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**Research Paper**

# Self-Esteem, Academic and Career Aspirations on the Basis of Socio-Economic Status of Adolescents

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to establish the relationship of socio-economic status on self-esteem, academic and career aspirations of adolescents. Sample consists of 269 adolescents at the age group of 14-17 years, belongs to high and low socio-economic status, studying in various higher secondary schools, Pathanamthitta district, Kerala. Schools were selected randomly from the rural, semi-urban and urban areas. The instruments used were Self-esteem Inventory (Thomas and Sanandaraj, 1981), academic and career aspirations checklist and personal data sheet constructed for the purpose of this study. The modified Kuppuswamy scale updated in the year 2018 was used to assess the socio-economic status (SES) of families. The scale measures the education, occupation and total family income of the adolescents. 138 adolescents belong to high SES and 131 adolescents from low SES. The results show that there is significant difference on self-esteem and career aspiration between low and high socio-economic status. It also shows highly significant difference in academic achievement of low and high socioeconomic groups. There is no significant difference in the self-esteem, career aspiration and academic achievement between two genders of high socio-economic status groups. Among the low socio-economic status group, there is no significant difference in career aspiration and academic achievement but there is highly significant gender difference in the self- esteem.

*Keywords: Self-Esteem, Academic Aspirations, Career Aspirations, Socio-Economic Status, Adolescents*

**S**elf-esteem can be defined as an individual's attitude about him or herself, involving self-evaluation along a positive negative dimension (Baron & Byrne, 1991). Schwalbe & Staples, (1991) defined self-esteem as the feeling an individual has about him or herself that affect how he or she views himself/herself. Mruk (2006) on the other hand has defined self-esteem in four different ways; first as an attitude which involves positive or negative cognitive, behavioral and emotional reactions. The second definition is based on discrepancy which

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involves measuring the difference between what an individual sees as the ideal self and their perceived self. In this case, the closer the two perceptions are, the higher the self-esteem is thought to be. The third definition is based on a psychological response an individual hold towards him or herself. Lastly, Mruk views self-esteem as a function of personality.

Most generally, self-esteem refers to an individual's overall positive evaluation to the self (Rosenberg, 1990; Rosenberg, Carmi, & Carrie, 1995). It is composed of two distinct dimensions, competence and worth. The competence dimension (efficacy-based self-esteem) refers to the degree to which people see themselves as capable and efficacious. The worth dimensions (worth-based self-esteem) refer to the degree to which individuals feel they are the person to be valued. In the words of Nathaniel Branden, (1992) self-esteem is the disposition to experience oneself as competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and as worthy of happiness. Similarly, Reasoner (2005), has defined self-esteem as the experience of being capable of meeting life challenges and being worthy of happiness.

Academic achievement is considered as a key criterion to judge one's total potentialities and capabilities. Therefore, it is more pressing for the individuals/ students to have high academic achievement. The term achievement refers to the degree or the level of success attained in some specific school tasks especially scholastic performance. In this sense, academic achievement means the attained ability to perform school tasks, which can be general or specific to a given subject matter. Academic achievement could be defined as self-perception and self-evaluation of one's objective academic success. Academic achievement generally indicates the learning outcomes of pupil. Achievement of those learning outcomes requires a series of planned and organized experiences. Good (1973), has defined, academic achievement as knowledge attitude or skill developed in the school subject usually designed by test scores or by marks assigned by teacher or by both. Consequently, academic achievement could be defined as self-perception and self-evaluation of one's objective success as aspired.

Career aspirations are an individual's point-in-time expressions of educational and occupational goals (Johnson, 1995; Rojewski, 2005). They are an important indicator for the understanding of the individual's self-concept, career behaviour and future career choices and achievements. Some researchers claim that career aspirations can predict future occupation membership equal or even better than interest inventories (Rojewski, 2005).

Socio-economic status (SES) could be a measure of economic and sociological conditions of an individual's work expertise and of a person's or family's economic and social position in regard to different community members. Usually, income, education, and occupation area unit taken into thought to determine socio-economic status.

Adolescence is the period of heightened sensitivity for rapid learning and of critical acquisitions which determine the general style of adult life. Adolescents with high self-esteem are considered to achieve high academic achievements which will provide their identity in the society, get good career opportunities, get acceptance from peer, parents and teachers, develop leadership qualities, and enhance their life skills. Adolescence is typically viewed as the preparation for adulthood. The term adolescence comes from the Latin word 'Adolescere', meaning 'to grow' or 'to grow to maturity'. The term adolescence has a broader meaning. It includes mental, emotional, social as well as physical maturity. The most commonly used chronologic definition of adolescence includes children from the age group

of 10-18 (APA, 2002). Adolescence is a critical period when teenagers are faced with so many options where they have to make their own decisions about their future, education and career.

According to Sirin et al. (2004), aspirations have been defined as the educational and vocational dreams that students have for their future. Aspirations begin to be shaped in children's early years of life, but they can change depending on the environment and experience. Aspirations have a tendency to decline as children mature in response to their growing by understanding of the world and constraints obligated by earlier decisions and achievements (Mau, 1995).

*Need And Significance Of The Study:*
While motivating students, researcher noticed a difference in self-esteem, academic achievement and career aspirations on the basis of SES adolescents. So, in order to understand the real impact of socio-economic status in the above study variables have conducted this study. The Government and NGOs who are trying to uplift the low SES groups normally provide financial and material upliftment for the low SES. It was noticed that inspite of providing financial and material support, they are not showing high aspiration and academic achievement in life. So, this points out the need for motivational input for the development of study variables for the upliftment of low SES. Significance of gender difference on this context is also studied. Thus the present study is entitled as "Self Esteem, Academic and Career aspirations on the basis of socio economic status of adolescents."

*Objective:*
1. To understand the influence of socio-economic status on self-esteem, academic achievement and career aspiration in adolescents.
2. To study the relationship among the study variables.
3. To study the gender differences on the study variables of different socio-economic groups.

*Hypotheses:*
1. There is significant difference in self-esteem, career aspiration and academic achievement of adolescent on the basis of socio-economic status.
2. There is no significant gender difference among adolescents on the basis of SES.
3. There is positive relationship between career aspiration and self-esteem.
4. There is positive relationship between academic achievement and self-esteem.
5. There is positive relationship between career aspiration and academic achievement.

# METHOD

*Sample:*
Sample consists of 269 adolescents at the age group of 14-17years that belong to low and high socio-economic status studying in 5 different higher secondary schools in Kerala. Schools were selected randomly from the rural, semi-urban and urban areas. According to the Kuppaswamy modified scale 2018, 138 adolescents belong to upper SES and 131 adolescents from lower SES.

*Instruments:*
1. **Self – Esteem Inventory(Thomas and Sanandaraj, 1981):** A 25 item self-esteem inventory developed by the Thomas and Sanandaraj, 1981 has been used for

measuring the level of self-esteem of the subjects. A score of 5, 4, 3, 2 or 1 was given to the category A, B, C, D. or E, for a positive item. The scoring was in reverse order for a negative item. As the score increases, the self-esteem becomes more positive.

2. **Career and Academic Aspiration Checklist and General Information schedule:** The checklist consists of career and expected marks in forthcoming final exam of adolescents, socio-demographic data such as age and gender of adolescents, occupation, education and income of the family.

   ➢ Career Aspirations is classified according to the occupation list of Kuppaswamy modified SES scale 2018. The occupation groups are classified as 10 career groups. The score increases with higher career aspiration.

**Table 1: Modified Kuppuswamy Socioeconomic scale updated for January 2018.**

**(a) Occupation of the Head of the Family: -**

| Sr. No. | Occupation of the Head | Score |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Legislators, Senior Officials & Managers | 10 |
| 2 | Professionals | 9 |
| 3 | Technicians and Associate Professionals | 8 |
| 4 | Clerks | 7 |
| 5 | Skilled Workers and Shop & Market Sales Workers | 6 |
| 6 | Skilled Agricultural & Fishery Workers | 5 |
| 7 | Craft & Related Trade Workers | 4 |
| 8 | Plant & Machine Operators and Assemblers | 3 |
| 9 | Elementary Occupation | 2 |
| 10 | Unemployed | 1 |

   ➢ Academic achievement aspiration is the expectation of percentage of marks in the forthcoming final exam. The marks are classified into 50 - 60% = C+ = Score 1; 60 - 70% = B = Score 2; 70 - 80% = B+ = Score 3; 80 - 90% = A = Score 4; 90 - 100% = A+ = Score 5.

   ➢ Socio-economic status was classified using the modified Kuppuswamy scale 2018. It is commonly used to measure SES in urban and peri-urban communities. It is based on a composite score considering the education and occupation of the head of the family along with monthly income of the family, which yields a score range of 3-29. This scale classifies the study populations into upper, upper middle, lower middle, upper lower and lower (Kuppuswamy, 2018). Upper and upper middle were considered as high SES and upper lower and lower as low SES. The middle category is not included in the study.

*Statistical Analysis:*

Data were analysed using SPSS; t-test and Pearson correlation have been conducted to verify the hypothesis.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION:**

To understand the influence of socio-economic status on self-esteem, academic achievement and career aspirations among adolescents, t-test has been conducted and the results are given in Table 1.

*Table 1: Result of t-test on self-esteem, academic achievement and career aspirations on
the basis of Socio-economic status (SES)*

| Variables | SES | N | Mean | t-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SELF-ESTEEM | High | 138 | 71.91 | |
| | Low | 131 | 69.11 | 2.252* |
| ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT | High | 138 | 4.38 | |
| | Low | 131 | 2.48 | 14.455** |
| CAREER ASPIRATION | High | 138 | 9.13 | |
| | Low | 131 | 7.31 | 15.467** |

Table 1 shows that the mean score of self-esteem of high SES is 71.91 and the mean score of self-esteem of low SES is 69.11. The t-value of high and low SES in self-esteem is 2.252 which is significant at 0.05 level, which shows that there is significant difference between high and low SES on self-esteem. High SES enhances self-esteem because self-esteem is feeling and thinking of one's own value or worth or competence. In the present society, income, occupation and education, may enhance self-worth. Most of the research has found a significant relationship between socio-economic status and self-esteem (Ross & Broh, 2000; Tremblay, Inman, & Willms, 2000; Wiltfang & Scarbecz, 1990). Children from families with higher levels of income tend to have higher self-esteem (Ross & Broh, 2000).

The mean score of academic aspiration of high SES is 4.38 and low SES is 2.48. The t-test value of high and low SES in academic achievement is 14.455 which shows there is highly significant difference between high and low SES. This points that high SES group aspire for 80-90% of marks while low SES group aspire for 60-70% of marks. The high SES group has significantly high aspirations of academic achievement than the low SES.

The mean score of career aspiration of high SES is 9.13 and low SES is 7.31. The t-value of high and low SES in career aspiration is 15.467 which shows there is highly significant difference between high and low SES. Most of the student's aspiration is in professional field. The score of 7 shows that their aspiration level is in clerical jobs according to Kuppaswamy modified scale 2018. This indicate that high SES adolescents aspire for higher professions while low SES adolescents expect for non-professional jobs.

Parental education is one of three common indicators of socioeconomic status. Parental education may change parenting styles, behaviours, and beliefs. Less educated parents have been found to be more likely than higher-educated parents to use coercive strategies (Miranda, 1985). Compared to highly educated parents, less educated parents may not have the resources and efficient strategies to improve their children's academic progress.

Previous studies show that adolescents from low SES families did not perform well academically compared to adolescents from high-SES families (Graetz, 1995). Conger, Conger, and Elder (1997) examined the relationships among family economic hardship, parents' responses to the pressure of hardships, their children' school performance, and their internalising and externalising problems. Their findings showed that economic hardship negatively affects adolescents' school performance. So, our result also agrees with the above study. Hence, there is significant difference in the self-esteem in low and high SES. Thus, socio-economic status influences self-esteem, academic and career aspirations among adolescents.

In order to understand the gender difference on self-esteem, career aspirations, and academic achievement of high SES adolescents, t-test has been done and the results are given in Table 2.

***Table 2: Result of t-test on gender difference on self-esteem, career and academic aspiration among high SES group***

| Variables | Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | t-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SELF-ESTEEM | Male | 66 | 70.95 | 12.586 | |
| | Female | 72 | 72.78 | 11.684 | 0.880 |
| ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT | Male | 66 | 4.26 | 1.012 | |
| | Female | 72 | 4.49 | .872 | 1.424 |
| CAREER ASPIRATION | Male | 66 | 9.15 | .361 | |
| | Female | 72 | 9.11 | .703 | 0.419 |

Table 2 depicts the result of t-test on gender difference on self-esteem, career aspiration and academics among high SES group. In self-esteem, the mean value in males is 70.95whereas in females, it is 72.78. The t-value score of 0.880 shows that there is no significant gender difference among high SES adolescents. The mean value of academic achievement in males is 4.26 and in females, 4.49. The t-value score of 1.424 shows that there is no significant gender difference in academic aspiration. The mean value of career aspiration in males is 9.15 and in females, is 9.11. The t-value score of 0.419 shows that there is no significant difference between males and females in career aspiration.

In order to understand the gender difference on self-esteem, career aspirations, and academic achievement of low SES adolescents, t-test has been done and the results are given in Table3.

***Table 3: Result of t-test on gender difference on self-esteem, career and academic aspiration among low SES group***

| Variables | Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | t-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SELF-ESTEEM | Male | 67 | 71.30 | 7.479 | |
| | Female | 64 | 66.83 | 7.665 | 3.378** |
| ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT | Male | 67 | 2.27 | 1.201 | |
| | Female | 64 | 2.70 | 1.136 | 1.054 |
| CAREER ASPIRATION | Male | 67 | 7.00 | 1.382 | |
| | Female | 64 | 7.63 | .968 | .976 |

Table 3 shows the result of t-test on gender difference on self-esteem, career aspiration and academics among low SES group. On the self-esteem, the mean value in males is 71.30 whereas in females, it is 66.83. The t-value score of 3.378 shows that there is highly significant gender difference in low SES. mean value of academic achievement in males is 2.27 and in females, 2.70. The t-value score of 1.054 shows that there is no significant gender difference in academic achievement aspiration. The mean value of career aspiration in males is 7.00 and in females is 7.63. The t-value score of 0.976 shows that there is no significant difference between male and female in career aspirations. Hence, there is no significant gender difference among low SES adolescents on educational and career aspirations. But there is significant gender difference in self-esteem.

*Table 4 – Result of Pearson correlation between self- esteem and academic achievement aspiration*

|  |  | SELF-ESTEEM | ACADEMIC ASPIRATIONS |
|---|---|---|---|
| SELF-ESTEEM | Pearson Correlation | 0.073 | 1 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.169 |  |
|  | N | 357 | 357 |
| ACADEMIC | Pearson Correlation | 1 | 0.073 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) |  | 0.169 |
|  | N | 357 | 357 |

Table 4 depicts that there is no significant correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement aspiration. Few studies show that academic achievement is significantly related to self-esteem (Bachman & O'Malley, 1986; Calsyn & Kenny, 1977; Tremblay, Inman, & Willms, 2000). Several researchers (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989) have found that general self-esteem affects academic achievement. But in the present study, there is no significant correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement.

*Table 5 - Result of Pearson correlation between self-esteem and career aspiration*

|  |  | SELF-ESTEEM | CAREER |
|---|---|---|---|
| SELF-ESTEEM | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .075 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) |  | .159 |
|  | N | 357 | 357 |
| CAREER | Pearson Correlation | .075 | 1 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) | .159 |  |
|  | N | 357 | 357 |

The table shows that there is no significant correlation between self-esteem and career.

*Table 6-Result of Pearson's correlation between career aspiration and academic achievement.*

|  |  | CAREER | ACADEMIC |
|---|---|---|---|
| CAREER | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .611[**] |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) |  | .000 |
|  | N | 357 | 357 |
| ACADEMIC | Pearson Correlation | .611[**] | 1 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |  |
|  | N | 357 | 357 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 shows that there is significant and positive correlation between academic achievement and career aspiration.

## CONCLUSION

The study indicates that the socio-economic status has significant effect on self-esteem, academic achievement and career aspirations among adolescents. Though gender has special equalizing role in Kerala, there is no significant gender difference was found in all the above three variables except self-esteem among low SES group. Career aspiration and academic achievement has no significance in self- esteem.

Since there is significant difference between low and high SES on study variables, it can be proposed there is drastic need to support the low SES groups with psychological, motivational and self-esteem promotional inputs.

Fortunately, because of the modern socio-economic development of the society, in Kerala, there are no gender differences noticed both in low and high SES groups. Especially, even in low SES, gender equality firmly prevails.

However, it is noticed low self-esteem among female adolescents in the low SES females. Hence, there is need to find the reasons for the same and take adequate measures to amend the situation in order to minimise the differences on the basis of SES.

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