

Self-esteem among High School Students: The Role of Parental Attachment and Gender

Dr. Sangeeta Rath¹, Mrs. Madhusmita Patra²

¹Professor of Psychology, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, Odisha, India

²Research Scholar, Utkal University, vanivihar, odisha, India

Abstract-The primary purpose of the present investigation is to examine the role of parental attachment and gender on the level of self-esteem of high school adolescents. The study adopted a 2 (students with high parental attachment versus students with low parental attachment) x 2 (boys versus girls) factorial design. Two hundred and forty students of 9th and 10th grade are purposively sampled from six different urban schools of the khurdha district of Odisha, India. In each group of 120 students, there are 60 boys and 60 girls. They were administered the Inventory of Parent attachment. These two groups of 120 boys and 120 girls are further divided into two subgroups on the basis of the median split of their scores on the Parent attachment scale. The participants of all the four groups (boys with high parental attachment, boys with low parental attachment, girls with high parental attachment and girls with low parental attachment) are compared with respect to their self-esteem. The result indicated that students with high parental attachment have higher self-esteem than students with low parental attachment. The result also revealed that there is no gender difference in the level of self-esteem of adolescent students.

Keywords: adolescent; parental attachment; gender; self-esteem.

I. INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is described as a global feeling of self worth or a sense of adequacy as a person (Baumeister, 1993), or generalized feelings of self-acceptance, goodness and self-respect (Rosenberg, 1965). It refers to a positive or negative orientation toward the self (Rosenberg, 1965), and reflects a sense of self-regard and self-worth. As defined by Skodol (1998), self-esteem is the 'sense of self-worth, self-respect, and self-acceptance that is usually linked to an expectation of success in life. It is literally defined as how much value people place on themselves. It is the evaluative component of self-knowledge. People with high self-esteem have a favorable view of themselves as competent, likeable, attractive, and successful. Low self-esteem may reflect an opposite pattern in which people see themselves as incompetent and unlikeable. According to Erickson's stage theory, adolescence is one of the most critical periods in life in terms of developing self-esteem; it is here that one gains a firm sense of identity (Cardwell et al., 2001). He argued that young adolescents who experience the many physical, cognitive, and social changes associated with puberty often become

confused and show at least some erosion of self-esteem as they leave childhood behind and begin to search for stable adult identity (Erik Erikson, 1963). Longitudinal studies that assess adolescents' perceptions of their competencies in particular domains (such as academics, social acceptance, physical skills/sports, and appearance) often find that adolescents' views of their own competence gradually decline across the high school years (Fredricks & Eccles, 2002, & Jacobs et al., 2002.), with particularly noticeable dips for some domains (e.g., academics, sporting competence) early in adolescence (Cole et al., 2001). In the present study the respondents are in their early adolescent years, ranging from fourteen to fifteen years.

There are various factors that affect self-esteem development i.e. genetic, birth order, gender, parental related factor such as acceptance, expectation, consistency, parenting style, modeling, social factors, race, and economic factor (Mruk, 2006). Some studies have revealed that secure attachment is related to higher self-esteem. Attachment theory plays an important role in the study of the cognitive, social, and emotional adjustment of adolescents. It reflects the core aspects of the ways through which adolescent's process their affect, cognition and behavior associated with qualities of past memories, present representations and future expectations with regards to attachment and affective bonds (Zimmermann 2004; Maysel & Scharf 2007). It makes the claim that the ability for an individual to form an emotional and physical attachment to another person gives a sense of stability and security necessary to take risks, branch out and grow and develop as a personality. Psychologist Bowlby (1969) was the first to coin the term. He defined it as the amount of trust adolescents have in their relationships with their parents. He further explains that attachment is a life-long, distinct behavioral system whose goal is proximity to the primary caretaker. He described two types of attachment, secure and insecure, as being based on parent responses to child and child responses to parent in times of stress during the infancy development stage. Ultimately, a child who has a secure attachment to his parents is likely to develop trusting, caring, and loving relationships as he or she matures and therefore he or she would be better adjusted (Armsden & Greenberg 1987).

Armsden & Greenberg (1987) further revealed that attachment with parents is the significant predictor to self-esteem. Wilkinson (2004) suggests that close, secure, and trust worthy relationship with parents will enable adolescents in giving more appreciation to their selves. Security of attachment to parents is associated with self-esteem across adolescence (Doyle, 2003). In accordance with attachment theory and previous empirical findings (Rice, 1990), it is predicted that parental attachment will have a direct and positive influence on the self-esteem of adolescents. Paterson *et al.* (1995) studied New Zealand adolescents and they found that attachment to parents displayed a modest correlation with self-esteem. Noom *et al.* (1999) investigated the relationships between parental attachment and self-esteem in a sample of 400 Dutch adolescents and parental attachment was found to be more strongly correlated with self-esteem.

Gender is the psychological, social, and cultural features and characteristics that have become strongly associated with the biological categories of boys and girls (Gilbert, 1992). Parents, especially by way of action and example influence gender typing of their children. For example, parents allow boys to have more independence than girls, while they show more concern about the sexual vulnerability of their daughter's. Parents with adolescent daughters experience more intense conflict about sex, choice of friends or peers than do parents of adolescent sons (Papini & Sebbly, 1988).

Studies in a wide range of western countries have revealed that adolescent girls, on average, have a lower sense of self-esteem than adolescent boys (Baumeister, 1993; Pipher, 1994). Adolescence brings a dramatically increased emphasis on physical attractiveness for young girls, many of whom feel they are lacking. The self-esteem of boys can be affected by contradictory societal messages— on the one hand to appear to be strong and on the other to be emotionally expressive (Pollack, 1998). According to Freeman (1970), inferior social status of girls is generally reflected in negative self-esteem, which in turn contributes to relatively lower achievement among girls. Since self-esteem evolves through social interaction, it is largely the product of the socialization process. Boys and girls are expected to perform different functions in the society. This differential socialization pattern, tradition and prejudice guide boys and girls in different directions. Previous research on gender differences in self-esteem suggests that boys have higher self-esteem than girls (Chubb *et al.*, 1997; Eccles *et al.*, 1989; Labouvie *et al.*, 1990; McMullin & Cairney, 2004; Moksnes, Moljord, Espnes, & Byrne, 2010; Robins *et al.*, 2002; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Twenge & Campbell, 2001; Young & Mroczek, 2003); however, in some studies the gender difference was small (Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell,

1999; Quatman, Sampson, Robinson, & Watson, 2001) or non significant (Keltikangas-Järvinen, 1990).

Although considerable amount of research has been made to find out the impact of gender on the self-esteem of adolescents, findings of research on self-esteem of adolescents have been found to be confusing and contradictory. There is much controversy regarding the gender differences in adolescent's self-esteem. Many empirical investigations find gender similarities in self-concept when self-concept is measured in terms of overall self-evaluation. So in the present study an attempt has been made to find out whether parental attachment and gender have got an impact on the self-esteem level of adolescent students in the Indian context.

II. METHOD

In this study, different measures were administered to assess the role of parental attachment and gender on the level of self-esteem of high school students.

- Participants

In the present study, two hundred and forty students (120 boys and 120 girls) of 9th and 10th grade are purposively sampled from six different urban schools of khurdha district of odisha, India. Participants belonged to the age group between fourteen to fifteen years. Care was taken to sample groups equated with respect to their socio economic status. All the participants are from the odiya medium schools. All of them were administered Inventory of Parent Attachment. Both the groups of high school boys and girls were divided into two sub groups on the basis of the median split of their scores on Parent attachment inventory. All the participants of four groups (boys with high parental attachment, girls with high parental attachment, boys with low parental attachment and girls with low parental attachment) were compared with respect to their self-esteem.

- Measures

In the present study, the measure of Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (Revised) (IPPA-R) developed by Armsden & Greenberg (1987) and The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale developed by Rosenberg (1965) are administered.

- Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment Scale (IPPA-R).

The IPPA was developed by Prof. Armsden & Greenberg in the year 1987 in order to assess adolescents' perception of the positive and negative affective/cognitive dimension of relationships with their parents and close friends particularly how well these figures serve as sources of psychological security. The scale assesses three broad dimensions such as degree of mutual trust; quality of communication; and extent of anger and alienation. IPPA-

R is a self-report questionnaire with a five point Likert scale response format ranging from never true (1) to always true (5). The original version of IPPA consists of 28 items for parents and 25 items for peers, yielding two attachment scores. The revised version (Mother, Father, and Peer Version) is comprised of 25 items in each of the mother, father, and peer sections yielding three attachment scores. For the present research purpose only parent version (Father and Mother) of the IPPA-R are taken. The IPPA-R is scored by taking into account the reverse-score items and then summing the response values in each section.

- The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES).

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale was developed by Rosenberg in the year 1965 which is used to assess one's orientation toward the self which comprises 10 statements, 5 positively worded and 5 negatively worded. Participants rate the extent to which they agree with each statement on a four point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Total scores are obtained by summing all responses (after reverse scoring) and range from 10 to 40, with high scores indicating high self-esteem. Its average reliability coefficient was greater than 0.80 (Rosenberg, 1965). RSES has shown evidences of its adequate reliability in its initial validation with regard to adolescents (Rosenberg, 1965). About half of the items were reversed to minimize the possibility of the impact of response set. The reliability coefficient is 0.83.

- Procedure

The study involved a 2 (adolescent students with high parental attachment versus adolescent students with low parental attachment) x 2 (boys versus girls) factorial design. The life satisfaction of participants of all the four groups (boys with high parental attachment, girls with high parental attachment, boys with low parental attachment and girls with low parental attachment) are compared with respect to their self-esteem. The investigator administered all the measures individually by giving clear instructions regarding the test materials. The instructions for each part of the questionnaire were adequately explained and care was taken to ensure that they understood the instructions. Each participant was allowed to ask questions in case of any difficulty in understanding the instruction. Care was also taken to ensure the participants that their responses would remain confidential and would be used only for research purposes and that their participation in the study was voluntary.

III. RESULTS

The summary of the analysis of variance of adolescent students with high parental attachment versus less attached ones and boys versus girls on self-esteem scores are presented in Table 1 and the summary of the mean ratings

and standard deviations of the participants on self-esteem scores is presented in Table 2.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) performed on self-esteem scores of participants reveals significant main effect for parental attachment, $F(1,236) = 10.64, P < 0.01$ (see Table 1). As shown by Table 2, adolescents who were highly attached to their parents showed higher self-esteem compared to the adolescents who had low attachments with their parents ($M = 30.66$ and 29.24 , respectively). The result shows no significant effect

Table 1

Analysis of Variance Performed on Self esteem Scores of Participants

Sources	df	MS	F
Parental attachment	1	120.12	10.64**
Gender	1	0.004	0.000
Parental attachment x Gender	1	13.35	1.18
Error	236	11.29	

Note : ** $P < 0.01$

Table 2

Mean Ratings on Self-esteem Scores of Participants

Groups	Males		Females		Combined M
	M	SD	M	SD	
High Parental attachment	30.42	2.97	30.90	3.68	30.66
Low Parental attachment	29.47	3.20	29.00	3.51	29.24
Combined	29.95		29.95		

for gender, $F(1,236) = 0.000, n.s.$ As depicted in Table 2, the examination of mean scores reveals that girls and boys report same level of self-esteem ($M = 29.95$ and 29.95 , respectively). Further analysis shows non-significant effect for parental attachment x gender, $F(1,236) = 1.18, n.s.$ That

shows parental attachment and gender combinedly have no effect on self-esteem scores of participants.

IV. DISCUSSION

The present study provides empirical evidence supporting the role of parental attachment on self-esteem of adolescent students. The findings clearly showed that students having high parental attachment have higher self-esteem than students having low attachment with their parents. Parental attachment appears to have a positive effect. Greenberg, Seigal & Leitch (1983) found that quality of attachment to parent significantly predicted self-esteem. Similarly, Feeney & Noller (1996) found that secure attachment is positively related to high self-esteem. Attachment to parents plays an important role in the adolescent's construction and evaluation of self which in turn influences their psychological well-being (Wilkinson, 2004) and that adolescents with an insecure attachment to parents are generally most susceptible to mental health problems (Essau, 2004).

Further the present study also reveals that there is no gender difference in the self-esteem of high school students. Empirical findings have been indicated which supports our findings that there is no gender difference in self esteem (Erol & Orth, 2011; Mullis, Mullis, & Normandin, 1992; Schwalbe & Staples, 1991). Previous researches have often found that boys tend to have higher self-esteem at this age. However, due to societal changes in the developing country like India the trend seems to have changed. The girls are now getting much more opportunities to step out of the house in order to get educated, explore opportunities, develop careers and even many a times make a choice of a suitable partner for marriage. There has been a reduction in stringent rules (especially in urban India) for girls, which they used to have to adhere to, such as, being restricted to household chores and serve the opposite sex. The Indian society is improving slowly and steadily in helping girls make a mark and achieve equality with the men folk. The educated Indian youth of today has a good understanding of their worth and wish to succeed in their life rather than merely striving through it. Young girls with the support of their families are now being able to flourish their intellectual potentials as well as have started giving importance to economic independence before getting married. This positive change in the social milieu seems to be a reason for the present findings, where boys and girls both have almost equal levels of self-esteem.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Armsden, G. C., & Greenberg, M. T. (1987). The inventory of parent and peer attachment: Individual differences and their relationship to psychological well-being in adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 16, 427-454.
- [2]. Baumeister, R. F. (1993). *Self-esteem: The puzzle of low self-regard*. New York, NY: Plenum.
- [3]. Bem, S. L. (1981). Gender schema theory: A cognitive account of sex-typing. *Psychological Review*, 88(45), 354-364.
- [4]. Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- [5]. Bowlby, J. (1982). *Attachment and loss: Attachment* (2nd ed., Vol. 1). New York: Basic Books.
- [6]. Carwell, M., Clark, L., & Meldrum, C. (2001). *Psychology for A2 level*. London: Collins.
- [7]. Chubb, N. H., Fertman, C. I., & Ross, J. L. (1997). Adolescent self-esteem and locus of control: A longitudinal study of gender and age differences. *Adolescence*, 32, 113-129.
- [8]. Cole, D. A., Maxwell, S. E., Martin, J. M., Peake, L. G., Scroczynski, A. D., Tram, J. M., Hoffman, K. B., Ruiz, M. D., Jicquez, F., & Maschman, T. (2001). The development of multiple domains of child and adolescent self-concept: A cohort sequential longitudinal design. *Child Development*, 72, 1723-1746.
- [9]. Doyle, A. B., Brendgen, M., Markiewicz, D., & Kamkar, K. (2003). Family relationships as moderators of the association between romantic relationships and adjustment in early adolescence. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 23, 316-340. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0272431603254238>
- [10]. Eccles, J. S., Wigfield, A., Flanagan, C. A., Miller, C., Reuman, D. A., & Yee, D. (1989). Self-concepts, domain values, and self-esteem: Relations and changes at early adolescence. *Journal of Personality*, 57, 283-310. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6494.1989.tb00484.x
- [11]. Erikson, E. H. (1963). *Childhood and society* (2nd Eds.). New York: Norton.
- [12]. Erol, R. Y. & Orth, U. (2011). Self-esteem development from age 14 to 30 years: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101 (3), 607-619.
- [13]. Essau, C. A. (2004). The association between family factors and depressive disorders in adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 33(5), 365-372.
- [14]. Feeney, J., & Noller, P. (1996). *Adult attachment*. London: Sage.
- [15]. Fredricks, J. A., & Eccles, J. S. (2002). Children's competence and value beliefs from childhood through adolescence: Growth trajectories in two male sex-typed domains. *Developmental Psychology*, 38, 519-533.
- [16]. Freeman, J. (1970). Growing up girlish. *Transactions*, 8, 36-43.
- [17]. Gilbert, L. A. (1992). Gender and counseling psychology: Current knowledge and directions for research and social action. In Brown, S.D. & Lent, R.W. (Eds.), *Handbook of Counseling Psychology*, (pp.383-416). New York: Wiley.
- [18]. Greenberg, M. T, Seigal, J. M., & Leitch, C. J. (1983). The nature and importance of attachment relationships to parents and peers during adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 12, 373-386.
- [19]. Jacobs, J. E., Lanza, S., Osgood, D. W., Eccles, J. S., & Wigfield, A. (2002). Changes in children's self-competence and values: Gender and domain differences

- across grades one through twelve. *Child Development*, 73, 509–527.
- [20]. Keltikangas-Järvinen, L. (1990). The stability of self-concept during adolescence and early adulthood: A six year follow up study. *Journal of General Psychology*, 117, 361–368. doi:10.1080/00221309.1990.9921142
- [21]. Kling, K. C., Hyde, J. S., Showers, C. J., & Buswell, B. N. (1999). Gender differences in self-esteem: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125, 470–500. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.125.4.470
- [22]. Labouvie, E. W., Pandina, R. J., White, H. R., & Johnson, V. (1990). Risk factors of adolescent drug use: An affect based interpretation. *Journal of Substance Abuse*, 2, 265–285. doi:10.1016/S0899-3289(10)80001-X
- [23]. Maysel, O., & Scharf, M. (2007). Adolescents' attachment representations and their capacity for intimacy in close relationships. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 17, 23-50.
- [24]. McMullin, J. A., & Cairney, J. (2004). Self-esteem and the intersection of age, class, and gender. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 18, 75–90. doi:10.1016/j.jaging.2003.09.006
- [25]. Moksnes, U. K., Moljord, I. E. O., Espnes, G. A., & Byrne, D. G. (2010). The association between stress and emotional states in adolescents: The role of gender and self-esteem. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 49, 430–435. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2010.04.012
- [26]. Mruk C. J. (2006). *Self-esteem research, theory, and practice: toward a positive psychology of self-esteem*, 3rd Ed. New York: Springer.
- [27]. Mullis, A. K., Mullis, R. L. & Normandin, D. (1992). Cross-sectional and longitudinal comparisons of adolescent self-esteem. *Adolescence*, 27(105), 51-61.
- [28]. Noom, M. J., Deković, M., & Meeus, W. H. (1999). Autonomy, attachment and psychosocial adjustment during adolescence: A double edged sword. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. 22, 771–783.
- [29]. Papini, D. R., & Sebbey, R. A. (1988). Variations in conflictual family issues by adolescent pubertal status, gender, and family member. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 8, 1-16.
- [30]. Paterson, J. E., Prior, J., & Field, J. (1995). Adolescent attachment to parents and friends in relation to aspects of self-esteem. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. 24, 365–376.
- [31]. Pipher, M. (1994). *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the selves of adolescent girls*. New York: Ballantine.
- [32]. Pollack, W. (1998). *Real boys: Rescuing our sons from the myths of boyhood*. New York: Henry Holt.
- [33]. Quatman, T., Sampson, K., Robinson, C., & Watson, C. M. (2001). Academic, motivational, and emotional correlates of adolescent dating. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*, 127, 211–234.
- [34]. Rice, K.G. (1990). Attachment in adolescence: A narrative meta-analytic review. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 19, 511-538.
- [35]. Robins, R. W., Trzesniewski, K. H., Tracy, J. L., Gosling, S. D., & Potter, J. (2002). Global self-esteem across the life span. *Psychology and Aging*, 17, 423–434. doi:10.1037/0882-7974.17.3.423
- [36]. Roeser, R. W., & Eccles, J. S. (1998). Adolescents' perceptions of middle school: Relation to longitudinal changes in academic and psychological adjustment. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 8, 123–158. doi: 10.1207/s15327795jra0801_6
- [37]. Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- [38]. Schwalbe, M. L. & Staples, C. L. (1991). Gender differences in sources of self-esteem. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 54, 158-168.
- [39]. Skodol, A. E. (1998). Personality and coping as stress-attenuating or amplifying factors. In B. P. Dohrenwend (Eds). *Adversity, Stress, and Psychopathology*, pp. 377–389. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [40]. Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, W. K. (2001). Age and birth cohort differences in self-esteem: A cross-temporal meta-analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 5, 321–344. doi:10.1207/S15327957PSPR0504_3
- [41]. Wilkinson, R. B. (2004). The role of parental and peer attachment in the psychological health and self-esteem of adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 33(6), 479-493.
- [42]. Young, J. F., & Mroczek, D. K. (2003). Predicting intraindividual self-concept trajectories during adolescence. *Journal of Adolescence*, 26, 586–600. doi:10.1016/S0140-1971(03)00058-7
- [43]. Zimmermann, P. (2004). Attachment representation and characteristics of friendship relations during adolescence. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 88, 83-101.