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Research Paper

Impact of Age and Gender on Perceived Social Support and Self-Esteem in Youth

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the current study was to examine the effects of age and gender on the self-esteem and perceived social support in adolescents and young adults. A purposive and convenient sampling method was used. A total of 120 participants were included with 60 adolescents (aged 12–19 years) and 60 young adults (aged 20–30 years), equally divided by gender. Adolescent participants were recruited from Vani Vihar High School, Bhubaneswar, and other schools with the permission of school authorities. Young adult data were collected via Google Forms. The questionnaires employed in this study were Interpersonal Support Evaluation List-12 (ISEL-12) and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). Two-way ANOVA was used to determine main and interaction effects of gender and age on both dependent variables. Results show that age has a significant effect on both perceived social support ($p = .002$) and self-esteem ($p = .008$), with young adults scoring higher than adolescents on both measures. Gender, however, did not produce a significant effect on either variable (perceived social support: $p = .303$; self-esteem: $p = .972$). Similarly, the interaction effect of age and gender was not significant for either variable (perceived social support: $p = .288$; self-esteem: $p = .754$). The results indicate that developmental age, rather than sex, is more influential on self-esteem and perceived social support. So, it is important to provide support-promoting interventions throughout adolescence.

Keywords: *Age, Gender, Perceived Social Support, Self-Esteem, Personal/Self-Development*

Self-development is a lifelong process involving self-awareness, learning, emotional understanding, resilience, and identity formation. Personality develops across childhood, adolescence, and adulthood through biological, psychological, social, and environmental influences.

Childhood involves caregiver relationships and learning through imitation. Adolescence brings physical, emotional, and cognitive changes, greater independence, identity exploration, and changing social relationships. In adulthood, personality becomes relatively stable as individuals form relationships, pursue careers, and develop a clearer identity.

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Factors Influencing Personal Development

Personality evolves through biological, psychological, social, and environmental influences. Genetic inheritance, hormones, brain functioning, family, culture, and media contribute to development. Self-concept, emotional health, motivation, optimism, and self-regulation also support adaptation.

Self-esteem and perceived social support are important psychological variables in personal development and well-being. The present study focuses on these variables among adolescents and young adults.

Self-Esteem

Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem as a positive or negative attitude toward oneself and an overall judgment of one's worth. High self-esteem is associated with confidence, positive relationships, optimism, and psychological protection. It generally declines during adolescence and increases through young adulthood.

Adolescence is important for self-esteem because of social comparison, identity development, and increasing independence. In young adulthood, self-esteem is relevant to decision-making, relationships, academic performance, and professional life. Men often report slightly higher self-esteem than women, although findings vary across cultures and contexts.

Perceived Social Support

Perceived social support is an individual's subjective assessment of available support from family, friends, and significant others (Zimet et al., 1988). It includes emotional, tangible, informational, and companionship support and can reduce stress and promote psychosocial well-being.

During adolescence, family and peer support are associated with better psychological outcomes, life satisfaction, and self-esteem. In young adulthood, parental support may decline while peer, romantic, and professional support becomes more important. Gender differences are influenced by social norms and culture.

Theoretical Background

The study draws on developmental and sociological perspectives, including Freud's psychosexual theory, Erikson's psychosocial model, Kohlberg's moral development model, Higgins' regulatory focus theory, and Cooley's and Mead's concepts of the social self.

Studies on Self-Esteem

A range of studies has highlighted the links between self-esteem and various factors. Entezami and Souri (2018) demonstrated that life skills training boosts self-esteem in mothers of children with mental disabilities. Lu et al. (2018) found a connection between higher self-esteem and better physical health, mediated by hippocampal grey matter volume. Dembinska et al. (2020) identified that low self-esteem can lead to excessive internet use, driven by loneliness and relationship difficulties.

Shao and Ni (2021) examined social media's impact on family intimacy and adolescent self-esteem, noting different usage patterns between genders. Bleckmann et al. (2022) indicated that self-esteem is more affected by personal views on social inclusion than by external perceptions, with neuroticism playing a moderating role. Fatma et al. (2022) established that

positive parental support bolsters adolescent self-esteem and vocational maturity. Tiwari et al. (2023) showed self-esteem's partial mediation in the relationship between self-forgiveness and flourishing. Qi et al. (2024) found resilience to be a predictor of self-esteem in hearing-impaired children, mediated by positive coping strategies. Recent works by Stevic et al. (2025) and Curun and Gökalp (2025) further explored self-esteem in online co-rumination and psychological sustainability contexts.

Studies on Perceived Social Support

Research indicates that perceived social support has beneficial effects across various populations. Sadoughi and Hesampour (2016) found it aids academic adjustment and reduces loneliness in university students. Zeidner and Matthews (2016) highlighted its mediating role between emotional intelligence and psychological distress. Zhang et al. (2018) noted that early college social support predicts lower loneliness, which in turn affects internet addiction.

Basak and Sinha (2020) showed that female college students faced more depression and less support during COVID-19, with tangible support easing depressive symptoms. Jafry et al. (2021) found social support helps alleviate stress's negative effects on health for homeless adults. Parimal et al. (2022) confirmed its significance for psychological well-being in thalassemia patients. Lee et al. (2023) reported it moderates the correlation between alcohol use and intimate partner violence in Black men. Galovski et al. (2023) revealed it mitigates depression linked to perceived neighborhood danger in veterans, especially those without trauma histories. Finally, Chen et al. (2025) indicated that social support enhances self-efficacy in vocational college students by reducing loneliness and anxiety.

Studies on Perceived Social Support, Self-Esteem, and Other Factors

Several studies have examined the interaction between self-esteem and social support in relation to psychological outcomes. Higuchi and Echigo (2017) noted a positive link between proactive coping and self-esteem in physical therapy students. Foster et al. (2017) identified that family and school connectedness in socially vulnerable adolescents led to lower depression and higher self-esteem. Wesley et al. (2018) found that bipolar patients in remission showed higher self-esteem and social support. The integrative review by Andersen et al. (2018) indicated that team sports participation enhances self-esteem and emotional support. Chang et al. (2018) reported that parental and peer support reduced depression among Chinese adolescents via self-esteem. Hameed et al. (2019) revealed that females reported more emotional disturbances and social support but lower self-esteem. Toma et al. (2020) and Yang et al. (2021) discussed the dual effects of social media on adolescent self-esteem. Seo et al. (2022) linked higher depression and social anxiety to suicidal ideation in medical students, with self-esteem and social support serving as protective factors. Zanella and Lee (2022; 2024) explored disordered eating in relation to self-esteem and social factors. Baranwal and Gandhok (2024) found no significant gender differences in social support among young adults. Chen et al. (2025) concluded that social support boosts psychological capital through self-esteem in middle schoolers. Shi et al. (2025) showed that social support and self-esteem mediate the relationship between prosocial behavior and adolescent stress.

Studies on Perceived Social Support and Self-Esteem

Studies indicate a consistent positive relationship between self-esteem and various factors. Sadovnikova (2016) linked adolescent attachment style to self-esteem and relationship quality. Wagner et al. (2017) found self-perceived social inclusion to be a stronger predictor of self-esteem than peer approval. Magro et al. (2018) demonstrated that peer and family

support correlate with self-esteem in middle childhood, especially among males and Dutch students.

Harris and Orth (2020) established a reciprocal relationship between self-esteem and social relationships across the lifespan, while Deepthika Shree and Ramasamy (2022) noted that rural adolescents and males reported higher social support. Lu et al. (2023) provided neurological evidence showing that hippocampal grey matter mediates the connection between perceived social support and self-esteem in young adults.

Rationale of the Study

While prior research has examined self-esteem and perceived social support in relation to several other variables, comparative studies that simultaneously examine both variables across age groups (adolescents and young adults) and genders (males and females) are relatively limited. Adolescent girls often show lower self-esteem and higher vulnerability to depression, and these patterns can persist into adulthood. Understanding how social support differs across age and gender groups is critical for identifying who may be most at risk and why.

Young adulthood is similarly a critical period, marked by significant role transitions — career, romantic relationships, independence — where the quality of social support has measurable effects on mental health and coping. Research has shown that males tend to perceive higher social support from friends, while females receive more support from significant others (Hameed et al., 2019). A gender gap in self-esteem, which typically emerges in adolescence, has also been consistently documented.

The present study addresses this gap by directly comparing adolescents and young adults of both genders on perceived social support and self-esteem. The findings can inform educational programs, counselling interventions, mental health policies, and research into the social determinants of psychological well-being during these critical developmental periods.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

1. To explore the differences between the two age groups and genders with regard to perceived social support and self-esteem.
2. To investigate the impact of age and gender on perceived social support.
3. To find out the impact of age and gender on self-esteem.

Hypotheses

1. **H1:** There will be a significant difference between both age groups (adolescents and young adults) and genders (males and females) with regard to perceived social support.
2. **H2:** There will be a significant difference between both age groups (adolescents and young adults) and genders (males and females) with regard to self-esteem.

Sample and Sampling Method

A purposive and convenient sampling method was used. A total of 120 participants were recruited: 60 adolescents (30 boys and 30 girls, aged 12–19 years) and 60 young adults (30 men and 30 women, aged 20–30 years). Adolescent participants were recruited from Vani Vihar High School, Bhubaneswar, and other schools with the permission of school

authorities. Young adult data were collected via Google Forms. Informed consent and confidentiality were maintained throughout. Participants had the right to withdraw at any time.

Sampling Distribution

Group	Female	Male	Total
Adolescents	30	30	60
Young Adults	30	30	60
Total	60	60	120

Variables

- **Independent Variables:** Age (adolescents: 12–19 years; young adults: 20–30 years) and Gender (male and female).
- **Dependent Variables:** Self-esteem (measured by RSES; higher scores indicate higher self-esteem) and Perceived Social Support (measured by ISEL-12; higher scores indicate greater perceived support).

Research Design and Analysis

A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was adopted. Two-Way ANOVA and descriptive statistics were conducted using SPSS Version 27 to examine the main and interaction effects of age and gender on the two dependent variables. A p-value of $\leq .05$ was considered statistically significant.

Instruments

- **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES):** Developed by Morris Rosenberg (1965), this 10-item scale assesses overall self-worth using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree). Five items are reverse-scored (items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9). Total scores range from 10 to 40, with higher scores reflecting higher self-esteem (low: 10–25; medium: 26–29; high: 30–40). Internal consistency (α) ranges from .77 to .88 and test-retest reliability ranges from .82 to .85.
- **Interpersonal Support Evaluation List-12 (ISEL-12):** Developed by Cohen et al. (1985), this is a 12-item short form of the original 40-item ISEL. It measures three dimensions of perceived social support: Appraisal Support (someone to talk to about problems), Belonging Support (companionship), and Tangible Support (practical aid). Each item is rated on a 4-point scale from 'Definitely False' (0) to 'Definitely True' (3). Six items are reverse-scored. Internal consistency (α) ranges from .77 to .90. Scores of 0–17 are considered low and 18–36 high (based on Platt et al., 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics: Perceived Social Support

The overall mean for perceived social support across all 120 participants was 21.74. Young adults (M = 23.32) reported notably higher levels than adolescents (M = 20.17), suggesting that perceived social support increases with age. Several explanations account for this. Young adults have greater autonomy over their social environments, allowing them to build and maintain supportive relationships more deliberately — whether with romantic partners, mentors, or professional peers. The transition into adulthood also tends to bring greater relationship stability and a clearer social identity, which provides a more secure support base. Cognitively and emotionally, young adults are better equipped to recognise, communicate, and make use of the support available to them.

Adolescence, by contrast, is a period of heightened emotional distance from family and of shifting, sometimes unstable, peer relationships. Before new and mature support networks are fully formed, adolescents often experience a temporary but real decline in perceived support. These findings are consistent with prior literature showing that support from parents tends to decrease while peer and partner support increases through adolescence and into early adulthood.

Female participants overall (M = 22.27) reported slightly higher support than males (M = 21.22), though the difference was small. Among adolescents, females (M = 21.23) reported higher support than males (M = 19.10), but this gap largely disappeared in young adulthood (males: M = 23.33; females: M = 23.30). Adults also showed higher variability in support scores (SD = 6.660) compared to adolescents (SD = 4.187), indicating more diverse experiences of social support in adulthood. This may reflect broader social trends toward gender equality, where both males and females increasingly engage in similar patterns of support-seeking and appraisal. Research suggests that as traditional gender norms become more fluid, the stereotypical divide — where women are emotional and expressive and men are stoic and independent — is less pronounced in practice. Additionally, in comparable life circumstances (similar stress levels, academic environments, or health challenges), both genders may perceive and utilise social support in similar ways, leading to comparable outcomes.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Social Support

Gender	Age Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	Adolescents	19.10	3.044	30
Male	Young Adults	23.33	7.034	30
Male	Total	21.22	5.782	60
Female	Adolescents	21.23	4.904	30
Female	Young Adults	23.30	6.385	30
Female	Total	22.27	5.740	60
Total	Adolescents	20.17	4.187	60
Total	Young Adults	23.32	6.660	60
Total	Overall	21.74	5.761	120

Descriptive Statistics: Self-Esteem

The overall mean for self-esteem was 25.09, reflecting a moderate-to-high level across all participants. Young adults (M = 25.73) reported slightly higher self-esteem than adolescents (M = 24.45), echoing the age pattern observed for perceived social support. Gender differences were minimal: males (M = 25.10) and females (M = 25.08) scored almost identically. This finding may reflect the multi-dimensional nature of self-esteem: while men might score higher in areas such as physical appearance or athletic competence, women might score higher on social or academic dimensions, and these differences balance out in total self-esteem scores. The finding is also consistent with the view that men and women are more psychologically similar than different, and that gender is often a minor factor when other contextual variables are controlled for. Furthermore, gender differences in self-esteem are more pronounced in certain Western cultural contexts and may not apply uniformly across all populations. Within both genders, young adults scored higher than adolescents. Adolescents showed greater variability in self-esteem scores (SD = 3.061) compared to young adults (SD = 2.024), suggesting that self-esteem becomes more stable as individuals enter adulthood.

This is consistent with well-established developmental patterns showing that self-esteem dips during adolescence due to social comparison, identity uncertainty, and peer pressure, and then rises as individuals move into young adulthood. With career beginnings, stronger self-identity, and more stable interpersonal relationships, young adults gain the confidence and sense of accomplishment that is associated with higher self-esteem. The greater variability in adolescent self-esteem scores further illustrates the instability of self-esteem during adolescence relative to the more consistent self-appraisal of young adults.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Self-Esteem

Gender	Age Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	Adolescents	24.53	2.751	30
Male	Young Adults	25.67	2.171	30
Male	Total	25.10	2.522	60
Female	Adolescents	24.37	3.388	30
Female	Young Adults	25.80	1.901	30
Female	Total	25.08	2.818	60
Total	Adolescents	24.45	3.061	60
Total	Young Adults	25.73	2.024	60
Total	Overall	25.09	2.663	120

Two-Way ANOVA: Impact on Perceived Social Support

A significant main effect of age was found on perceived social support, $F(1, 116) = 9.637$, $p = .002$, confirming that young adults reported higher support than adolescents. The main effect of gender was not significant, $F(1, 116) = 1.071$, $p = .303$. The interaction effect of age and gender was also not significant, $F(1, 116) = 1.140$, $p = .288$. The model accounted for approximately 9.3% of the variance in perceived social support ($R^2 = .093$), indicating a small effect size.

This suggests that the age-related increase in perceived social support is consistent across both genders — adolescent boys and girls both experience relatively lower support, and young adult men and women both report higher support. While the descriptive data showed a slightly larger gender gap among adolescents (females: 21.23, males: 19.10) that narrowed in young adulthood, this pattern did not reach statistical significance. The non-significant interaction suggests that gender differences in social support remain relatively stable across these two developmental periods rather than converging or diverging sharply.

These results partially disprove H1: while a significant age difference was found, neither gender differences nor their interaction with age was significant for perceived social support.

Table 3: Impact of Age and Gender on Perceived Social Support

Source	df	F	Sig.
Gender	1	1.071	.303
Age	1	9.637	.002*
Gender × Age	1	1.140	.288
Corrected Total	119	--	--

** Significant at $p \leq .05$. $R^2 = .093$ (Adjusted $R^2 = .069$)*

Two-Way ANOVA: Impact on Self-Esteem

A significant main effect of age was found on self-esteem, F (1, 116) = 7.219, p = .008, confirming that young adults reported higher self-esteem than adolescents. The main effect of gender was not significant, F (1, 116) = 0.001, p = .972. The interaction effect of age and gender was also not significant, F (1, 116) = 0.099, p = .754. The model explained approximately 5.9% of the variance in self-esteem (R^2 = .059), again indicating a small effect size.

This shows that both males and females experience a similar age-related pattern: lower self-esteem in adolescence and higher self-esteem in young adulthood. This is in line with research by Ogihara (2020), which found that the self-esteem gap between men and women in youth and early adulthood is not statistically significant. Age effects and gender effects appear to operate independently on self-esteem, without combining to produce a unique effect for any particular age-gender combination.

These results partially disprove H2: while a significant age difference was found, gender differences and interaction effects were not significant for self-esteem.

Table 4: Impact of Age and Gender on Self-Esteem

Source	df	F	Sig.
Gender	1	0.001	.972
Age	1	7.219	.008*
Gender × Age	1	0.099	.754
Corrected Total	119	--	--

** Significant at p ≤ .05. R^2 = .059 (Adjusted R^2 = .035)*

Taken together, these findings indicate that developmental stage is a more powerful determinant of both self-esteem and perceived social support than gender. The small effect sizes found in this study also suggest that many other factors — personality, family environment, socioeconomic status, cultural background, and individual experiences — contribute significantly to variations in these variables beyond what age and gender alone can explain.

CONCLUSION

The study investigates the influence of age and gender on self-esteem and perceived social support among adolescents and young adults. Findings reveal that age significantly impacts both self-esteem and perceived social support, with young adults reporting higher levels than adolescents. Gender showed no significant effect, indicating similar experiences across both sexes, possibly due to changing social dynamics. No interaction effect between age and gender was observed, suggesting a consistent developmental trend for both genders. Despite age's role, other factors like personality, family, and socio-economic conditions contribute more to variations in these domains. The research highlights the importance of emotional and social support during adolescence and suggests further investigation into additional influential factors. Limitations include a small sample size and cross-sectional design, affecting the generalizability and causal inference of the results. The study's implications extend to mental health awareness, educational program development, and policy-making, emphasizing robust support systems for youth.

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