

AGE, GENDER, AND FAMILY RELATIONS AS CORRELATES OF SELF-ESTEEM AMONG PHYSICALLY AND NON-PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

***Stella A. Olowodunoye**

&

Bunawari F. Ojogo

Adekunle Ajasin University

***Correspondence:** Stella A. Olowodunoye, Department of Pure & Applied Psychology, Adekunle Ajasin University, PMB 001 Akungba-Akoko, 34-234 Ondo State, Nigeria. E-mail: solowodunoye@yahoo.com
Phone: +2348059227041.

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the extent to which age, gender and family relations predicted self-esteem of the physically and non-physically challenged. Participants were 232 students (116 physically challenged; 116 non-physically challenged) whose ages averaged 17.16 years. Results indicated that physically challenged had lower self-esteem than non-physically challenged students. Age was associated with lower self-esteem. But good family relations enhanced students' self-esteem. Lastly, age, gender and family relations exerted a significant joint influence on self-esteem.

Key words: Self-esteem, gender, physically challenged, family relations.

INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem, defined as the overall assessment of oneself (Santrock, 2006), has been the focus of research in recent time. The reason for this may be due to its importance in the achievement of life's objectives; as it affects the psychological functioning of the individual. Self-esteem is

associated with depression, anxiety, motivation and general satisfaction with one's life (Harter, 1986; Rosenberg 1986).

Giving this association, children and young adults who are low on self-esteem may be dependent on their parents and have lower academic and vocational goals. Attribution theory (Heider, 1958) explained that individu

al's behaviour is being attributed to certain cause(s); therefore, low self-esteem among physically challenged individuals may be attributed to the disability experienced by such individual.

Schafield and Beek (2005) identified low socio-economic status, maltreatment and lack of trust as factors that could affect the self-esteem of a child. Low self-esteem has been found to have positive relationship with poor health, deviant behaviours (smoking, substance abuse), poor academic performance, depression, suicide and teenage pregnancy (Shirk, Burwell, & Harter, 2003).

Some of these studies (e.g. Akbar & Ipshita, 2007; King, Shultz, Sted, Gilpin & Cather, 1993) examined gender and physical disabilities in young adults and the impact of disability on the development of self-esteem, but none has been able to delve into the influence of family relation combined with age and gender of the physically challenged and the non-physically challenged students. This study may help fill this lacuna.

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between family relations and self-esteem between physically challenged and non-physically challenged students. Also, this study sought to determine whether disability has any significant influence on self-esteem. It is a matter of great concern that abilities and potentials of disabled persons have not yet been fully explored and tackled but practically it is a great loss of human resources, which if discovered, nurtured appropriately, channeled and

utilized could add a new force to the progress of the society.

The desire for positive evaluation of self may affect a person's feelings, actions, aspiration throughout life, and this may start from childhood stage. Physically challenged children may often face the problem of rejection or abandonment from their parents and other siblings in the family. Most of the time, they may be seeing as liabilities or necessary evil in the family and this may affect the development of self-esteem of these children.

Individuals with physical impairments have limited strength, vitality or alertness, due to chronic or acute health problems which adversely affects them in different situations (Sirvis, 1988). Physical disabilities may include a variety of neurological or muscular- skeletal impairments such as cerebral palsy, spinal problem, muscular dystrophy, etc. It is not surprising that the physically challenged fight two battles, which include overcoming the limitations imposed by their physical condition and acceptance by others. It is only recently that disability has been termed as a challenge or impediment for an individual.

The bias against disability is revealed in the terminologies locally used to describe these individuals, which are often derogatory and limiting to such individuals who grow up with a very negative self-image resulting in low motivation and inspiration. According to World Health organization (WHO) (1980), disability means any restriction or lack of ability to perform any activity in a manner

within the range considered normal in human beings.

Historically, individuals with disabilities have not only been marginalized but also institutionalized as a way of hiding them from public view (O'Brien, 2004). Even today, people with disabilities are often overlooked or seen as inferior human beings or abandoned and treated as misfits in the society. In fact, in the olden days, they were seeing as people having evil spirit in them and some of these children were left to die or thrown away because parents seeing them as a burden and unnecessary evil. Physical or intellectual limitations have been associated with being "less than" in a society that values affection and celebrates a narrow definition of beauty.

It is anticipated that those individuals with disabilities could be at risk for experiencing pressures related to body shapes, size and culturally constructed body ideals compared to normal individuals. Individuals with disabilities should not be categorized as a homogeneous group but seeing as normal individuals, though with one disability or the other but with a lot of abilities. Young adults who have different kinds and levels of disabilities may quite be different in their level of self-esteem compared to those who do not have such impairment. Akpata and Ipshita (2007) found that physically challenged students have lower self-esteem than the non-physically challenged. We, therefore, hypothesized as follow:

Hypothesis 1: *Non-physically challenged students will have a sig-*

nificant higher self-esteem than physically challenged students.

The importance of the family cannot be overemphasized in enhancing the self-esteem of children and this could be done through family closeness which must start when the children are still young. In fact, family relation should be the type that encourage self and identity development that is entrenched in the family tradition which involves respect and obedience (Harwood, Leyendecker, Carlson, Asencio & Miller, 2002; Santrock, 2006). Belsky (1984) emphasized that parental support and influence can increase the self-esteem of children. He found that interpersonal interaction between parents and children can go a long way to determine whether self-esteem will be enhanced or undermined.

He also maintained that parenting can be influenced through three forces: (1) forces emanating from within the individual parent, (2) forces emanating from the child and (3) forces from the larger society where the parent-child relationship is embedded. Barber, Ball and Armistead (2003) also found that family support had a great influence on self-esteem and development of a child. They submitted that for healthy development of any child to be enhanced, proper discipline coupled with set boundaries along with acceptance and respect of the child are very essential.

However, it may not be an overstatement to say that parents nowadays no longer have enough time for their children again, let alone assisting them to build their self-

esteem. This may be because of pre-occupation with materialism; the need to be more affluent; and the demand of globalization make them spend more time on paid job, leaving their children at home without proper guidance or at the mercy of house help.

Lamorey (2002) and Barber et al. (2003) maintained that family relationships and support can play a great influential role in the lives of children from various cultural backgrounds in relation to their self-esteem. How parents react to both normal and physically-challenged is as important as to what ways they ensure their welfare. Parents ought to be concerned with ensuring children's welfare, protecting their rights and helping them to learn how to relate with others.

Gender, which is defined as the psychological and socio-cultural dimensions of being male or female (Santrock, 2006) is a very important and sensitive issue as far as humanity is concerned and which may influence individual's identity, social relationship and the perspective of the world generally. Also the different socialization processes given to male and female children by parents and the society at large may underscore gender differences in self-esteem.

Most often than not, through actions and examples portray by the parents, the gender development of the children are being influenced (Lenton & Blair, 2004; Maccoby, 2003). Most of the time, gender is often used more than any other attributes to categorize people that we come in contact with (Fiske, Haslam, & Fiske, 1991). This may affect the self-esteem of the individual been categorized. For

example, Akbar & Ipshita (2007) reported that gender had a strong influence on individuals' level of self-esteem. A gender differences in self-esteem research carried out by Women Mental Health (2004) revealed that male patients have greater self-esteem compared to female patients. We hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2: Gender, age, and family relation will have significant independent and joint influence on self-esteem.

METHODS

Design and Participants

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design. The sample was made up of 232 students (physically challenged = 116; non-physically challenged = 116) selected from southwestern Nigeria. Their ages ranged between 13 and 19 ($M = 17.16$; $SD = 2.37$). Out of the 116 physically challenged participants, 57 were males and 53 were females. The non-physically challenged participants comprised 74 males and 48 females.

Measures

Family relations: This was measured with Inventory for Family Relation (IFR) developed by Hudson (1982). It was a 25-item inventory designed to measure interpersonal relationship in the family. IFR was rated on a 5-point scale (Rarely or none of the time = 1; Most or all of the time = 5). The participant's total score was obtained

by adding together the scores on the items and subtracting 25 from the total score. A reliability coefficient of .95 was reported by Hudson (1982). Elusiyan (1994) obtained a divergent coefficient of .01 by correlating IFR and the Psychopathic Deviate subscale of MMPI (Hathaway & McKinley, 1967). In this study, we obtained a reliability coefficient of .79. High score reflected good family relations while low scores indicated inadequate family relations.

Self-esteem: This was assessed with Hare's (1985) Hare Self-esteem Scale. It was a 30-item scale designed to measure the extent to which school age children hold favourable view of themselves in 3 domains (peer = 10 items; home = 10 items; school = 10 items). This was rated on a 4-point (Strongly disagree = 1; Strongly agree = 4). A test-retest reliability coefficient of .74 was reported by Hare (1985). In this study, a reliability coefficient of .67 was obtained. A high score indicated high feeling of self-esteem.

Procedure

Permissions were obtained from the authorities of schools (schools for physically challenged and the non-physically challenged). The participants were informed about the aim of the study and that the study was not meant to expose their weaknesses but strictly for academic purposes. Participation in the study was voluntary. The students, with the assistance of their teachers, were guided on how to respond to the questionnaires. Out of the 250 questionnaire administered, 232 were duly completed and found usable.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses include Pearson product moment correlation to assess the relationship that existed among the variables. Hypothesis 1 was evaluated with a *t* test. A multiple regression was conducted to test hypothesis 2.

RESULTS

The results of the descriptive and correlations of the variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean, SD, and Inter-variable Correlations

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Age	17.16	2.37	1							
Family type	-	-	.04	1						
Religion	-	-	.10	.14*	1					
Family size	5.97	3.22	.25**	.33**	-.14*	1				
Position in the family	3.22	2.48	.04	.31**	.01	.62**	1			
Gender	-	-	-.06	-.04	-.05	-.02	.00	1		
Family relations	75.66	10.24	-.29	.09	-.05	.06	.14*	.06	1	
Self-esteem	82.11	9.63	-.29**	-.15*	-.11	.20**	-.11	.00	.12	1

Note: ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$. $N = 232$.

The results in Table 1 show that students' self-esteem reduced significantly as their ages increased [$r(230) = -.29, p < .01$]. Gender had no significant relationship with self-esteem [$r(230) = .00, p > .05$]. Table 1 also revealed that family relations had

no significant relationship with self-esteem [$r(230) = .12, p > .05$].

Hypothesis 1, which expected the non-physically challenged students to have a higher level of self-esteem than those that are physically challenged, was evaluated with a t test. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of t Test on Self-esteem

Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Non-physically challenged	116	85.52	9.24	230	6.12	>.05
Physically challenged	116	78.34	8.62			

Table 2 shows that the non-physically challenged students had a significantly higher level of self-esteem than the physically challenged students [$t(230)$

$= 6.12, p < .01$]. This confirmed hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 was tested with a multiple regression. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Multiple Regression of Age, Sex and Family Relations on Self-esteem

Predictors	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>
Age	-.29	-4.53*			
Gender	-.03	-.47	.32	.10	8.55**
Family relations	.13	-2.08*			

Note: ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$. $N = 232$.

The results in Table 3 indicated that age significantly predicted self-

esteem such that older students tended to exhibit lower level of self-esteem

that younger students ($\beta = -.29, p < .05$). Gender did not significantly predict self-esteem ($\beta = -.03, p > .05$). However, family relations significantly predicted self-esteem in such a way that students who reported good family relations tended to have favourable evaluation of themselves compared with those who reported bad family relations ($\beta = .13, p < .05$). Finally, age, gender, and family relations significantly predicted self-esteem [$R = .30; R^2 = .10; F(3,224) = 8.55, p < .05$]. The results in Table 3 partly confirmed hypothesis 2.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the extent to which age, gender and family relation correlated with self-esteem of physically challenged and the non-physically challenged students. It also investigated whether physical disability had a negative influence on self-esteem.

Hypothesis 1 stated that non-physically challenged students would have a significant higher self-esteem than the physically-challenged students was confirmed by the results in Table 2. Results indicated that non-physically challenged had a significantly higher self-esteem than the physically-challenged students. This result supported the work of Akbar and Ipshita (2007) who found that physically challenged students had a lower self-esteem than the non-physically challenged students.

This result also supported the theory of attribution (Heider, 1958), that the behaviour of individual is

being coined or attributed to certain cause(s). So, it could be deduced that the lower status of self-esteem experienced by the physically challenged students could be as a result of their disabilities. This may be as result of the fact that the physically challenged students had limited strength, vitality or alertness, due to chronic or acute health problems which adversely affects them in different situations (Rogers, 1980; Sirvis, 1988).

The second hypothesis, which stated that gender, age and family relation would have significant independent and joint influence on self-esteem, was partly confirmed by the results in Table 3. It was a mixed result. Gender as a variable did not have any significant influence, but age and family relation had significant independent influence; but there was a joint influence of these three variables on self-esteem. The result on gender negated the work of Akbar and Ipshita (2007) who found that gender had a strong influence on individuals' level of self-esteem.

It also contradicted the results reported by the Women Mental Health (2004), that male patients had greater self-esteem compared to female patients. The results on family relations supported Belsky (1984), who submitted that parental support and influence could increase the self-esteem of children. Also, the findings of Barber et al. (2003) and Lamorey (2002), that family support had a strong influence on self-esteem and development of a child, were supported. Age as one of the variables had a significant relationship with self-esteem in table 1 and also had a

significant independent and joint influence on self-esteem. This indicated that age is a strong determinant of self-esteem among young adults.

CONCLUSION

Since there was a significant difference in self-esteem between the physically challenged students and the non-physically challenged students, the implication of this is that the physically challenged individual must be assisted by the members of the family with necessary care needed for them to be able to develop a good image of themselves, which could enhance their self-esteem. Gender as one of the variables had no significant influence on self-esteem, which implied that both male and female could be victims of low or high self-esteem. So, both must be nurtured to have a good self-concept.

Age had both strong relationship and influence on self-esteem. This implied that right from childhood, children must be trained in a way that enhances self-esteem. Parents should avoid words and actions that could deter the development of self-esteem in their children. Lastly, family relation was found to have a strong influence on self-esteem. This implied that supportive family assists in enhancing self-esteem. So, whether physically challenged or non-physically challenged, the children need the support of their parents and the entire member of the family to be able to build good image and enhances their self-esteem.

This study only focused physically and non-physically challenge in

schools below tertiary institutions. So, further studies may enlarge the scope of research to include physically challenged in tertiary institutions. Also, for adequate comparison, self-employed and government employed physically challenged may be beneficial.

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