

Research Paper

A Study on Self-Esteem and Mental Health among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Young adulthood represents a critical developmental phase characterized by significant personal, social, and professional transitions that profoundly influence psychological well-being. Among the various psychological factors, self-esteem plays a pivotal role in shaping mental health outcomes. The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and mental health among young adults, with specific focus on examining the influence of gender and marital status on these variables. The sample comprised 80 young adults selected from different areas of Ranchi district, Jharkhand, using convenience sampling technique. The sample included both male and female participants, consisting of married and unmarried young adults. Standardized psychological tools were administered, namely the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12). Statistical analysis was performed using independent t-tests and Pearson correlation coefficient. The findings revealed significant differences in self-esteem and mental health across gender and marital status groups. Male young adults demonstrated significantly higher self-esteem and better mental health compared to females. Similarly, unmarried participants exhibited higher self-esteem and better mental health than married participants. A significant negative correlation was found between self-esteem and mental health distress, indicating that higher self-esteem is associated with lower psychological distress. The study concludes that self-esteem serves as a vital protective factor for mental health, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions.

Keywords: *Self-Esteem, Mental Health, Young Adults, Gender, Marital Status, Psychological Well-being*

Young adulthood is a significant stage of life marked by various personal, social, academic, and professional transitions. During this period, individuals often face challenges related to higher education, career planning, financial independence, and interpersonal relationships. These experiences can influence their psychological well-being and overall mental health. As a result, understanding the factors that contribute to positive mental health among young adults has become an important area of psychological research. Self-esteem is one of the key psychological factors that influence an individual's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It refers to a person's overall evaluation of their own worth and value (Rosenberg, 1965). Individuals with high self-esteem generally have a positive view of themselves, feel competent in dealing with life challenges, and are more confident in their abilities. In contrast, individuals with low self-esteem often experience

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Received: July 1, 2026; Revision Received: July 15, 2026; Accepted: July 19, 2026

self-doubt, feelings of inadequacy, and a negative self-image, which may affect their emotional well-being and adjustment (Orth & Robins, 2014). Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which individuals recognize their abilities, cope effectively with normal life stresses, work productively, and contribute to their communities (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). Good mental health enables individuals to maintain healthy relationships, make informed decisions, and manage everyday challenges effectively. Conversely, poor mental health may result in emotional difficulties, reduced functioning, and an increased risk of psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression. Research has consistently highlighted the important relationship between self-esteem and mental health. Individuals with higher self-esteem tend to experience greater psychological well-being and lower levels of emotional distress (Mann et al., 2004). Self-esteem acts as a protective factor that helps individuals cope with stress and adapt to adverse situations more effectively. Studies have also shown that low self-esteem is associated with a higher risk of depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems (Sowislo & Orth, 2013). Therefore, self-esteem plays a crucial role in maintaining positive mental health and overall psychological adjustment. In recent years, concerns regarding the mental health of young adults have increased due to academic pressure, career uncertainty, social expectations, and the growing influence of digital technology and social media. These factors can affect how individuals perceive themselves and their ability to manage psychological challenges. Consequently, examining the relationship between self-esteem and mental health among young adults is important for understanding their psychological well-being and identifying factors that promote healthy development. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and mental health among young adults. The findings of the study may contribute to a better understanding of the role of self-esteem in psychological well-being and may provide useful insights for mental health promotion and intervention programs.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Curtis and Garratt-Reed (2026) conducted a study to examine the mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between perfectionism and mental health outcomes. The study was based on the Two Continua Model of Mental Health and included measures of perfectionism, self-esteem, flourishing, and psychological distress. Data were collected from participants using standardized psychological assessment tools. The findings revealed that self-esteem significantly mediated the relationship between perfectionism and mental health outcomes. Individuals with higher self-esteem reported greater flourishing and lower levels of psychological distress. The study concluded that self-esteem plays an important role in promoting positive mental health and reducing psychological difficulties, making it a key factor in understanding the relationship between perfectionism and mental well-being.

Li et al. (2026) conducted a psychometric and network analysis to investigate the dynamic relationships among emotional distress, self-esteem, loneliness, and hope in adolescents. The sample consisted of 1,862 Chinese senior high school students aged between 16 and 18 years (Mean age = 16.22 years), including 49.8% females and 50.2% males. The researchers employed the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale for Youth (DASS-Y), self-esteem measures, loneliness scales, and hope assessments. Advanced statistical techniques, including Rasch analysis, Structural Equation Modeling, Exploratory Structural Equation Modeling, and Network Analysis, were used to examine the relationships among the variables. The findings demonstrated that self-esteem occupied a central position within the psychological network and was strongly associated with emotional distress, loneliness, and hope. Higher self-esteem was related to lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, as well as greater hope.

and psychological well-being. The study highlighted the critical role of self-esteem in adolescent mental health and emotional adjustment.

da-Silva-Domingues et al. (2025) conducted a cross-sectional descriptive study to investigate the relationships among social support, family functioning, sense of coherence, self-esteem, and anxiety among university students. The primary objective of the study was to examine whether sense of coherence and self-esteem mediate the relationship between psychosocial factors and anxiety. The sample consisted of 530 undergraduate students aged between 18 and 24 years from public universities in Andalusia, Spain. The participants were selected using a stratified multistage cluster sampling technique. The mean age of the participants was 20.11 years, and 56.6% were female students. Data were collected using standardized instruments measuring family functioning (Family APGAR), perceived social support, sense of coherence, self-esteem, and anxiety. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, t-tests, and path analysis. The findings revealed that more than 60% of the students reported experiencing anxiety. Anxiety was strongly and negatively associated with self-esteem ($r = -0.748$) and sense of coherence ($r = -0.771$), while moderate negative associations were found with social support and family functioning. Path analysis indicated that the proposed model explained 69% of the variance in anxiety and 49% of the variance in self-esteem. The results further showed that social support and family functioning positively influenced self-esteem and sense of coherence, which in turn reduced anxiety levels. Self-esteem was found to be a significant mediator between psychosocial resources and anxiety. The study concluded that higher self-esteem serves as an important protective factor against anxiety and contributes significantly to the psychological well-being of university students.

Pan et al. (2025) conducted a study to examine the relationship between physical activity and subjective well-being among college students, with a particular focus on the mediating roles of perceived social support, self-esteem, and psychological resilience. The sample consisted of 846 college students from three universities in China. Data were collected using standardized scales, and structural equation modeling was used for data analysis. The findings revealed that physical activity positively influenced subjective well-being and significantly enhanced self-esteem, perceived social support, and psychological resilience. Self-esteem was found to be an important mediator in the relationship between physical activity and subjective well-being. Students with higher self-esteem reported better psychological adjustment and greater mental well-being. The study concluded that self-esteem plays a significant role in promoting positive mental health among college students.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

1. To examine the influence of gender on self-esteem and mental health among young adults.
2. To examine the influence of marital status on self-esteem and mental health among young adults.
3. To examine the relationship between self-esteem and mental health among young adults.

Hypotheses

To address these objectives, we formulated the following hypotheses:

- **H₀.** There is no significant difference in self-esteem between male and female young adults.

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- **H₀.** There is no significant difference in self-esteem between married and unmarried young adults.
- **H₀.** There is no significant difference in mental health between male and female young adults.
- **H₀.** There is no significant difference in mental health between married and unmarried young adults.
- **H₀.** There is no significant correlation between self-esteem and mental health among young adults.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on a sample of 80 young adults selected from different areas of Ranchi district, Jharkhand. The sample included both male and female participants, comprising married and unmarried young adults. Participants were selected using the convenience sampling technique.

Table 01 Sample Design

Marital Status	Married	Unmarried
Gender		
Male	20	20
Female	20	20
Total	40	40
	80	

Tools

- **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES):** This was developed by Morris Rosenberg (1965) at the University of Chicago. Total items are 10. Each item has four statements. The response is scored with the help of a manual. It is a 4-point Likert scale type scale consisting of 10 items. Each item has 4 responses: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Norms for the scale are available on a sample belonging to all age groups. The response alternatives to positive items are scored from 4 to 1 and to negative items are 1 to 4. The reliability and validity of this test are 0.88 and 0.85 respectively. Age range, 13 to 95 years. The range of the scale is 10-40, where higher scores indicate higher self-esteem and lower scores indicate low self-esteem.
- **General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12):** This was developed by David P. Goldberg (1978) at the University of Manchester. Total items are 12. Each item has four statements. The response is scored with the help of a manual. It is a 4-point Likert scale type scale consisting of 12 items. Each item has 4 responses: Not at all (0), No more than usual (1), Rather more than usual (2), and much more than usual (3). Norms for the scale are available on a sample belonging to general populations. The response alternatives are scored from 0 to 3 for each item using the standard Likert scoring method. The reliability and validity of this test are 0.85 and 0.82 respectively. Age range, 15 years and above. The range of the scale is 0-36, where higher scores indicate poorer mental health and higher psychological distress, and lower scores indicate better mental health.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis of the data involved the use of an independent t-test to assess group differences and pearson 'r' correlation coefficient to measure the relationship between self-esteem and mental health.

RESULTS

The findings derived from the statistical analysis are presented below:

Table 02 Influence of Gender on Self-Esteem

Subgroups	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	df	t
Male	30.50	4.20	4.40	78	4.22**
Female	26.40	4.50			

** Significant at 0.01 level

Figure 01 Mean scores on Self-Esteem in relation to Gender.

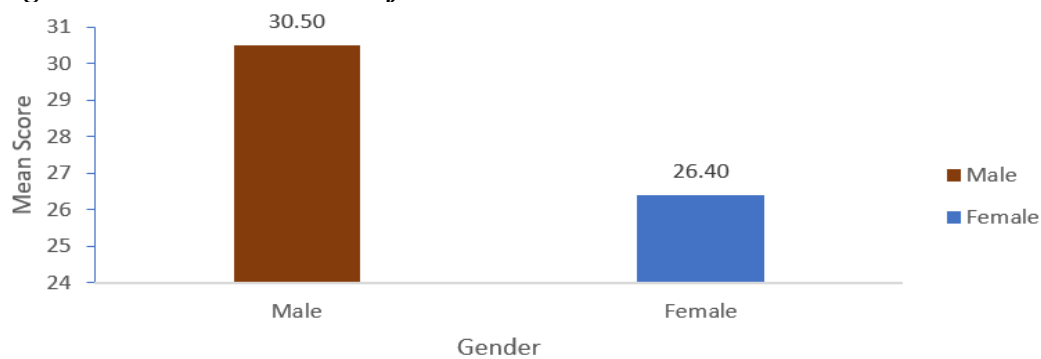


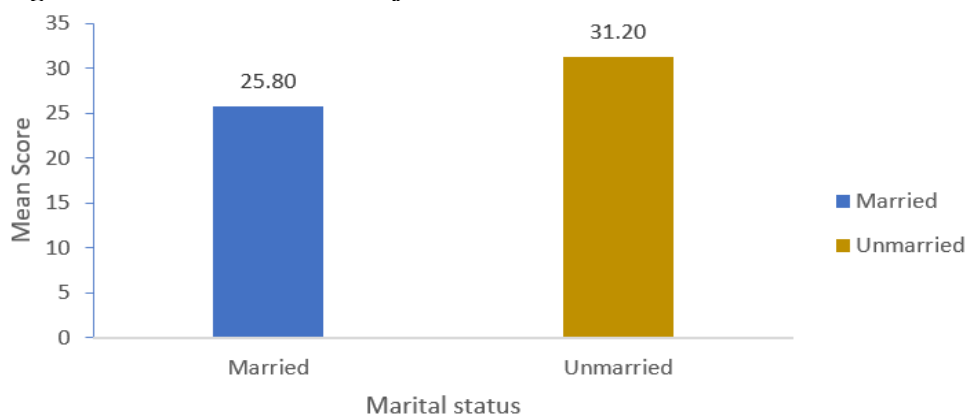
Table 02 and Figure 01 indicate that the mean self-esteem scores of Male and Female participants were 30.50 and 26.40, respectively. The obtained t-value (4.22) was found to be significant at the 0.01 level, indicating a statistically significant difference between Male and Female participants in terms of self-esteem. Male participants reported higher levels of self-esteem than their Female counterparts. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that gender has no significant difference in self-esteem between male and female young adults is rejected.

Table 03 Influence of Marital Status on Self-Esteem

Subgroups	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	df	t
Married	25.80	4.10	5.40	78	6.15**
Unmarried	31.20	3.80			

** Significant at 0.01 level

Figure 02 Mean scores on Self-Esteem in relation to Marital Status.



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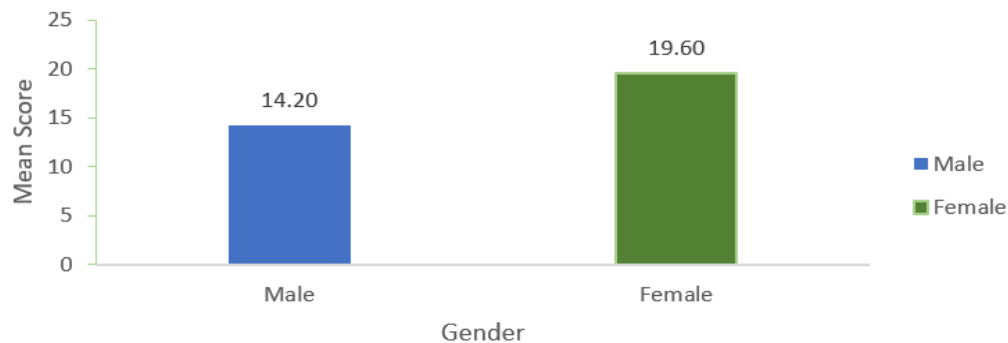
Table 03 and Figure 02 indicate that the mean self-esteem scores of Married and Unmarried participants were 25.80 and 31.20, respectively. The obtained t-value (6.15) was found to be significant at the 0.01 level, indicating a statistically significant difference between Married and Unmarried participants in terms of self-esteem. Unmarried participants reported higher levels of self-esteem than their Married counterparts. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that marital status has no significant difference in self-esteem between married and unmarried young adults is rejected.

Table 04 Influence of Gender on Mental Health

Subgroups	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	df	t
Male	14.20	4.50	5.40	78	5.05**
Female	19.60	5.10			

** Significant at 0.01 level

Figure 03 Mean scores on Mental Health in relation to Gender.



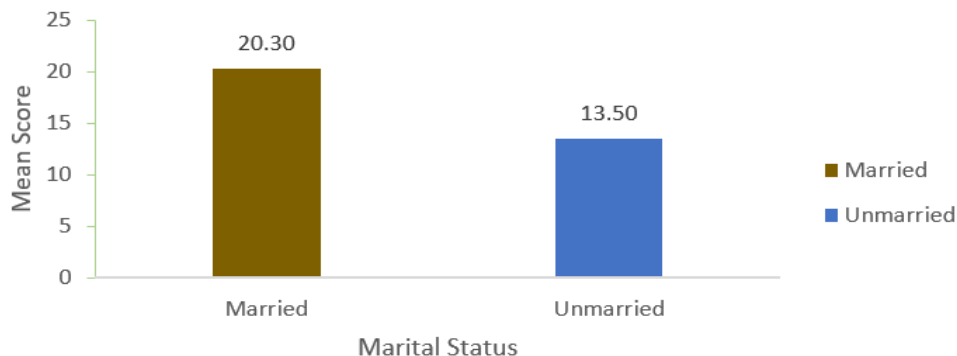
From Table 04 and Figure 03, it is evident that Male participants obtained a mean mental health score of 14.20, whereas Female participants obtained a mean score of 19.60. The obtained t-value of 5.05 was found to be significant at the 0.01 level, indicating a significant difference in mental health distress between Male and Female participants. Female participants reported higher levels of psychological distress (poorer mental health) than their Male counterparts. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that gender has no significant difference in mental health between male and female young adults is rejected.

Table 05 Influence of Marital Status on Mental Health

Subgroups	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	df	t
Married	20.30	4.80	6.80	78	7.02**
Unmarried	13.50	3.90			

** Significant at 0.01 level

Figure 04 Mean scores on Mental Health in relation to Marital Status.



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Table 05 and Figure 04 indicate that the mean mental health scores of Married and Unmarried participants were 20.30 and 13.50, respectively. The obtained t-value (7.02) was found to be significant at the 0.01 level, indicating a statistically significant difference between Married and Unmarried participants in terms of mental health. Married participants reported higher levels of psychological distress than their Unmarried counterparts. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in mental health between married and unmarried young adults is rejected.

Table 06 Correlation coefficient of Self-Esteem and Mental Health

	Self-Esteem	Mental Health
Self-Esteem	1	0.68**
Mental Health	0.68**	1

From Table 06, it is clear that, the correlation coefficient was found positive ($r = 0.68$), which is significant at 0.01 level. It indicates that self-esteem and mental health both are positively correlated to each other, means higher self-esteem results in higher mental health scores. Hence, the null hypothesis that, there is no significant correlation between self-esteem and mental health, is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted here.

DISCUSSION

The main aim of this study was to understand the relationship between self-esteem and mental health among young adults, and to see how gender and marital status affect these two factors. The results showed that both self-esteem and mental health differ significantly based on gender and marital status, and there is a strong connection between self-esteem and mental health. These findings support earlier research that says self-esteem is very important for good mental health during young adulthood. The study found that male young adults have higher self-esteem than female young adults. This may be because of social pressures and cultural expectations that often affect how women see themselves, especially in Indian society. Similarly, unmarried young adults were found to have higher self-esteem than married young adults. This could be because marriage brings new responsibilities, financial pressures, and family adjustments, which can temporarily reduce a person's confidence in themselves. When it came to mental health, female young adults showed more psychological distress than males, meaning they faced more mental health challenges. This matches many other studies that show women often experience higher levels of anxiety and depression due to social, hormonal, and role-related pressures. Married young adults also reported more mental health problems than unmarried ones, likely because of the stress that comes with adjusting to married life, managing a household, and meeting family expectations at a young age.

A very important finding of this study was that self-esteem and mental health are strongly and positively correlated ($r = 0.68$). This means that when self-esteem goes up, overall mental health and psychological well-being also improve. In simple words, young adults who feel good about themselves tend to have significantly better mental health. This finding is supported by many recent studies like Li et al. (2026), Curtis and Garratt-Reed (2026), da-Silva-Domingues et al. (2025), and Pan et al. (2025), all of which say that self-esteem acts like a shield that protects people from stress, anxiety, and depression, thereby promoting positive mental health. These results have important meanings for counselors, teachers, and mental health workers. They show that we need special programs to build self-esteem, especially for female and married young adults. Colleges and communities should organize

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workshops, counseling sessions, and support groups that help young people feel more confident and handle life's pressures better.

However, this study also has some limitations. The sample size was small (only 80 people) and limited to Ranchi district, so the results may not apply to all young adults in India. The study was also done at one point in time, so we cannot say for sure that one thing causes the other. Future studies should use bigger samples, cover more areas, and follow people over a longer period to get a clearer picture. This study clearly shows that self-esteem plays a very important role in the mental health of young adults. Gender and marital status also affect how young people feel about themselves and their mental well-being. By helping young adults build stronger self-esteem, we can help them lead healthier, happier, and more balanced lives.

CONCLUSION

The present study was conducted to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and mental health among young adults, as well as to examine the influence of gender and marital status on these psychological variables. Based on the analysis of the data collected, several significant conclusions can be drawn. First, the study found a significant difference in self-esteem and mental health based on gender. Male young adults demonstrated higher levels of self-esteem and better mental health (lower psychological distress) compared to their female counterparts. This indicates that young women in the sample experienced more mental health challenges and lower self-worth, highlighting the need for targeted psychological support for females.

Second, marital status was found to have a significant impact on both variables. Unmarried young adults reported higher self-esteem and better mental health than married young adults. The additional responsibilities, role adjustments, and pressures associated with married life appear to contribute to increased psychological distress and a decline in self-esteem among married individuals in this age group. Third, and most importantly, the study revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.68$) between self-esteem and mental health. This means that as self-esteem increases, overall mental well-being and psychological adjustment also increase. This confirms that self-esteem acts as a vital protective factor that helps young adults cope with life's challenges and maintain emotional stability.

Self-esteem is a fundamental psychological resource that significantly influences the mental well-being of young adults. The findings emphasize the critical importance of fostering self-worth, particularly among female and married young adults, who were found to be more vulnerable to psychological distress. Educational institutions, counselors, and mental health professionals should design and implement intervention programs, workshops, and support systems focused on building self-esteem and resilience. Ultimately, enhancing self-esteem can serve as a powerful and effective strategy to promote positive mental health and improve the overall quality of life for young adults navigating the complexities of early adulthood.

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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: Naaz, S. (2026). A Study on Self-Esteem and Mental Health among Young Adults. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 14(3), 137-145. DIP:18.01.014.20261403, DOI:10.25215/1403.014