

Research Paper

Self-Esteem Factors among Urban and Rural College Students in Relation to Socio-Economic Status

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined selected self-esteem factors among urban and rural college students in relation to socio-economic status. A balanced sample of 160 B.A. undergraduate students from Jalgaon District, Maharashtra, was selected for the study. The sample included equal representation from urban and rural areas and from high- and low-socio-economic-status groups. The Self-Esteem Scale developed by Dr. Santosh and Dr. Upindar Dhar was used to measure six factors of self-esteem: positivity, openness, competence, humility, self-worth, and learning orientation. Socio-economic status was classified by using the Socio-Economic Status Scale developed by R. L. Bhargadwaj. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and two-way analysis of variance were used for statistical analysis. Results indicated significant main effects of area and socio-economic status on all six self-esteem factors. Significant Area x SES interactions were found for positivity, openness, humility, self-worth, and learning orientation, whereas the interaction for competence was not significant. Correlation analysis showed that socio-economic status was positively related to positivity, openness, competence, and self-worth, and negatively related to humility and learning orientation. The findings suggest that self-esteem factors are not uniform across student groups and are shaped by both residential and socio-economic background.

Keywords: *Self-Esteem Factors, Socio-Economic Status, Urban Students, Rural Students, College Students*

Self-esteem is an important psychological construct in educational psychology because it reflects the way students evaluate their own worth, abilities, social acceptance, and personal direction (Rosenberg, 1965). College life is a critical period in which young people begin to form more independent views about their identity, future goals, academic competence, and social position; self-esteem also changes meaningfully across developmental stages (Orth & Robins, 2014). During this stage, students are exposed to academic competition, peer comparison, career uncertainty, changing family expectations, and wider social experiences. These experiences may strengthen or weaken different aspects of self-esteem. Therefore, it is useful to examine not only the overall level of self-esteem but also its separate components among college students.

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Received: July 07, 2026; Revision Received: July 10, 2026; Accepted: July 14, 2026

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The present investigation focuses on six factors of self-esteem, namely positivity, openness, competence, humility, self-worth, and learning orientation. Positivity refers to a favourable attitude toward oneself and life situations. Openness is related to the acceptance of experiences, feedback, and interpersonal interactions. Competence indicates perceived ability and confidence in performing tasks. Humility represents balanced self-perception and acceptance of personal limitations. Self-worth reflects a sense of dignity and personal value. Learning orientation shows interest in improvement, growth, and continuous learning. These factors provide a broader and more meaningful understanding of student self-esteem than a single total score and are consistent with the multidimensional view of self-concept (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985).

Socio-economic status is one of the important background variables related to student development. Earlier meta-analytic evidence has shown a small but significant positive relationship between socio-economic status and self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2002). Socio-economic status includes educational, occupational, income, family, and material conditions that create different opportunities and restrictions for students. Students from high-socio-economic-status families may receive more educational resources, social exposure, parental support, private tuition, and opportunities to build confidence. In contrast, students from low-socio-economic backgrounds may face financial constraints, limited access to academic resources, and greater family responsibilities. However, such students may also develop persistence, humility, and stronger motivation for upward mobility. Hence, socio-economic status may influence different self-esteem factors in different directions.

Area of residence is another important factor in the Indian educational context. Urban students generally have greater access to colleges, libraries, coaching facilities, digital resources, and career guidance. They also experience more competition and social comparison. Rural students may have fewer institutional facilities and may experience geographical, economic, and cultural limitations. At the same time, rural students may show strong adjustment, modesty, social connectedness, and a willingness to learn due to close-knit community life and family support. Thus, an urban-rural comparison is necessary to understand how the place of residence is associated with psychological development among college students.

In Maharashtra, especially in districts such as Jalgaon, higher education includes students from diverse rural and urban backgrounds. Many students are first-generation learners or come from families with different levels of socio-economic resources. Such diversity makes college students a suitable population for studying self-esteem factors. When students enter higher education, their perceptions of self-worth, competence, and learning capacity can influence academic participation, communication confidence, and future aspirations. A student with strong self-worth may participate more freely in class, whereas a student with low perceived competence may avoid academic challenges. Similarly, learning orientation is important for continuous improvement and adjustment to higher education.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rosenberg (1965) explained self-esteem as an individual's positive or negative attitude toward the self. His work gave a clear foundation for understanding self-esteem as a central part of the self-concept. In the present context, this view is important because college students constantly evaluate themselves in academic, social, and personal situations. A student who believes that he or she is worthy and capable is likely to show greater

confidence in college activities. However, Rosenberg's approach mainly emphasised global self-esteem. The present research extends this understanding by considering factor-wise self-esteem because dimensions such as positivity, competence, humility, and learning orientation may operate differently among urban and rural students.

Marsh and Shavelson (1985) proposed that self-concept is hierarchical and multidimensional. Their argument is relevant to self-esteem research because it indicates that the self cannot be adequately understood by a single general score. In educational settings, students may evaluate themselves differently in academic, social, moral, and personal domains. This idea supports the need for factor-wise analysis of self-esteem. For example, a student may feel competent in academic work but may be less open to social feedback. Another student may show humility and learning orientation even when self-worth is moderate. Therefore, the present study treats self-esteem as a set of interrelated factors rather than a single undifferentiated construct.

Twenge and Campbell (2002) conducted a meta-analytic review of self-esteem and socio-economic status and reported a small but significant positive relationship between the two variables. Their findings suggest that socio-economic advantages can support positive self-evaluation, although the effect is not large. This review is directly related to the present research because socio-economic status is used as a major classification variable. Students from high-SES backgrounds may have better educational resources and family support, which may strengthen positivity, openness, competence, and self-worth. At the same time, the present study also explores whether low-SES students exhibit greater humility and a stronger learning orientation.

Mann, Hosman, Schaalma, and de Vries (2004) reviewed self-esteem as an important factor in mental health promotion. They argued that self-evaluation influences aspirations, goals, social interaction, and general well-being. This view is meaningful for college students because self-esteem can shape participation in academic work, adjustment to peers, confidence in communication, and ability to cope with stress. A student with low self-worth may avoid challenges, whereas a student with positive self-esteem may show better resilience. The present study is therefore relevant not only for academic research but also for counselling and student development programmes in colleges.

Orth and Robins (2014) reviewed longitudinal evidence on the development of self-esteem and showed that self-esteem changes across the life span. Their work highlights that self-esteem is not fixed; it develops through experience, achievement, social feedback, and life conditions. For college students, this is particularly important because the college years mark a transition from adolescence to adulthood. During this stage, socio-economic opportunities, exposure to rural or urban environments, and academic experiences can contribute to changes in self-evaluation. The present study builds on this developmental view by examining how self-esteem factors differ among students living in different social and residential conditions.

Objectives of the Study

1. To compare positivity, openness, competence, humility, self-worth, and learning orientation among urban and rural college students.
2. To compare the above self-esteem factors among students from high and low socio-economic status groups.

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3. To examine the interaction effect of area of residence and socio-economic status on self-esteem factors.
4. To examine the relationship between socio-economic status score and the selected self-esteem factors.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** There will be significant differences between urban and rural college students in self-esteem factors.
- **H2:** There will be significant differences between high- and low-socio-economic-status college students in self-esteem factors.
- **H3:** There will be a significant interaction effect of area of residence and socio-economic status on self-esteem factors.
- **H4:** There will be a significant relationship between socio-economic status score and self-esteem factors.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study used a 2 x 2 factorial survey design. The independent variables were area of residence (urban and rural) and socio-economic status (high and low). The dependent variables were six self-esteem factors: positivity, openness, competence, humility, self-worth, and learning orientation.

The population consisted of B.A. undergraduate students studying in selected colleges of Jalgaon District, Maharashtra. Based on the available data, a stratified, balanced sample of 160 students was used in the present research. The sample was arranged in a 2 x 2 design with 40 students in each Area x SES cell. Gender was kept balanced across strata to avoid unequal representation, although it was not treated as a separate variable in the present research.

The Self-Esteem Scale developed by Dr. Santosh and Dr. Upindar Dhar (2015) was used to assess self-esteem. The scale contains six factor scores: positivity, openness, competence, humility, self-worth, and learning orientation. The Socio-Economic Status Scale developed by R. L. Bharadwaj (2001) was used to classify respondents into high- and low-socio-economic-status groups. Data were analysed through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and two-way analysis of variance.

Table 1 Sample Distribution of the Study

Area of Residence	High SES	Low SES	Total
Urban	40	40	80
Rural	40	40	80
Total	80	80	160

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The mean and standard deviation were calculated to understand the overall trend in scores. A two-way analysis of variance was applied separately for each self-esteem factor to test the main effects of area, socio-economic status, and the Area x SES interaction. Pearson correlation was also computed between socio-economic status score and each self-esteem factor.

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of Self-Esteem Factors by Area and Socio-Economic Status

Factor	Urban High SES M (SD)	Urban Low SES M (SD)	Rural High SES M (SD)	Rural Low SES M (SD)
Positivity	24.91 (2.35)	22.62 (1.83)	23.02 (1.56)	22.22 (1.65)
Openness	20.85 (2.29)	18.77 (1.50)	19.14 (1.37)	18.70 (1.89)
Competence	12.19 (1.66)	11.24 (1.24)	11.25 (0.94)	10.73 (1.35)
Humility	14.21 (2.04)	15.78 (1.68)	16.01 (1.39)	15.95 (1.35)
Self-worth	12.43 (1.78)	11.36 (1.10)	11.39 (1.15)	11.18 (1.16)
Learning orientation	6.22 (1.35)	7.53 (0.75)	7.45 (0.90)	7.65 (0.80)

Table 2 shows that urban high-SES students had the highest mean scores on positivity, openness, competence, and self-worth. Rural students, particularly rural high-SES students, showed higher humility, while rural low-SES students had the highest mean score on learning orientation. These descriptive trends suggest that self-esteem factors do not move in a single direction; rather, each factor shows a distinct pattern across areas and socio-economic backgrounds.

Table 3 Two-Way ANOVA for Self-Esteem Factors

Factor	Source	F(1, 156)	p	Partial eta squared
Positivity	Area	15.00	< .01	.088
	SES	27.07	< .01	.148
	Area x SES	6.41	.012	.039
Openness	Area	9.83	.002	.059
	SES	19.53	< .01	.111
	Area x SES	8.21	.005	.050
Competence	Area	11.94	< .01	.071
	SES	12.41	< .01	.074
	Area x SES	1.10	.295	.007
Humility	Area	14.57	< .01	.085
	SES	8.37	.004	.051
	Area x SES	9.83	.002	.059
Self-worth	Area	8.40	.004	.051
	SES	9.25	.003	.056
	Area x SES	4.16	.043	.026
Learning orientation	Area	19.03	< .01	.109
	SES	24.31	< .01	.135
	Area x SES	12.89	< .01	.076

The ANOVA results indicate significant area and SES effects for all six factors. Urban and high-SES students scored higher on positivity, openness, competence, and self-worth, whereas rural and low-SES students scored higher on humility and learning orientation. The Area x SES interaction was significant for positivity, openness, humility, self-worth, and learning orientation, but not for competence.

Table 4 Correlation between Socio-Economic Status Score and Self-Esteem Factors

Self-esteem Factor	r	p
Positivity	.431	< .01
Openness	.402	< .01
Competence	.379	< .01
Humility	-.292	< .01
Self-worth	.291	< .01
Learning orientation	-.426	< .01

The correlation analysis supports the ANOVA pattern. Socio-economic status was positively related to positivity, openness, competence, and self-worth, and negatively related to humility and learning orientation. This means that higher socio-economic scores were associated with stronger positive self-evaluation and self-worth, whereas lower socio-economic scores were associated with comparatively greater humility and learning orientation.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study show that self-esteem factors differ significantly according to area of residence and socio-economic status. The first hypothesis stated that there would be a significant difference in self-esteem factors between urban and rural college students. This hypothesis was accepted at the 0.01 level for all six factors, namely positivity, openness, competence, humility, self-worth, and learning orientation. The ANOVA results showed that the area effect was significant for positivity, openness, competence, humility, self-worth, and learning orientation. Urban students scored higher on positivity, openness, competence, and self-worth, whereas rural students scored higher on humility and learning orientation. This indicates that residential background plays an important role in shaping different aspects of self-esteem. Urban students may have greater educational exposure, social interaction, communication opportunities, and access to institutional facilities, which may strengthen positive self-evaluation and perceived competence. This interpretation is supported by Rosenberg's view that self-esteem develops in relation to personal worth, social experience, and self-evaluation (Rosenberg, 1965).

The second hypothesis stated that there would be a significant difference in self-esteem factors between high- and low-socio-economic-status college students. This hypothesis was also accepted at the 0.01 level for all six self-esteem factors. The SES effect was significant for positivity, openness, competence, humility, self-worth, and learning orientation. High-SES students scored higher on positivity, openness, competence, and self-worth. This may be because students from higher socio-economic backgrounds usually receive better parental support, academic guidance, material resources, digital learning facilities, and career-related exposure. These advantages may help them develop greater confidence, openness, and a stronger sense of self-worth. The finding is consistent with earlier research showing that socio-economic status is positively associated with self-esteem and educational development (Sirin, 2005; Twenge & Campbell, 2002).

The results also showed that rural and low-SES students scored higher on humility and learning orientation. This finding should not be interpreted as a lower level of psychological strength. Rather, it suggests that these students may have a more realistic and balanced self-view. Students from rural and low socio-economic backgrounds may be more aware of social and economic limitations, which may increase their desire to learn, progress, and

improve their future. Their higher learning orientation may be linked to educational aspirations, employment needs, and social mobility. This explanation is supported by motivational perspectives which emphasise effort, persistence, learning goals, and improvement-oriented behaviour among students (Dweck, 1986; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). The third hypothesis stated that there would be a significant interaction effect of area of residence and socio-economic status on self-esteem factors. This hypothesis was partially accepted. The interaction effect was significant for positivity at the 0.05 level ($p = .012$), openness at the 0.01 level ($p = .005$), humility at the 0.01 level ($p = .002$), self-worth at the 0.05 level ($p = .043$), and learning orientation at the 0.01 level ($p < .01$). Therefore, the interaction hypothesis was accepted for five factors. However, the interaction effect for competence was not significant ($p = .295$); therefore, the hypothesis was rejected for competence. This means that area of residence and socio-economic status jointly influence most self-esteem factors, but their combined effect does not significantly influence competence.

The fourth hypothesis stated that there would be a significant relationship between socio-economic status score and self-esteem factors. This hypothesis was accepted at the 0.01 level for all six factors. Socio-economic status was positively correlated with positivity, openness, competence, and self-worth, and negatively correlated with humility and learning orientation. This shows that higher socio-economic status is associated with stronger positive self-evaluation, greater openness, greater perceived competence, and higher self-worth. At the same time, lower socio-economic status is associated with greater humility and a stronger learning orientation. Thus, the correlation findings support the ANOVA results and confirm that socio-economic background is an important variable in understanding self-esteem factors among college students.

CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that self-esteem factors among college students vary according to both area of residence and socio-economic status. Urban and high-SES students showed comparatively higher positivity, openness, competence, and self-worth, whereas rural and low-SES students showed comparatively higher humility and learning orientation. The interaction between area and socio-economic status was significant for five of the six factors, indicating that residential and socio-economic contexts interact in shaping self-esteem. Competence, however, did not show a significant interaction effect.

The findings highlight the need for student development programmes that strengthen confidence, openness, and self-worth among disadvantaged groups, while also recognising the motivational strengths of rural and low-SES students. Colleges may use counselling, mentoring, skill development activities, and academic support programmes to promote balanced self-esteem among students from diverse backgrounds.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Tayade, V.Y. & Patil, A.B. (2026). Self-Esteem Factors among Urban and Rural College Students in Relation to Socio-Economic Status. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 14(3), 057-064. DIP:18.01.007.20261403, DOI:10.25215/1403.007