Self Esteem and Subjective Wellbeing: 
Correlates of Academic Achievement of Students

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Abstract

The intercorrelation between self esteem, subjective wellbeing and academic achievement of University students was explored. Gender difference was also examined in self esteem and subjective wellbeing. The study used a simple two-group survey with a between-subjects design involving 120 participants. The results revealed that there was a significantly positive relation between self esteem, subjective wellbeing and academic achievement. The independent t-test revealed that female students possessed significantly higher self esteem and subjective wellbeing than their male counterparts. Out of the eleven domains of subjective wellbeing, female students were found to be significantly higher in transcendence, social support and deficiency in social contact than male students.

Keywords: self esteem, wellbeing, transcendence, social support, social contact
Introduction

Wellbeing and self esteem are two major indicators of the positive health of an individual. Wellbeing, an index of holistic health, may be defined as the state of being well, happy, or prosperous. It is a good or satisfactory condition of existence -- a state characterized by positive health. The manifestation of wellbeing is happiness, which is considered as the ultimate goal of human existence. Happiness is a unique positive emotional state that is subjectively defined by every person. Happiness is a mental state of wellbeing characterized by positive emotions, ranging from contentment to intense joy. Happiness is the good life in terms of personal happiness, which is a general thrust of the hedonic view of wellbeing (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993). Seligman (2002) described a term ‘authentic happiness’, which means there is more to life than happiness and subjective pleasure.

Subjective wellbeing involves subjective evaluation of one’s current status in the world. Diener (2002) defines subjective wellbeing as a combination of two things - first, positive affect and second, life satisfaction. It is an overall assessment of feelings and attitudes about one’s life at a particular point of time ranging from negative to positive. Positive affect includes the feeling of excitement, joy and love. Life satisfaction refers to a desire to change one’s life, satisfaction with the past, satisfaction with the future and significant others’ views of one’s life (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Different factors, like temperament (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996), adaptation to conditions (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003), and goal striving (Emmons, 1986) substantially influence levels of subjective wellbeing. Examining the meaning in life and psychological well-being in male and female students of pre-adolescence and adolescence, Rathi and Rastogi (2007) found significant differences in the perception of life as meaningful and psychological well-being for the groups. Study also concludes that boys have greater psychological well-being than girls, due to better physical self-concept (Rodriguez, 2009).

Self esteem, an essential aspect of emotional health, plays a pivotal role in individual’s subjective wellbeing. Self esteem refers to an individual’s sense of his or her value or worth, or the extent to which a person values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). Rosenberg (1965) describes self-esteem as a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the self. Moreover, self-esteem is generally considered the evaluative component of the self-concept, a broader representation of the self that encompasses cognitive and behavioural aspects as well as evaluative or affective ones (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). According to Crocker (2001), self esteem refers to a global judgment of the worth or value of the self as a whole (similar to self-regard, self-respect, and self-acceptance), or to evaluations of specific aspects of the self (e.g., appearance self-esteem or academic self-esteem). Global self-esteem is the essential part of the subjective quality of life and is related strongly to positive affect and life satisfaction (Diener 1984), less anxiety (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991), and fewer depressive symptoms (Crandall 1973). Falci (2011) concluded that self esteem increased at a faster rate among girls than boys during high school. Adolescent females, on average, have a lower sense of self esteem than adolescent males (Baumeister, 1996; Pipher, 1994), whereas male shows a greater level of self esteem and more emotionally expressive in comparison to female (Pollack, 1998). Self esteem is related to better health, less criminal behaviour, lower level of depression and overall greater success in life (Orth, Robins, & Meier, 2009). In a study on students with different achievement goal orientation profiles, Tuominen-Soini, Salmela-Aro, and Niemivirta (2006) found that observed differences in subjective well-being (self-esteem, depressive symptoms,
school-related burnout, and educational goal appraisals) indicated that goals related to self-improvement and growth were positively associated with various indices of well-being, whereas avoidance tendencies and concerns with validating or demonstrating one’s competence were linked with different types of adjustment problems. Taking into account the importance of self esteem and subjective wellbeing in student’s life, this study is an attempt to find the answer to the question whether both self esteem and subjective wellbeing play a crucial role in academic success.

**Objectives**

The objectives of the study were

1. To explore the relationship between self esteem, subjective wellbeing, academic achievement, and age in University students.
2. To find out the role of gender in self esteem and subjective wellbeing of University students.

**Hypotheses**

It was hypothesized that

1. There would be a relationship between self esteem, subjective wellbeing, academic achievement and age in University students.
2. There would be a gender difference in the self esteem and subjective wellbeing of University students.

**Method**

(i) Design

The study used a simple two-group survey with a between-subjects design. The independent variable was gender and the dependent variables were self esteem, subjective wellbeing and academic achievement of the participants. The participants were placed in two groups (male and female) on the basis of gender.

(ii) Participants

The participants in this study included 60 male and 60 female students from the University of Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, India. The male and female participants ranged in age from 20 to 28 years ($M = 21.68$) and 19 to 25 years ($M = 22.83$), respectively. Participants were selected using a convenience sample from the Integrated Masters, Masters and M.Phil. subject pool.

(iii) Materials

Materials used for this study included Self Esteem Inventory (SEI), Subjective Wellbeing Scale (SWS) and a demographic sheet.

**Self Esteem Inventory.** This measure, developed by Coppersmith (1967), consisted of 25 items with a 2-point rating scale (like me and unlike me). The participant was to put a cross mark under ‘like me’ option when the statement was felt as true to him/her and a cross mark under ‘unlike me’ option when the statement was felt as wrong to him/her. The total score of the test varied from 0 to 25. The reliability and validity of the SEI were 0.62 and 0.82 respectively.

**Subjective Wellbeing Scale.** Developed by Sell and Nappal (1985), this measure consisted of 40 items with 11 domains. Each item of the scale was measured with a 3-point scale ranging from 1 to 3 except items number 14,27,29 where 4-point scale was used. The domains were general wellbeing-positive affect, expectation-achievement congruence,
confidence in coping, transcendence, family group support, social support, primary group concern, inadequate mental mastery, perceived ill-health, deficiency in social contacts, and general wellbeing-negative affect. The scoring was done by assigning the values of 4, 3, 2, 1 to response categories of the positive items, and 1, 2 and 3 , to the negative items. The total score of the scale varied from 40 to 120, which was interpreted in the light of three broad score ranges, such as 40-60, 61-80 and 81-120.

**Demographics.** The demographic sheet asked the participants to give their name, gender, age, course in the University, and marks of the last semester examination.

(iv) Procedure

Each of the participants was contacted individually and rapport was established. Each of them was given an informed consent form and asked to sign it after reading the same. Once informed consent was obtained, each of them was given the questionnaire containing demographic data, SEI and SWS, and asked to fill up the same as per the instructions written on the top of each of the questionnaires. Any problem in understanding of any statement was explained by the investigator. Once the participants had completed the questionnaire, they were debriefed.

**Results**

The obtained quantitative data were examined by means of descriptive statistics, Pearson’s r, t-test and graph by means of computer software SPSS 11.5.

**Correlation between self esteem, subjective wellbeing, academic achievement and age (Hyp 1).** The correlations between the key variables in respect of the entire sample, and males and females are shown in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Self esteem</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.61**</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Subjective wellbeing</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Academic achievement</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Age</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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**Note.** n = 120. Higher scores indicate a greater magnitude of each variable. All analyses are two-tailed.

*p<.05, **p <.01

Table 2.

**Summary of Intercorrelation between self esteem, subjective wellbeing, academic achievement and age of males and females**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1</th>
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<th>4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Self esteem</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Subjective wellbeing</td>
<td>.68**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Academic achievement</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.25**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In case of the entire participants ($n = 120$), self esteem was significantly related to subjective wellbeing ($r = .61$, $p<.01$) and academic achievement ($r = .22$, $p<.05$). This indicates that those who reported more self esteem were also more likely to have better subjective wellbeing and higher academic achievement. In case of males ($n = 60$), esteem was found to be significantly related to subjective wellbeing ($r = .68$, $p<.01$) indicating that when self esteem in males became higher, so did the subjective wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing was found to be significantly related to academic achievement ($r = .35$, $p<.01$) indicating that the males who reported higher subjective wellbeing were found to have better academic achievement. Academic achievement was found to be significantly negatively related to age ($r = -.25$, $p<.01$), indicating that with the increase of age, the academic achievement decreased in males. In case of females ($n = 60$), esteem was found to be significantly related to subjective wellbeing ($r = .50$, $p<.01$) indicating that like males, when self esteem in females increased, so did the subjective wellbeing. But academic achievement was found to be significantly positively related to age ($r = .28$, $p<.05$), indicating that with the increase of age, the academic achievement increased in females.

**Gender difference in the self esteem and subjective wellbeing (Hyp 2).** The means, standard deviations and ‘$t$’ value of two groups of participants (males and females) for self esteem, subjective wellbeing and 11 domains of subjective wellbeing are presented in Table 3. Analysis of the data using the independent $t$-test for equal variances indicated that females possessed significantly higher self esteem ($t = 2.77$, $p<.01$) and subjective wellbeing ($t = 2.09$, $p<.05$) than males. Out of 11 domains of subjective wellbeing, females exhibited significantly higher transcendence ($t = 2.87$, $p<.01$), social support ($t = 4.14$, $p<.01$), and deficiency in social contact ($t = 2.46$, $p<.05$) than males. No significant gender difference was noticed for the remaining eight domains of subjective wellbeing. Results are also shown in Figure 1, 2 and 3.

**Table 3.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>T</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>$M$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self esteem</td>
<td>14.72</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>16.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective wellbeing</td>
<td>92.52</td>
<td>8.95</td>
<td>95.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General wellbeing positive affect</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>6.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation achievement congruence</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>6.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in coping</td>
<td>7.45</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>7.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendence</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>6.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family group support</td>
<td>7.57</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>7.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>6.48</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>7.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary group concern</td>
<td>8.95</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>8.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate mental mastery</td>
<td>15.23</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>14.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Mean (SD) Males</td>
<td>Mean (SD) Females</td>
<td>t-score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived ill health</td>
<td>14.55 (2.79)</td>
<td>14.98 (2.13)</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficiency in social contact</td>
<td>6.40 (1.70)</td>
<td>7.12 (1.48)</td>
<td>2.46*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General wellbeing negative affect</td>
<td>7.33 (1.49)</td>
<td>7.17 (1.40)</td>
<td>0.630</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** n = 60. Higher scores indicate a greater magnitude of each variable. All analyses are two-tailed.

*p < .05, **p < .01

**Figure 1**
Mean difference between males and females for Self esteem scores.

**Figure 2**
Mean difference between males and females for Subjective wellbeing scores.

**Figure 3**
Mean difference between males and females for three domains of Subjective wellbeing, such as transcendence (TRS), social support (SSP) and deficiency in social contact (DSC).
The first objective of the study was to assess the relationship between self esteem, subjective wellbeing, academic performance and age. It was hypothesized that there would be a relationship between self esteem, subjective wellbeing, academic performance and age. The findings of the study showed that there was a positive relationship between self esteem and subjective wellbeing. This suggests that as self esteem increases, subjective wellbeing also increases. There are many factors which can influence individual’s self esteem, like childhood experiences, family life, parenting style, friend and peer relationship and influences (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990), biological strength and weakness, body images, child’s temperament in a given situation, childhood loneliness, sustained hospitalization, family changes, and abuse. Study suggests that the quality and stability of adolescents' friendships not only are related to their self-esteem, but also are related to the changes over time in specific areas of self-esteem (Keefe & Berndt, 1996), and bolstering self-esteem and improving academic performance among young girls may have specific benefits in sexual decision-making and substance-related risk-taking (Wheeler, 2010). Finding also suggests that poor self-esteem during adolescence predicts low earnings during adulthood (Drago, 2011).

Age and academic achievement was also found to be related to each other in both male and female participants. In case of male, the age and academic achievement were negatively correlated, which indicates that increase in age leads to decrease in performance, where as in females these two were found to be positively correlated where increase in age leads to increase in performance. In this study, self esteem was found to be high in females as compared to males. Males found to have low self esteem because of many possible factors, like family pressure, workload in education, personal and social responsibilities. Similarly, subjective wellbeing is affected by many factors, like childhood experiences, quality of life, personal and environmental factors, and individual’s personality (Shek, 1997; Sastre & Ferriere, 2000). The findings showed that females have higher subjective wellbeing than males. Males are expected to work hard and earn for the family for which they have to face many difficulty like personal and social responsibilities, job stress, work related problems etc. Because of these there was a significance difference found between males and females in relation to self esteem and subjective wellbeing. In all the domains of subjective wellbeing females scored higher compared to males, except in confidence in coping, inadequate mental mastery, and general wellbeing - negative affect. Therefore, the second hypothesis of the study is also accepted. Supporting the hypotheses the study reveals that female students are significantly higher in both self esteem and subjective wellbeing than males, and self esteem
is found to have significant positive relationship with subjective wellbeing and higher academic achievement. The individual has to develop and foster his/her own worldview and inner resources for their optimum self esteem and subjective wellbeing, as study emphasizes that happy people become more satisfied not simply because they feel better but because they develop resources for living well and healthy (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002).

The findings of this study would help the individuals, especially students, to assess their self esteem and subjective wellbeing. The study would help in enhancing the performance as well as personality. Finally it would be helpful in future research guidance. Beside all these implications, there are also some limitations. The study consists of a sample of only 120 participants chosen by means of convenient sampling method. There is only one independent variable (gender) with two levels taken into consideration. The scale and inventory developed and validated in the western societies have been administered to measure the dependent variables.

References


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