

## Self-Esteem in Adolescents and Its Connection with Stressful Experiences

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### ABSTRACT

The focus of the present study is to identify the effects that self-esteem has on stressful experiences and how the adolescent copes with stress levels.

**Methods:** A sample of 200 teenagers (N=132) female and (N=68) male, aged between 13 and 18 years. Rosenberg rating scale and Self-Evaluation Rate of Self-Assessment to adolescents were used for the development of research.

**Results:** About 26.5% of adolescents experience high levels of stress, 28.5% moderate stress, and the majority of 45% with low stress levels. Differences were found between women and men ( $t=2.256$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ) in terms of stress levels, where men had higher stress levels ( $M=259.26$ ,  $SD=17.583$ ) compared to women ( $M=198.07$ ,  $SD=187.156$ ).

**Conclusion:** The presences of stressful experiences during adolescence are seen as a strong point in how teenagers will cope with stressful events along their lifetime. An adolescent with a high self-esteem will be able to better manage internal personal resources in the way he copes with stressful experiences.

**Keywords:** Adolescence, Self-esteem, Stressful experiences

### INTRODUCTION

The momentum and dynamism of recent times have led to an increasing tendency to stress experience in the teenagers. Certainly, this stress will have its consequences through the path of life [1]. It is thought that the impact of a stressful experience will depend largely on the way in which this teenager struggles with this stressor [2]. The teenager's issues related to education, relationships with others, personal challenges and unforeseen social situations are seen as the main cause of stress disruption in its daily life [3]. Experiencing stress at moderate levels helps the teenager to be motivated and active in dealing with everyday problems.

The experience of coping with stressful events has repeatedly been related to the development of mental health problems [4,5]. The way of coping with difficulty and stressful experiences in daily life is strongly influenced by our internalizing problems as self-esteem, a core component of self-concept [6]. Internalizing problems has been framed in context of developmental psychology, which focuses on the interaction between environment and childhood [7]. The internal problem linked with self-esteem seems to be a risk factor of development of a wide range of mental health problems [5] and depression in particular [8,9]. Self-esteem is considered as a source of strength for the individual to successfully deal with stress throughout the adolescence and

not only [10,11]. Research has shown that adolescents with a high self-esteem exhibit fewer symptoms of sadness as a reaction to stress before the exam [12-14]. The tendency to help the individual improve the concept of self, influences how that individual improves his personal talents to deal with stressful experiences [2,15].

Stress at high levels and mismanagement can create a serious problem with humor, anxiety and aggressivity [16]. Stress resource for the teenager is also the ongoing transformation of their body as a consequence of self-image adaptation, not only in physical, but also in the adaption of adolescents with their self-image [17,18]. Yet, another source of stress in adolescence is social pressure as a result of the necessity of adolescents to adapt to their peer groups and the efforts to gain their approval. In some cases, the

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social pressure impels adolescents to opt for socially dangerous behaviors not because they want but to be accepted by their like groups [19]. Another source of adolescent stress can be related to their worries about good academic performance, if they are going to get to the University, homework and preparing for the examinations [20]. Domestic issues may also be another source of stress on the teenager, including typical kinds that strongly affect their overall psychological well-being, but also become a source of strong strain. Parenthood divorce, conflicts between parents, health issues within the family, emotional and physical abuses, as well as quarrels with brother or sisters [15,21]. All these factors are seen as a contributing factor to the growth of the stress level in the adolescent and obstacle their development. Such factors can be considered as the main cause for the emergence and development of mental health problems affecting both the teen and their future.

Studies revealed about the stressful experiences of adolescents similar to adults, but teenagers' concerns are that

they do not seem to be aware of the great influence that stress has over their mental and physical health in the long term perspective [11,22]. Self-esteem as an internal state of adolescents, as other psychopathological symptoms, can be best reported by adolescents themselves [23]. Lower levels of self-esteem are associated with lower levels of emotional stability, and in longitudinal terms adolescents with lower self-esteem had more physical and psychological problems in adulthood [24]. Low level of self-esteem served as predictors of adult depression [25].

**METHOD AND PROCEDURES**

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of self-esteem in coping with stressful experience in the teen's life. Participants in the research were 200 teenagers of the X, XI, XII grades in two High Schools of Tirana, respectively "Sadik Stavileci" and "Vajdin Lamaj". The study sample was selected as random (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Demographic data (n=200).

Demographic Data		n	%
School	Sadik Stavileci	102	51.0
	Vajdin Lamaj	98	49.0
	Total	200	100.0
Gender	Male	68	34.0
	Female	132	66.0
	Total	200	100.0
Age	15 years	8	4.0
	16 years	42	21.0
	17 years	92	46.0
	18 years	58	29.0
	Total	200	100.0

From the grades of High School "Sadik Stavileci" participated a total of N=102 aged 15-18 years old, respectively from the grade of 10<sup>th</sup>, a number of 37, from the grade 11<sup>th</sup>, a total of 35 and from the grade 13<sup>th</sup> a number of 30. Also from "Vajdin Lamaj" High School grades participated a total number of 89 aged 16-18 years old, respectively from the grade of 10<sup>th</sup>, a number of 29 from grade 11<sup>th</sup>, a number of 33 and from the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, a number of 27.

The instruments used in the present study were: **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)**, a short questionnaire consisting of 10 structured questions and 4- statement degrees. Participants responded by 1-4 Likert scale (strongly agree,

agree, disagree, strongly disagree). The self-esteem scale ranges from 0 to 30 points. Scores from 25 to 30 show a high level of self-esteem.

Scores from 15 to 25 points show a normal level of self-esteem, while scores below 15 points show a low self-esteem rate for the **SRRS Readjustment Rating Scale** [1]. The **Social Adaption Scale** on adolescents stress, version for children and adolescents, consists of 37 events such as: separation from spouse/partner, school problems, school exclusion, use of narcotic drugs or alcohol, adolescent or family members health problems, loss of parents' work, ongoing arguments or conflicts with parents or friends, etc., events that may have occurred in the last 12 months and

which may have caused stress on adolescents. Data analysis was performed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 program. The analyzes were conducted at the 95% confidence interval. Cronbach alpha was used to test the internal reability of the instruments. Preliminary data were presented in tables and graphs through descriptive analyzes.

For the evaluation of the results of all tests, the level of statistical significance is set at 0.05. The data are reviewed for normal distribution and the tests used for further analysis are parametric as Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum, Maximum, Frequency, Percentage. **T test** was used to see if there are significant differences in the average between two independent groups of males and females in terms of self-esteem and stressful events, **the Pearson correlation coefficient** to measure statistical dependence on the strength and direction between the two variables and the **simple Linear Regression** to observe the impact of independent

variables on the dependent ones through beta coefficient and explanatory variance.

$$\text{Self-esteem} = B_0 + b_1\text{stress} + \epsilon t$$

**RESULTS**

The highest number in the study is represented by females with 66% (n=132) and males 34% (n=68).The age with the largest representation is 17 years old at 46%, followed by the 18 years old with 29%, 16 years old with 21% and less than 15 years with 4%.The minimum age of students participating in the study was 15 years old, the maximum age 18 years old and the average age was M=17 years old with a standard deviation of SD=0.814. Descriptive data revealed that the minimum scores taken were 0 points and the maximum ones 30 with an average score of M=23.05 and standard deviation Ds=5.096. The 23-point score indicates a normal level of student self-esteem.

**Table 2.** Scale of self-esteem of participants.

Self-Esteem degree	n	%
Low degree of self-esteem	14	7.0
Normal degree of self-esteem	117	58.5
High degree of self-esteem	69	34.5
Total	200	100.0

Referring to the **Table 2**, it results that out of 200 students, 34.5% have a high self-esteem degree, 7% low self-esteem and a prominence of 58.5% for normal self-esteem. Descriptive data indicate the minimum points taken are 0

points and maximum 955 points with an average score of M=218.88 and standard deviation Ds=183.575 The average score of 218.88 points indicates a moderate degree of stress.

**Table 3.** Degree of stress in participants.

Participant’s degree of stress	n	%
Low stress degree	90	45.0
Moderate degree of stress	57	28.5
High degree of stress	53	26.5

Referring to the **Table 3** it is shown that out of 200 students, 26.5% have a high degree of stress, 28.5% a moderate degree and a prominence with 45% of low stress degree.

**Table 4.** Stressful events degree of participants.

	Stressful events	Number of suveyed
1	Death of Spouse/Mate	9
2	Death of a Close family member (sister/brother/grandparents, etc.)	32
3	Divorce and Separation (partner/mate/parents’)	41
4	Pregnancy (undesirable pregnancy)	13

5	Major personal injury or illness	37
6	Engagement	11
7	Marriage	12
8	Being an adopted child	10
9	Major change in independence or responsibilities	<u>89</u>
10	Use of a narcotics or alcohol	52
11	Drop-out of school	16
12	School issues	47
13	Major change in the health or behavior of a family member	77
14	Parents' loose of jobs	36
15	Changes in the financial status of parents	63
16	Lack of the parental figure at home	18
17	Sexual difficulties (confusion in sexual identity)	14
18	Gaining a new family member (birth, re-marriage or adoption)	18
19	Death of a close friend	14
20	Having a major physical impairment	23
21	Sentencing in imprisonment of a parent for more than 30 days	13
22	Beginning a new interpersonal affair	58
23	<u>Major arguments with parents, spouse or friends</u>	<u>90</u>
24	Ongoing arguments between parents	46
25	<u>Sleeping less than 8 h at night</u>	<u>164</u>
26	Serious issues with ex-partner or ex-boyfriend or girlfriend	29
27	Outstanding personal achievement (scientific title, scholarships, studies or awards)	79
28	Changes in the life conditions (home visitors, home remodeling, etc)	69
29	Changes in personal habits (beginning or ceasing smoking or diet)	53
30	Chronic Allergies	32
31	Moving to a new school (or beginning of a new school year)	40
32	Changes in living area (moving to a new dwelling area etc)	18
33	Engagement in religious activities	20
34	Pre-menstrual period	70
35	Holidays	71
36	Winter holidays	67
37	Minor violations in law	47

According to the **Table 4**, it is shown that the stressful events that the majority of adolescents experience are related to sleeping less than 8 h a night for 164 teenagers; ongoing arguments with parents, partner or friends for 90 adolescents and changes in independence or responsibility for 89 teenagers.

**Table 5.** T-test of differences in means of self-esteem and stress relating to gender.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev	T	p
Degree of Self-Esteem	Male	68	23.53	4.833	0.955	0.341
	Female	132	22.80	5.227		
Stressful Events	Male	68	259.26	170.583	2.256	0.025
	Female	132	198.07	187.156		

The T-test was used to measure whether there are significant differences between male and female genders in terms of self-esteem and stress (**Table 5**). Referring to the above table it is revealed that there are not have significant gender differences in terms of self-esteem as the significance is  $p > 0.05$ . There were significant differences between women

and men ( $t = 2.256, p \leq 0.05$ ) in terms of stress degree. Based on the means, men have higher stress degrees ( $M = 259.26, Ds = 17.583$ ) compared to women ( $M = 198.07, Ds = 187.156$ ). Pearson correlation was used to measure the variables on strength and direction between the two variables.

**Table 6.** Pearson correlation between age and degree of self-esteem.

Correlation between age and self-esteem		Age	Degree of Self-Esteem
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.098
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.167
	N	200	200
Degree of Self-Esteem	Pearson Correlation	-0.098	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.167	
	N	200	200

**Table 6** above shows that there is no a significant correlation between age and self-esteem ( $p > 0.05$ ) and we cannot determine whether an adult or young age have high

or low self-esteem. So, the self-esteem does not change with the growing age of adolescents.

**Table 7.** Pearson correlation between age and stress.

Correlation between age and stress		Age	Stress
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	0.111
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.117
	N	200	200
Stress	Pearson Correlation	.111	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.117	
	N	200	200

Data above, in **Table 7**, shows that there is no a significant correlation between age and stress ( $p > 0.05$ ) and therefore,

we cannot determine whether an adult or young age have a high or low stress degree.

**Table 8.** Pearson correlation between self-esteem and stress.

Correlation between self-esteem and stress		Degree of Self-Esteem	Stress
Degree of Self-Esteem	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.280**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	200	200
Stress	Pearson Correlation	-0.280**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	200	200

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The results in **Table 8** show that there is an important negative link between the two variables of self-esteem scale and the degree of stress ( $r=-.280$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ). Referring to the results we could infer that with the increase in self-esteem the stress decreases and vice versus.

To see the extent of the self-esteem impact at the degree of stress, it was used the multiple linear regression analysis according to the following model:

$$\text{Stress} = B_0 + b_1 \text{self-esteem} + \epsilon$$

**Table 9.** Regression of the relation of self-esteem with stressful events.

Model		Not standardized Coefficients			Standardized Coefficients	
		B	Std. Dev	Beta	t	p
1	(Constant)	451.198	58.016		7.777	0.000
	Degree of Self-Esteem	-10.079	2.458	-.280	-4.101	0.000

$F=16.815$ ,  $R^2=0.078$

Referring to the model in **Table 9**, it is noted that  $R^2$  as a probability coefficient shows a value of 0.078. This indicates that 7.8% of the variance of stressful events is explained by the self-esteem explanatory variable. Self-esteem has a significant negative relationship with the stressful event ( $\beta=-10.079$ ), since t-statistic in absolute value is greater than 2. ( $t=-4.101$ ), either if we would observe the significant **p** its value is ( $p=0.000 < 0.05$ ) and self-esteem reduces stress by 28% ( $\text{Beta}=-.280$ )

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of the present study was to examine the impact of internalizing symptoms as self-esteem had in addressing the stressful experiences of adolescents of the city of Tirana. Referring to gender differences in self-esteem, it results that the same degree of self-esteem is shown among female and male. Whereas, regarding gender differences in the degree of stress, the results showed that between female and male various levels of stress were reported; male reported higher degree of stress than female, so there are gender differences in stress degrees, but not on self-esteem one. With regard to gender differences in self-esteem, studies have noted that there are significant differences between boys and girls, reporting that especially teenage girls have lower self-esteem [26]. Various researches connect self-esteem in adolescence with different aspects as physical appearance, academic achievement, family and peer relationships, athletic skills

and socio-cultural influences [27]. Indicating self-esteem as a predictor of mental disorders as suggested by studies [2,10,28] both male and female with lower self-esteem are vulnerable regarding future mental health problems.

Gender difference in self-esteem was also found in a study on the overall self-esteem between the two sexes, where girls at the end of high school had lower self-esteem than boys [29]. Regardless of what was suggested through studies on gender differences in self-esteem, our study showed that there are no gender differences in this domain. More important that gender differences are peer attachment and self-esteem in general well-being in adolescence and adulthood [30]. These two components seem to be essential during this transitional period [28].

The second assumption of the difference relating to gender and stress is also supported by other studies that suggest that adolescents that are good in coping with various changes, issues, problems and with a high self-esteem interact better with stressful experience and internal problems [31]. Research show significant changes in the way how boys and girls copy with stress [32-35]. It seems that boys are more likely to refuse to deal with stress and distract themselves from it, while girls are more likely to seek support and actively reduce the stress they experience [36-39].

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the current study are considered in relation to the impact of internalizing symptoms as self-esteem have on mental health and also indicate the importance of addressing self-esteem in prevention and intervention programs. The degree of stress in males was higher than in females [40]. Thus, in conclusion we can infer that there are no differences in the self-esteem among males and females, but they differ in the degree of stressful events where men report experiencing more stress than women. But both internalizing symptoms and stressful experiences substantially increase risk for depression and self-harm among adolescents. Self-esteem serves in the whole as a strong tool with a positive impact on the coping skills and mechanisms to stress. The evidences shows that internal symptom as self-esteem during adolescence have important role of taking action to improve the level of self-esteem at this age and in emerging adulthood [41].

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