*Table 1 showing the gender difference on the variables of self-esteem and mental health*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t-ratios</b>
Self-esteem	Girls	21.67	3.62	1.97
	Boys	22.61	3.08	
Mental Health	Girls	11.00	6.20	3.17
	Boys	14.73	6.49	

The observation of the table shows that there is no significant gender differences on the dimension of self-esteem ( $t = 1.97$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) but mean value show slight differences on the variable. The mean score of boys ( $\bar{X} = 22.61$ ) was higher on self-esteem than girls ( $\bar{X} = 21.67$ ). Similarly, the variable of mental health shows that there is significant difference in the score ( $t = 3.17$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The mean score of boys ( $\bar{X} = 14.77$ ) was higher than girls ( $\bar{X} = 11.00$ ).

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The result of the study concealed that there are non-significant gender differences on the variables of self-esteem and significant differences on the variable of mental health among school children. Prior studies have found that female adolescents score low on self-esteem (Cairns et al., 1990; Chubb et al., 1997; Martinez & Dukes, 1991; Quatman & Watson, 2001) and higher on depressive mood (Marcotte, Fortin, Potvin, & Papillon, 2002) in comparison to males. Some researchers have also revealed that females adolescent not only show lower self-esteem, but their self-esteem decline and depressive symptoms increase over time in contrast to males (Robins et al., 2002). Research on self-esteem constantly suggest that girls display lower self-esteem as compared to boys, which reflect the more negative consequence of low self-esteem in adolescent girls (Moksnes & Espnes, 2012). Furthermore, girls are more probable than boys to encompass academic commitment and accomplishment (Bugler, McGeown, & St. Clair-Thompson, 2015; Havik & Westergard, 2019), signifying higher rate in school participation for girls.

### *Correlation Analysis*

The co-relation analysis is conceded to find out the relationship between self-esteem and mental health

**Table 2 showing the correlation between self-esteem and mental health among school children**

Variables	N	Correlated 'r' Value
Self-esteem and mental health	200	.212**

*\*\*significant at .01 level*

Table 2 shows a low and positive correlation of self-esteem and mental health ( $r = .212$ ,  $p < .001$ ) among school children of Jammu city. Previous research studies have also supported the above results. Positive self-esteem contributes to wellbeing (Garnezy, 1984; Glick and Zigler, 1992). Self-esteem is one among the key features of mental health (Tudor, 1996) Evidence exhibits that high self-esteem individuals are more likely than low self-esteem individuals to survive or persevere in the face of failure (Baumeister et al., 2003). Adolescents with higher self-esteem exhibit much better mental health and are more resilient in the face of difficulties compared to those low in self-esteem (DuBois et al., 2002).

## **CONCLUSION**

From the present study it is manifested that there is slight difference among boys and girls on the variable of self-esteem, while boys score more than girls on the variable of mental health and there is a positive relation of self-esteem with mental health in school children of Jammu city. We can infer from the results that self-esteem and mental health are positively related to each other. If there is high self esteem, it will enhance mental health. Improvement in mental health leads to higher self-esteem and vice versa. Person with low self-esteem in childhood and adolescence may be incapable to structure compassionate associations with their peers or life partners, which may exaggerate adjustment troubles and leads to other new harms in young adulthood. In the same way, it has established that children and adolescents with low self-esteem develop numerous forms of disruptive activities as a way to improve their sense of worth. Thus, low self-esteem perhaps helps prompt children and adolescents into criminology. Low self-esteem children and adolescents may also get less consideration and support from parents, teachers, and peers.

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**Conflict of Interest**

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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