

## Gender differences in self-esteem among college students: a comparative study

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**Abstract:** The aims of the present investigation were to study the level of self-esteem in college students who enrolled for a graduate medical program and to see the gender differences between males and females in that particular age. Thirty-two students (16 males and 16 females), with ages between 18 and 22 years (group mean age  $\pm$  S.D.,  $19.9 \pm 1.6$  years) were selected as the participants for this study. All of them were college students who were enrolled for a medical graduate program in a college in the north India. For the baseline assessment of self-esteem, Self-Esteem Index was used. The study was a onetime assessment, with a cross-sectional design. Signed consent was taken from each participant before data collection. Data of male and female students was compared by unpaired t-test. Significant difference was found in total self esteem quotient ( $p < 0.05$ ). A significant difference was also observed when standard score of personal security of female was compared with the same of male ( $p < 0.01$ ). In conclusion, there was gender differences found in the overall self-esteem and personal security (a part of overall self-esteem) in the college students.

**Key words:** self-esteem, gender differences, college students, yoga

### Introduction

There are visible differences in the lives of males and females in India. Adult men and women have different goals, expectations, roles and mostly even different training for achieving their respective ends in life. None can deny that. It can be an interesting and equally important thing to note how adult males and females in India differ for the self-esteem. Self-esteem induces a lot of interest in mental health professionals. Self-esteem is a sensitive psychological correlate for the development of everybody, especially more with the young adults. Various earlier theories of personality view the self-esteem to be a psychological need of human being. Maslow saw self-esteem or esteem need included in his hierarchy of needs. Esteem needs include two kind of esteem; one is to receive respect from others and other form is respect of yourself i.e. self esteem (Maslow, 1987). According to Maslow without fulfilling the esteem needs, which is lower in hierarchy than self actualization, one can't achieve the self actualization in life. He will be forced back to fulfil the lower needs before seeking for the higher one. For the young adults self-esteem brings self love, self-worth and a feeling of worth of others' respect, love and recognition. Self-esteem determines what an individual wants from the life and what he thinks is possible for him to achieve. It brings him confidence, skills, aptitude and gives him the necessary push to achieve the same for he believes he actually deserves it and anything to be done for reaching there, where he thinks he belongs, must be done (José-Vicente, 1997).

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Self-esteem is a very sensitive trait especially in the early age. The various positive and negative events of life cause a feeling of being desirable or undesirable. Later these impressions become somewhat permanent and take the shapes of various complexes (Olsen et. al, 2008). Various other experiences like, especially in teenage, school performance peer relations (Bultler, 1998; Pomerantz et. al, 1995), the rejection or appreciation from opposite gender, popularity or friendship with the members of other gender also play an important role in the development of self-esteem in teenage. Various negative experiences of being criticized, ridiculed, sexually or emotionally abused, teased, cause a poor self-esteem. This is where young women in India are at risk. They receive unwanted attention, remarks and feel being chased from a very early age. This brings a sense of vulnerability. A feeling of not being safe in their person or always asked to remain low profile may cause some damage to their self-esteem. Young men are generally not the victim of such harsh treatment by their opposite counter parts. But in a recent study in USA it was found that there is no significant differences between self-esteem trajectories of men and women (Erol & Orth, 2011). Another important finding of the same research was that self-esteem keep on developing with the time and at different level of development the self-esteem can be different. Another related research points that there can be a difference for self concept between males and females. This research points out that men tend to be more independent while women tend to be more interdependent (Cross & Madson, 1997).

### **Yoga and self-esteem**

Yoga plays a significant role in enhancing one's physical and mental health. There are a large number of studies to see the effects of yoga on mental health, (Telles, 2012) physical fitness, (Chen et al., 2009) cognitive performance, (Naveen et al., 1997) and depth perception, (Raghuraj, Telles, 2003) but there are fewer studies assessing the effect of yoga on self-esteem. A study provides significant evidence that the intervention of *Maun* meditation program (a meditation program) had positive effects on self-esteem and school adjustment of children in the early stage of primary school (Yoo, Lee, 2013).

Previously, a randomized controlled trial was conducted to assess the effects of yoga or physical exercise on physical, cognitive and emotional aspects in school going children (Telles et al., 2013). In this study the yoga group showed a significant increase in total ( $p < .001$ ), general ( $p < .001$ ) and parental self-esteem ( $p < .01$ ) in a within group comparison.

### **Research methods**

Variables of the research were gender difference and self-esteem.

The participants were 32 students (16 males and 16 females), with ages between 18 and 22 years (group mean age  $\pm$  SD,  $19.9 \pm 1.6$  years;  $20.5 \pm 1.8$  years for male students;  $19.3 \pm 1.1$  years for female students). All of them were students who had enrolled for a graduate medical course in a college located in the north India. Signed informed consent was taken from the participants before starting the actual study. The study was a onetime assessment, with a cross-sectional design. The assessment was carried out once.

### **Self-Esteem Index**

The Self-Esteem Index (Brown, Alexander, 1991) was used to assess the level of self-esteem at the moment of testing. The SEI (Self – Esteem Index) has eighty items, each of which has four possible choices. These are: 1. always true, 2. usually true, 3. usually false and 4. always false. Four subscales of twenty items each comprise the SEI. These are: 1. the perception of familial acceptance scale, 2. the perception of academic competence scale, 3. the perception of peer popularity scale, and 4. the perception of Personal Security Scale. Following instructions, the SEI was administered to the participants. The

participants had taken about 30 minutes to complete the SEI. After completion, the SEI questionnaire was collected from the participants.

**Data extraction and analysis**

The total raw score for the SEI and raw scores for the four scales of SEI {Familial Acceptance Scale (FA), Academic Competence Scale (AC), Peer Popularity Scale (PP), Personal Security Scale (PS)} were calculated on the Profile and Record form with the help of the numerical values associated with the responses marked in the Student Response Booklet. The total raw score was then converted into Percentile Rank (PR) and Self- Esteem Quotient (SEQ); and the total score of its four scales was converted into Percentile Rank (PR), Standard Score (SS) and Standard Error of Measurement (SEM) following the instructions given in the manual. With the help of standard score and deviation quotient (Self- Esteem Quotient), interpretation was done. Data of male and female was compared by unpaired t-test.

**Results**

Results showed that there is a significant difference in the self-esteem quotient (SEQ) ( $p < 0.05$ ) of males and females. A significant difference was also observed when standard score of personal security of female was compared with standard score for personal security of male ( $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 1.** Derived self-esteem scores in college students, values given in Mean  $\pm$  SD

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
	<b>Mean <math>\pm</math> SD</b>	<b>Mean <math>\pm</math> SD</b>
Total scores of Self Esteem (SEQ)	96.3 $\pm$ 13.2	105.4 $\pm$ 10.9*
Personal Security (PS)	6.2 $\pm$ 2.9	8.9 $\pm$ 2.0**
Familial Acceptance (FA)	10.1 $\pm$ 2.0	11.1 $\pm$ 1.7
Academic Competence (AC)	9.8 $\pm$ 2.9	11.7 $\pm$ 2.9
Peer Popularity (PP)	11.9 $\pm$ 2.1	11.4 $\pm$ 2.1

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

**Discussion and interpretation**

Firstly it is evident that those days are gone when there was any special treatment for the male members in the family in India. These days parents provide equal opportunities of the skill development and provide the same love and nurturance to both males and females members of the family. This was also seen in the research that gender doesn't affect the academic performance and peer popularity. Young women find themselves equally good and capable and share the same ambitions as their male counterparts. But here gender differences were observed for SEQ (self esteem quotient) and personal security.

A similar research in USA failed to show any such differences (Erol, Orth, 2011). There are numerous reasons for this to happen in India. This can be explained by the Pentacle Social Appraisal Theory. According to researchers the five responsible factors are following:

### ***Gender role expectation***

Gender role expectations may cause the male and female members to develop specific capabilities to exploit different sources of self-esteem. Males and females accept different criteria for the evaluation of self-esteem. Women feel good if they do well in their emotional, personal and domestic spheres while for the men he needs to do well in business, job and should be good at social transactions. A woman in India if not earning well, or if she is not very ambitious or if she is lacking various social skills, is easily accepted. Nobody complains about it. But it is gender expectation that she provides emotional support for her husband and children, she is skilled at domestic front, she is modest and humble; then she is very much acceptable and appreciable. Women have accepted that it is their duty to achieve harmony and success on those fronts. They are heaped upon the praise in long run if they perform well in these areas. Indian women seem to have learned to be little interdependent without feeling anything wrong with that.

### ***Lower satisfaction threshold***

Indian women also tend to exhibit a lower satisfaction threshold i.e. they become happy even if don't get what they deserve. But at the same time they accept themselves to be somewhat less capable at other fronts. This is evident from the fact that at many places women are ready to work for the considerably less income than their male counterparts. They are alright with that and even present it as their strength at the time of job interview. Many women call it as discrimination against women while others accept it as a method to trespass the boundaries of the various male dominated jobs and professional fields. Many Indian women don't really believe that earning is their primary job rather whatever they earn is considered as a surplus and good support by everyone in family. It is important to note that young women find they are entitled to depend upon the closest male member of their family; be it their husband, father or even son.

### ***Social comparison***

Besides it women are also subject to social comparison, where their emotional and social competence, physical strength, decision making with respect to financial matters and various other factors are compared with men where they lag little bit behind. This comparison is carried out not just by male members of family but also female members too. Slowly but surely, the most of the young women start accepting it even if they tell otherwise and when they have their daughters or young sisters, they are seen doing the same comparison. This collective social stigma that Indian women are also sharing makes them believe that they are indeed a little behind than men. And despite all their big cries of equalities, they are always only 'catching up' with the men.

### ***Continuous threats to personal security***

Yes it is true young women in India are not feeling safe. Recent exponential increases in the events of kidnap, rape, murders against the women had increased this dark feeling of fear in the hearts of Indian women (Kumar, 1993). Even after the ever increasing number of rapes in India, these numbers are still quite less than in many developed nation (Goel, 2013). Of course there is a strong possibility that these numbers might be flawed. Women are subjected to sexual violence and rapes from the time immemorial. At the time of partition some 100,000 women were kidnapped and raped (Butalia, Dobhal, 2011). And similar examples exist everywhere in the world.

But still women felt secured in the security feelings provided by their family members and society. Various direct and indirect sexual assaults against the women are common in very country but as long as these are dealt severely by the law, women would feel reasonably safe. But recently this has changed. These days women are always afraid for their lives and dignity. Many times, society denies to provide

them this security feeling rather asks them to stay in their 'limits' if she cares for this. Even the family members are also seen helpless and do what they can do best by denying their girls and young women the right of freedom and security. In doing so people are heaping the fears and insecurities in the hearts of women.

### ***Lack of sports and physical training***

Sexual violence is a big threat to women everywhere but they don't feel themselves that much insecure as the Indian women do. The reason behind this is an open secret. A big but often unnoticed or deliberately ignored reason of the young women's insecurity feeling is the lack of proper physical training to them in India. While society expects their boys to be tough and strong, they especially in India completely ignore the same for the young girls. It is really surprising that while the girls are always insecure they rarely take any steps to come out of it. They are happy to remain beautiful princesses, dolls or a playful things. Never are they ready to compromise with their soft bodies and beauty. You never see young Indian girls playing football, volleyball, basketball, boxing, martial arts or any tough physical sport. While in a country, where they are so much insecure at each junction of their life, they can be reasonably expected to line up in big numbers outside the boxing rings and martial arts training centre. But unfortunately it never happens. Not even their family members are encouraging them to do this. Somehow the young Indian girls are expecting others (family members and society) to come and provide the security and not taking this responsibility on themselves. The more unfortunate aspect of the problem is that people crying for women empowerment and equality never seem to address such a small issue.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, in this study gender differences were found in the overall self-esteem and personal security (a part of overall self-esteem) of the male and female college students.

Apart from this, advanced research is needed to see the effects of different types of yoga on self-esteem because yoga may help teenagers, adolescents to learn about their body and discover what their strengths and limitations are. Yoga allows them to visualize, relax and enter a noncompetitive environment (Bridges, Madlem, 2007).

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Received: September 27, 2014

Accepted: November 15, 2014