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SELF-ESTEEM AMONG JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS STUDENTS IN THE CENTRAL REGION OF GHANA

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess the overall level of self-esteem among junior high school students in two districts in the Central Region of Ghana. The sample comprised 109 students (59 males, 50 females), who were enrolled in the second and third year in two junior high schools in an urban and a rural district. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was utilized to measure their overall sense of self-esteem. Negatively worded questions were reverse-coded, and, as such, the higher the score for each question, the higher the level of self-esteem. "I feel that I have a number of good qualities" had the best overall score (M = 3.48, SD = 0.70), while "I wish I could have more respect for myself" scored the lowest (M = 1.89, SD = 1.01). The study's results indicate a high level of self-esteem among respondents (M = 29.2, SD = 9.08) The independent sample t-test showed no statistically significant results between male students (M = 29.136, SD = 3.535) and female students (M = 33.143, SD = 26.785) in terms of their self- esteem, t (106) = -1.138, p = .258. There is no significant difference between students in the rural area (M = 32.412, SD = 22.829) and students in the urban area (M = 28.475, SD = 2.679) in terms of their self- esteem, t (106) = 1.084, p = .281. The study makes a significant contribution to new knowledge on self-esteem regarding urban, rural and gender in the formation and development of school children in Ghana

***Keywords**: Self-esteem, rural school, Ghana*

Introduction

The term self-esteem indicates a person's evaluation of his or her own overall sense of worthiness (Baumeister, 1993; Rosenberg, 1979; Schmitt & Allik, 2005). It comprises beliefs such as considering oneself competent or incompetent, and emotions such as feeling happy or desperate, proud or ashamed. Erikson (1956) suggested that adolescents are in a period of transition and exploration. While in a form of identity crisis, adolescents may feel lost and misunderstood, experimenting with a variety of behaviors and personality traits while attempting to discover what "feels right." The undesirable feelings that come with transition and identity instability give way to lower self-esteem. Self-esteem varies across the lifespan, waxing and waning throughout different developmental periods. Research has shown that self-esteem decreases greatly during adolescence and then begins a slow, gradual increase through adulthood (Tiggemann, 2005). The sharp decline in adolescent self-esteem has been attributed to various factors, including the physical changes that come with puberty, a greater awareness of self (Searcy, 2007), and an increase in focus on peer approval (Rhodes, Roffman, Reddy, Fredrikson, & Way, 2004).

Higher self-esteem has been linked to academic success, positive body image, and peer group satisfaction in adolescence (Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005; DuBois et al., 2002). Individuals with higher self-esteem show more persistence and resilience than those with lower self-esteem (Baumesiter, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003). In contrast, lower self-esteem is linked to lower life satisfaction and numerous difficulties as adults. According to Searcy (2007), adolescents whose low self-esteem is experienced in the school setting are more likely to drop out in an attempt to avoid daily reinforcement of their inadequacy. When individuals describe their own worth, they describe their personal self-esteem. Individuals live and work in groups or society, so they look forward to collective self-esteem. According to this perspective, it is important to assess how people perceive themselves to be viewed by significant others, such as friends, classmates, family members, and so on. Some recent theories of self-esteem have emphasized the norms and values of the cultures and societies in which people are raised. For instance, Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) argued that some people experience collective self-esteem, because they are especially likely to base their self-esteem on their social identities as belonging to certain groups. Studies indicate particular vulnerabilities of

rural youth tend to be more isolated to have fewer educational, recreational, and other public health resources (Apostal & Bilden, 1991; Markstrom, Marshall, & Tryon, 2000). This in turn may lead to lower aspiration, self-esteem, and self-concept as well as fewer opportunities for success (Markstrom et al., 2000).

Gender can also affect the level of self-esteem and academic achievement. Girls experience lower self-esteem as compared to boys. Carlson, Uppal, and Prosser (2000) examined sex difference in self-esteem and reported that, globally, men scored significantly higher in self-esteem than women. Majority of researchers have also observed that male students score higher on self-esteem than female students. Girls score slightly lower than boys in overall sense of self-worth, partly because they feel less confident about their physical appearance, academic competences, and athletic abilities (Marsh, Pradda, & Ayotte, 2004; Young & Mroczek, 2003). Girls may think less well of themselves because they internalize negative cultural messages. Compared with their Caucasian age mates, African American children tend to have slightly higher self-esteem, possibly because of warm, extended families and a strong sense of ethnic pride (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000). Finally, children and adolescents who attend schools or live in neighborhoods where their social economic status (SES) and ethnic group are well represented feel a stronger sense of belonging and have fewer self-esteem problems (Gray-Little & Carels, 1997). Understanding the impacts of the gender and locations of students on their level of self-esteem has great implications for their current and future development. The purpose of the present study was to further explore the levels of self-esteem of students in a rural junior high school and an urban one in the Central Region of Ghana. The study attempts to answer three research questions: (a) To what extent are the level of self-esteem on each item of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) of the students? (b) Is there a difference between genders regarding self-esteem? and (c) Is there difference between rural and urban students regarding self-esteem?

Method

The study design is a descriptive cross-sectional design.

Location and participants of the study

The Central Region is one of Ghana's 10 regions and occupies an area of 9,826 square kilometers, or 4.1% of Ghana's land area, making it the third smallest in area after the Greater Accra and Upper East regions. It shares common boundaries with the Western Region to the west, the Ashanti and Eastern regions to the north, and the Greater Accra Region to the east. To the south is the 168-kilometer-long Atlantic Ocean (Gulf of Guinea) coastline (Ghana Population and Housing Census, 2010). It was created in 1970 and currently has 17 district authorities and 19 constituencies, with Cape Coast as the administrative capital. The region can be broadly divided into two sections: the coast and the hinterland (Population and Housing Census, 2010). The region has two public universities and reputable secondary schools. The study's target population comprises junior high school students in the Central Region, and the accessible population consisted of all students in two districts (one urban and one rural school). Convenience sampling was used for the purpose of the study, because the two schools were available at the time the study was being conducted and had agreed to participate in the study. The total population of the students in the two schools comprised 190 students, out of which a sample of all second- and third-year students (N = 109: 59 males, 50 females) were selected for the study. The mean age (M = 14) ranged from 13 to 18 years. The first year students were excluded from the study, because most of them were 12 years old. The RSES was utilized in the study.

Measures

The RSES is a 10-item scale that was designed to optimize ease of administration, economy of time, unidimensionality, and face validity. The scale has a 4-point Likert scale varying from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4), resulting in a score range of 10–40, with higher scores representing higher self-esteem. Items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 are reverse-scored. Scores are summed, and the higher the score, the higher the self-esteem. It contains an equal number of positively worded items—1, 3, 4, 7, and 10—and negatively worded items—2, 5, 6, 8, and 9. It is a relatively simple

and accessible scale, and the author/successors have explicitly permitted the use of this scale A score between 25 and 35 indicates fairly high self-esteem, while a score below 25 suggests low self-esteem. According to Rosenberg (1979), these 10 items assess the self-worth of a person as a human being. The scale has reported reliability with alpha coefficients ranging from 0.77 to 0.88 (Rosenberg, 1965), an alpha coefficient of .92 (Fraser, Hadjimichael, & Vollmer, 2001), and an alpha coefficient of 0.91 (Fraser et al., 2003). The ratings for the statements were summed, with the negative statements reverse-coded, as mentioned.

Procedure

The researcher informed the headmasters and teachers of the schools sampled of the intent of the study, and the headmasters agreed to allow the students' participation. The students were informed that their participation was voluntary and confidential, and they were requested to respond as honestly as possible to the survey. There was no time limit. The researcher provided the necessary help and made sure that the participants had completed the questionnaires correctly. The RSES was administered in the presence of four local school teachers.

Data Analysis

Statistical tests were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Science, standard version 17.0 software (SPSS Inc., 2010) for final analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to determine the self-esteem levels of the students in the schools according to the RSES. A t-test was utilized to compare male and female student scores, and a further analysis was used to compare rural and urban student scores.

Results and Descriptive findings

(a) To what extent are the levels of self-esteem on each item of the RSES of the students?

"I feel that I have a number of good qualities" had the best overall score (M = 3.48, SD = 0.70), indicate strong agreement. This statement was followed by "I have a positive attitude toward myself" (M = 3.33, SD = 0.97); "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others" (M = 3.27, SD = 0.98); "I am able to do things as well as most others" (M = 3.06, SD = 0.92); and "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" (M = 3.00, SD = 0.81)—all of which are interpreted as indicating strong agreement. On the other hand, "I certainly feel useless at times" (M = 2.92, SD = 0.89); "I feel I do not have much to be proud of" (M = 2.92, SD = 0.90); and "At times I think I am no good at all" (M = 2.40, SD = 0.97) are interpreted as indicating "I agree," while "I wish I could have more respect for myself" scored the lowest (M = 1.89, SD = 1.01), indicative of disagreement. From the results, it could be inferred that the participants have a positive self-image. The students strongly perceived their good qualities as individuals and disagree with the notion that they do not have enough respect for themselves. The results of the descriptive data analysis indicate a high level of self-esteem among the respondents (M = 29.2, SD = 9.08). The descriptive analysis of the student respondents' self-esteem according to each item is indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: The levels of sense of self-esteem of the student respondents

	M	*SD*	*N*
1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	3.00	.81	109
2. At times I think I am no good at all	2.40	.97	109
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities	3.48	.70	109
4. I am able to do things as well as most others	3.06	.92	109
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of	2.92	.89	109
6. I certainly feel useless at times	2.92	.90	109
7. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	3.27	.98	109
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself	1.89	1.01	109
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	2.93	.93	109
10. I have a positive attitude toward myself	3.33	.97	109

(b) Is there a difference between males and females regarding self-esteem?

Gender Differences in Males and Females

The independent sample t-test showed no statistically significant results between male students (M = 29.136, SD = 3.535) and female students (M = 33.143, SD = 26.785) in terms of their self- esteem, t (106) = -1.138, p = .258 (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Differences between males' and females' self-esteem

Gender	N	M	SD	df	t	p-value
Male	59	29.136	3.535	106	-1.138	.258
Female	49	33.143	26.785			

(c) Is there differences between rural and urban students regarding their self-esteem?

Differences in Rural and Urban Schools

The independent sample t-test showed no statistically significant results between rural students (M = 32.412, SD = 22.829) and urban students (M = 28.475, SD = 2.679) in terms of their self- esteem, t (106) = 1.084, p = .281 (see Table 3).

Table 3: Differences between rural and urban students' self esteem

Location	N	M	SD	df	t	p-value
Rural	68	32.4118	22.82983	106	1.084	.281
Urban	40	28.4750	2.67934			

Discussion

This study measured the levels of self-esteem of participants in one rural and one urban junior high school. The results indicate that all the positive items on the RSES scale were rated higher than the negative self-esteem items. Items 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10 are indicative of positive self-esteem and include the following: "I feel that I have a number of good qualities"; "I have a positive attitude toward myself"; "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others"; "I am able to do things as well as most others"; "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself." It appears that the students have a high level of confidence in themselves and associate their self-worth in a positive manner. This confirms the study by Gray-Little and Hafdahl (2000). African American children tend to have slightly high self-esteem, possible because of warm, extended families and a strong sense of ethnic pride as well as their support system. Culturally, the study suggests that the respondents have a higher positive self-image than negative self-image. It appears that the warm extended family support system and the strong sense of ethnic pride in this population may underlie the higher positive self-esteem compared to negative self-esteem. This finding confirms the studies by Keeny and McEachern (2009) and Berk (2007) that consider culture as one of the greatest influences on a child's self-esteem**.** Cultural values and traditions (such as the level of family involvement) significantly impact how a child feels about herself. Indeed, culture can function as either a protective factor, or it can present a child with stressors that may damage her self-esteem. Furthermore, individuals in strong extended social support systems with mostly positive self-esteem tend to be well adjusted, social, and satisfied with their parental relationships compared to those with negative self-esteem.

The results also suggest that their responses to the negative items (2, 5, 6, 8, and 9) were lower than the mean, with the lowest score on "I wish I could have more respect for myself." This suggests that the respondents do not believe they have negative or low self-esteem. The independent sample t-test showed no statistically significant results between male and female students. This result does not place gender as a key factor in self-esteem. Unlike other studies, such as that by Carlson et al.

(2000), who view gender as an important variable that affects the level of self-esteem among adolescents, the current study indicates that there is no significant difference between the levels of self-esteem among males and females. While other studies have observed that, globally, male students score higher on self-esteem than their female counterparts, the present study refutes that. The members of these communities perceive themselves to have come from one common lineage and thus view themselves as one people without respect to gender. Thus, males and females appear to have self-worth without prejudices in regard to the other gender.

Another finding worthy of note is the high sense of self-esteem among the rural students. This is in contrast to other studies that have found that rural youth tend to be more isolated and have fewer educational, recreational, and other public health resources, which invariably leads to lower self-esteem (Apostal & Bilden, 1991; Markstrom, Marshall & Tryon, 2000). It appears that the students in the rural community base their self-esteem on their social identity as belonging to one group in the community. This confirms the study by Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) showing that some people experience collective self-esteem, because they are especially likely to base their self-esteem on their social identity as belonging to certain groups.

Implication for Educationists and Mental Health Professionals

Self-esteem is an important construct in positive psychology that is crucial to the development of adolescents in their education. Self-esteem is linked to academic achievement; thus, educationists and mental health professionals should identify the good qualities of youths and build on them for sustainable development. Building on the talents and skills of the young people will enable them to plan successfully for their future. Moreover, parents should motivate their children by appreciating the work they do at school. It is worth noting that parents should encourage their children for a bright future because that students' level of self-esteem has great implications for their current and future development.

Limitation

The study was limited to only two schools in the Central Region of Ghana with a small sample population. Future studies would benefit from additional schools in the sample.

Conclusion

The current study explored the levels of self-esteem of students in their second and third years of junior high school in a district in the Central Region of Ghana. The sample comprised 109 Ghanaian students (59 males, 50 females; mean age = 14 years). The results indicate that the overall sense of student self-esteem, according to the RSES, was rated with the positive items being higher than the negative items. As regards gender and location, the findings indicate that students do not differ in their levels of self-esteem. The study makes a significant contribution to new knowledge on self-esteem regarding location and gender in the development of school children in Ghana

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Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Overall	Male	59	29.1356	3.53533	.46026
	Female	49	33.1429	26.78463	3.82638

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Overall	Equal variances assumed	2.483	.118	-1.138	106	.258	-4.00726	3.52018	-10.98636	2.97184
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.040	49.390	.304	-4.00726	3.85396	-11.75053	3.73601

Group Statistics

	Class	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Overall	Rural	68	32.4118	22.82983	2.76852
	Urban	40	28.4750	2.67934	.42364

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Overall	Equal variances assumed	1.571	.213	1.084	106	.281	3.93676	3.63119	-3.26242	11.13595
	Equal variances not assumed			1.406	70.108	.164	3.93676	2.80075	-1.64900	9.52253