

Perceived Stress and Self-Esteem among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

This study has attempted to assess the relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem among young adults of Karnataka and to study the gender difference in their perceived stress level and self-esteem. The data was collected using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) and Rosenberg Self-esteem scale for adults from a sample of 100 young adults, in which 50 were males and 50 were females. The statistical technique of Pearson coefficient of correlation and independent sample t test were employed. The study found that there was a significant relationship between perceived stress levels and self-esteem. The study also found that there was no significant gender difference in perceived stress among young adults and it was also found that females had a higher perceived stress than males, and in the case of self-esteem, no significant gender difference was found, but the study showed males showed higher self-esteem levels than females although difference in their perceived stress levels was marginal.

Keywords: *Perceived stress, Self-esteem, Young adults*

A young adult is usually an individual ranging in age from their late teens or early twenties up to their thirties. The young adult stage under human development precedes middle adulthood. For various reasons, timelines on young adulthood cannot be exactly defined – hence displaying different results according to the various mix of overlapping indices (legal, maturational, occupational, sexual, etc) employed. Despite all this, there is broad agreement that it is necessarily the twenties and thirties which comprise 'Early adulthood'. Mortality statistics among men and women level off during the late twenties and thirties, due to good health and their behaviour being less risk-taking. According to Erik Erikson, in the context of his theory on adolescent emphasis upon identity formation, it is said that young adults emerge from the search for and insistence on identity, and are eager and willing to fuse their identity with that of others. They are ready for intimacy, focusing on the capacity to commit to concrete affiliations and partnerships.' In modern societies, these young adults face a number of problems as they finish schooling and begin to hold full-time jobs and take on other responsibilities of adulthood and the reasons could be that a young adult is usually preoccupied with self-growth and here, we focus mainly on the society and relationships with others.

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Self-Esteem

Self-esteem may be referred to as an individual's overall sense of his or her value or worth. Self-esteem is plainly one's attitude toward oneself (1965), describing it as a "favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the self" as said by Morris Rosenberg. Multiple factors believed to have an impact on our self-esteem include personality, age, life experiences, genetics, health, thoughts, social circumstances, the reactions of others, comparison of self to others. Self-esteem is malleable and measurable which implies that we can test for and improve upon it. The mention of esteem is observed on the fourth level of Maslow's hierarchy: esteem needs.

There is an element of self-esteem in this level of the hierarchy, but Maslow felt that the esteem of others was more important than self-esteem for development and need fulfilment. He explained that for one to attain self-actualisation and grow, their need for inner-respect and esteem from other people must be met. On a general basis, a person with low self-esteem is extremely critical of themselves, underestimates or ignores their positive qualities, considers themselves to be inferior to their peers, describes themselves in a negative manner such as stupid, fat, ugly or unlovable, holds discussions with oneself (this is called 'self-talk') that are always negative and critical, assumes that luck plays a major role in his/ her achievements and doesn't take the credit, blames self when things go wrong instead of taking into account other factors which they don't have control over such as the actions of other people or economic forces, doubts compliments from others.

It has been often found that unhappy childhood, poor academic performance resulting in a lack of confidence, stressful life event that include relationship breakdown, parent or career, being part of an abusive relationship, medical issues such as chronic pain, severe illness, mental illness such as an anxiety disorder or depression are some of major causes of low self-esteem in young adults, leading them to be laidback.

Research has indicated that self-esteem peaks in one's 50s or 60s and then undergoes steep decline in old age. Two explanations for this drop were proposed. The first involves loss of important things contributing self-esteem. For example, the elderly loses socioeconomic roles caused by retirement, close others such as spouses and romantic partners, and abilities such as physical and cognitive capacities. The second is a change in attitude towards oneself. The elderly come to accept their faults and limitations as they get older, leading them to have a more modest, humble and balanced view of themselves.

Perceived Stress

Perceived includes feelings and thoughts about the uncontrollability and unpredictability of a person's life, which includes things like how often one has to deal with irritating hassles, how much change is occurring in one's life, and confidence in one's ability to face their problems, basically how much stress they are under at that given point of time. It does not measure the types or frequencies of stressful events which have occurred to an individual, but rather how a person feels about the general stressfulness of their life and their ability to deal with such stress and stressful situations. These individuals may go through similar life events that could be negative and this has an impact on various aspects and as a result of factors such as personality, coping resources, and support. Perceived stress portrays the interaction between an individual and their environment.

Adaptive stress helps an individual rise to life's challenges. The adrenaline, nor-adrenaline and glucose which flow into our blood creates a buzz of energy and alert feeling, focused

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and creative. Negative stress occurs when a person's ability to cope with life's demands crumbles. When an individual tends to leave the stress chemicals unattended, they stay in the blood, preventing them from relaxing. Consequently, this results in a permanent state of stress for the individual. The initial buzz turns to panic.

Prior to the development of the PSS, assessment of stress mainly focused on objective indicators, frequencies, of specific stressors like chronic illness, family loss, new family members. This tendency in due course overlooks on the impact of an individual's subjective interpretation of a stressor might have on the occurrence of a stressor. Cohen (1983) viewed the void of the subjective element in assessing stress as an irrelevant quality and developed the PSS in response. In particular, the PSS is based upon Lazarus's original transactional model of stress which argues the experience of a stressor is influenced by evaluations on the part of the person as to how well they can handle a stressor given their coping resources.

Growing research indicates that various types of circumstances stress women and men. Men were more likely to list financial and work-related behaviours as causes of their stress, while women were more likely to list incidents related to family and health.

Stress is used to characterise the physical, mental, cognitive, and behavioural reactions to activities perceived to be dangerous or difficult. People under stress may also act differently: eating and crying too much, pacing, smoking and drinking more than what is considered to be normal, or striking others physically by hitting or throwing objects. Emotionally, people who are under stress may experience anxiety, depression, apprehension, and irritability, as well as become angry and frustrated. Mental stress signs include concentration, memory, and decision-making difficulties, and people under stress frequently lose their sense of humour.

Perceived stress is an individual's feeling or a thought about the amount of stress they are under at a particular point in time or over a particular period of time. Perceived stress includes uncontrollability and unpredictability feelings about one's life. Different individuals may suffer negative events in life which are similar in nature but they may evaluate the effect of severity of this to a dissimilar degree. Perceived stress basically reflects the interaction of an individual with their environment which they evaluate or appraise. Due to the workload, academic performance standards, work schedules and fear of the unknown, many people experience high levels of stress (Reed, 2015).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Srivastav et al. conducted a study among school going adolescents with respect to gender. The study was to assess and compare gender differences among school going adolescents in terms of perceived stress and self-esteem. The results showed that female school going adolescents perceive more stress and less self-esteem as compared to their male adolescents. (Srivastava et al., 2015).

A research study done by Lee et al. conducted a study on Perceived stress and self-esteem mediate the effects of work-related stress on depression. To determine the relationships among work-related stress, perceived stress, self-esteem, and depression structural equation modelling was used and the results of this displayed that perceived stress was inversely related to self-esteem. (Lee et al., 2012).

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A research done by Hubbs et al. on relationships among self-esteem, stress and physical activity in college students showed that there was a significant correlation between perceived stress and self-esteem in men and in women. Although physical activity was not significantly correlated with neither perceived stress nor self-esteem. SPSS software was used to analyse the data. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality was carried out. (Hubbs et al., 2012)

In the study self-esteem, perceived stress, and gender during adolescence carried out by Bi et al., analyses the relationships between self-esteem perceived stress, the quality of different types of interpersonal relationships, and gender in adolescents. The result highlights that perceived stress mediated the relationship between self-esteem and four of the types of interpersonal relationships. Also, it was concluded that gender seems to be a moderator for some of the patterns of the relationships between these variables. (Bi et al., 2015).

Galanakis et al. conducted a study on the connection between stress and self-esteem that showed there is a significant relationship between stress and self-esteem. The study provided multiple papers, articles to support the statement. The supported studies represented the relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem, and its various effects on different factors such as stress experienced by students, occupational stress, job performance, job satisfaction (Galanakis et al., 2016).

To evaluate the impact of the stress and self-esteem and gender's effect on student's academic performance a study was conducted on 300 students from different private institutes by Farhan et al. Clustered random sampling technique was used. The findings displayed strong correlation between stress and self-esteem, but gender has no significant impact on students' GPA (Farhan et al., 2015).

Another study was conducted to analyse the combined contribution of trait emotional intelligence, self-esteem and perceived stress to well-being, conducted by Villanueva et al. The study comprised a sample size of 381 individuals, aged 12-16 (preadolescents). The results showed significant correlation between perceived stress, emotional intelligence and self-esteem in the direction of life satisfaction. From the scores obtained, it was found that girls had a higher level of perceived stress and low levels of self-esteem (Villanueva et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Statement of the problem

The purpose of this study was to assess the relationship between perceived stress and Self-esteem among Young adults residing in Karnataka. Also aimed to study the gender differences in perceived stress and self-esteem among them.

Research Design

A correlational non experimental research design was employed using quantitative approach to assess the relationship between perceived stress and Self-esteem among young adults living in Karnataka. It was a quantitative non-experimental design because the researcher made use of the standardised psychological tools to measure the variables - perceived stress and self-esteem and no treatment was given to the participants, only the information with regards to their current behaviour, feeling and thoughts was considered.

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Research Question

- Is there a significant relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem?
- Is there a significant gender difference in perceived stress among young adults?
- Is there a significant gender difference in self-esteem among young adults?

Objectives

- To assess the relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem among young adults.
- To find out the gender differences in perceived stress among young adults.
- To find out the gender differences in self-esteem among young adults.

Hypotheses

H1: There will be a significant relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem among young adults.

H₀₁: There will be no significant gender difference in perceived stress among young adults.

H₀₂: There will be no significant gender difference in self-esteem among young adults.

Tools

Self-esteem

The scale used to measure self-esteem is the Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (also called the RSE and sometimes the SES). This 10-item scale was developed by Rosenberg and presented in his 1965 book *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image*, which was rated on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree). With few items reverse scored, by adding up the entire item score, the total sum can be calculated for an overall measure of self-esteem.

Perceived Stress

To measure the stress level, a 10-item version of Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), which uses a 5-point Likert scale to score each item was. Basically, a self-report instrument used to evaluate the degree of perceived stress in daily life within the past month. It was developed by Cohen et al. in 1983, who reported good reliability and validity. The previous found the PSS-10 to have good reliability, showing Cronbach's coefficient above 0.70, even up to 0.91. The scale measures general stress level, which is why it is not limited to certain situations or settings. The items 4, 5, 7 and 8 are reverse scored. The total score is the sum of all item scores. A maximum score of 40 which is a higher score indicates a greater perceived stress. Scores ranging from 0-13 would be considered low stress, scores ranging from 14-26 would be considered moderate stress and scores ranging from 27-40 would be considered high perceived stress.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The data collected were scored, tabulated and their descriptive statistics were calculated. In turn, the outcomes or results were interpreted hypothesis wise with the help of inferential statistics. The results obtained are presented as well as discussed.

H1: There will be a significant relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem among young adults residing in Karnataka.

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In order to test the above hypothesis, the mean scores obtained by the participants on perceived stress and self-esteem was computed apart from the computation of SD. Further, the significance of the relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem was computed using Pearson correlation test which yielded the following.

Table 1 Correlation between perceived stress and self-esteem among young adults

	N	M	SD	r	p
PSS	100	19.98	5.52676	-.337	.001
SE		16.43	4.76997		

Note: PSS= Perceived Stress Scale, SE=Self-Esteem, P=Significant (2-tailed)

An analysis of the above table indicates that there were 100 participants. The mean score of the students for perceived stress was found to be 19.98, while that for self-esteem was 16.43. With respect to standard deviation, the perceived stress had 5.52676 and self-esteem had 4.76997. It means the spread of scores away from the mean was apparently more for perceived stress suggesting that the variation was more for perceived stress among the young adults. In order to see whether there was a significant relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem among young adults, the scores were subjected to Pearson correlation test, which yielded the Pearson correlation coefficient 'r' as -.337, which was statistically significant at both the levels. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis was accepted which indicated that there was a significant relationship between these two variables.

H₀₁: There will be no significant gender difference in Perceived stress among young adults.

In order to test the above hypothesis, the mean scores obtained by females and males on perceived stress was computed apart from the computation of SD and SE. Further, the significance of difference between mean scores of the two groups was computed using "t" test which yielded the following:

Table 2 Independent Sample t test for the gender difference in perceived stress among young adults.

	N	M	SD	SE	df	t	p
Female	50	20.6400	5.99238	.84745	98	1.197	.234
Male	50	19.3200	4.99158	.70592			

Note: df = Degree of Freedom, t = t-test value

An analysis of the above table indicates that there were 100 participants among which 50 were females and 50 were males. The mean score of males on perceived stress was found to be 19.3200, while that for females was 20.6400. Although both the groups have moderate levels of perceived stress, it can be observed that the females have a higher level of perceived stress when compared to males. While in terms of standard deviation, the females had 5.99238 and males had 4.99158. It means the spread of scores away from the mean was apparently more for females. Suggesting that the variation was more for females rather than males. In order to test the obtained mean difference for their statistical significance, the scores were subjected to independent sample t-test and it was found to be 1.197, which was statistically insignificant at 0.05 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. It means that there was no significant gender difference in perceived stress among young adults.

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Ho2: There will be no significant gender difference in self-esteem among young adults.

In order to test the above hypothesis, the mean scores obtained by the males and females on self-esteem was computed apart from the computation of SD and SE. Further, the significance of the difference between mean scores of the two groups was computed using “t” test which yielded the following:

Table 3 Independent Sample t-test for the gender difference in self-esteem among young adults.

	N	M	SD	SE	df	t	p
Female	50	16.1400	4.96111	.70161	98	-.606	.546
Male	50	16.7200	4.60275	.65093			

Note: df= Degree of Freedom

An analysis of the above table indicates that there were 100 participants among which 50 were females and 50 were males. The mean score of females on self-esteem was found to be 16.1400, while that for males was 16.7200. There was minimal difference of mean scores in favor of males which indicates that they had a higher self-esteem than females. In terms of standard deviation, females scored 4.96111 and males scored 4.60275, suggesting that the scores of males were spread more away from the mean scores than that of females. In order to test the obtained mean difference for their statistical significance, the scores were subjected to independent sample t-test and it was found to be -.606, which was not significant at both the levels. So, the null hypothesis was accepted. It means that there was no significant gender difference in self-esteem among young adults. So, it can be said that the gender had nothing to do with self-esteem among the young adults.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to find whether there is a relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem among young adults residing in Karnataka and also to find out the gender differences in the levels of perceived stress and self-esteem among young adults. Results of the study showed there was a significant relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem, and this finding is consistent with the previous studies which showed a significant relationship between these two variables (Farhan et al., 2015; Bi et al., 2015).

Findings regarding gender differences in perceived stress among young adults revealed that there was no significant gender difference in perceived stress among young adults to be found and females reported higher levels of perceived stress than males. These findings were supported by the results obtained in the previous studies in which females were reported to have higher levels of perceived stress (Bi et al., 2015). Although the females showed a higher level of perceived stress, the sample data did not provide enough evidence to show a significant gender difference in perceived stress among young adults and a similar result was also obtained by Bi et al. Yale University School of Medicine found that men and women both manage stress differently. Women usually have the responsibility to manage both family and work. And it has been found that females emotionally process stressful events more than males.

Findings regarding gender differences in self-esteem among young adults showed no significant difference in the study. Although, the study revealed that males have higher levels of self-esteem than females. These findings were found to be consistent with the previous studies which showed that females experience a higher level of self-esteem than

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males (Srivastava et al., 2015). Bleidorn and her colleagues found that self-esteem increases with age and men at every age tend to have higher levels of self-esteem than women. This is due to the cultural differences that guide self-esteem in men and women.

The study posed a number of limitations. The researcher employed a correlational design and hence the causal relationship between the two variables used in the study cannot be drawn. The size of the sample limits to college students, an extent to which the results can be generalized. The gender study was only done on two genders of the youth population, as a suggestion for the future study on the two variables, a random sampling technique can be used. Also, since the study was limited only to a particular geographical location, the extent of the findings was also limited, hence different population and location can be used in further studies.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The aim of the current study was to assess the relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem among young adults residing in Karnataka. It also aimed to find the gender difference in their perceived stress levels and self-esteem levels. The tools used in the present study were the Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSE), which is a 10-item scale, to assess their self-esteem levels and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), which is a 10-item scale was used to measure their perceived stress levels.

A total of 100 participants were taken for this study in which there were 50 females and 50 males. Based on the responses that were gathered from the 100 participants, all of which aged between 18 to 35 years of age, it was found that there was a significant relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem. The study also found that there was no significant gender difference in perceived stress among young adults and females had a higher perceived stress than males but the difference in perceived stress when compared to self-esteem is marginal. In case of self-esteem, no significant gender difference was found although the females showed lower self-esteem levels than males.

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Conflict of Interest

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