

Difficulties in emotional regulation, loneliness and self-esteem among adolescence

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a transitional period in which individual experiences major physical, cognitive, and socio affective changes. It is the period of life between childhood and adulthood. Research suggests that emotional issues are quite prevalent during the adolescent years. The study aimed at assessing the difficulties in emotional regulation, loneliness and self-esteem among male and female college students. The sample for the study consisted of 150 college undergraduates. Amongst them 50% were males and 50% were females. 48 adolescents belonged to rural area and 102 belonged to the urban area. The sample was drawn using purposive sampling method. The tools used included: Socio-demographic record sheet, Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), UCLA loneliness scale, Rosenberg's self-esteem scale. Mean, Standard deviation, t-test and correlation was used for statistical analysis. The statistical analysis revealed significant difference between male and female college students on self esteem, impulse control and awareness. This study provides an insight about emotional regulation, loneliness, self esteem and gender differences. The results indicate that emotion regulation training and training for enhancing self-esteem may be useful for adolescents.

Key Words : Emotion, Loneliness, Self-esteem, Adolescence

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is described as a transitional period in which individual experiences major physical, cognitive, and socio affective changes (Dumont and Provost, 1999). The term adolescence is commonly understood to define the period of life between childhood and adulthood (Kaplan, 2004). Emotional Development during adolescence involves establishing a realistic and coherent sense of identity in the context of relating to others and learning to cope with stress and manage emotions (Santrock, 2001), processes that are life long issues for most people. Multiple theories propose that a lack of emotion regulation can contribute to depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and borderline personality disorder (Martin and Dahlen, 2005). During adolescence, young people establish their emotional and psychological independence, learn to understand and manage their sexuality and consider their future role in society. The process is gradual, emotional and sometimes unsettling. A young person

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might feel disappointed, disillusioned and hurt one minute, ecstatic, optimistic and in love the next. As they grapple with physical and emotional changes, today's adolescents must also cope with external forces over which they have little control (UNICEF, 2002). Research suggests that self-esteem is a significant predictor of psychological and physical well-being. According to Harmon-Jones *et al.* (1997) it is "one's belief regarding how well one is living up to the standards of value prescribed by the worldview". With regard to adolescence, previous research on self-esteem development has yielded inconsistent results. Several studies reported an increase in self-esteem (Cairns *et al.*, 1990; Twenge and Campbell, 2001), whereas other studies reported that self-esteem does not change (Young and Mroczek, 2003) or even decreases (Keltikangas-Järvinen, 1990; McMullin and Cairney, 2004). Low self-esteem in adolescence and young adulthood is a risk factor for negative outcomes in important life domains. Low self-esteem during adolescence predicts poorer mental and physical health, worse economic well-being, and higher levels of criminal activity in young adulthood (Trzesniewski *et al.*, 2006). Loneliness is an unpleasant and distressing, subjective experience that results from deficient social relationships (Peplau and Perlman, 1982). Evidence suggests that loneliness is most prevalent during the adolescent years (Heinrich and Gullone, 2006). Loneliness is also regarded as a risk factor in respect of a wide variety of problems, posing a potential danger to human health (Lauder *et al.*, 2004).

Review of literature :

Loneliness increases during adolescence (Mahon *et al.*, 2006) and is most prevalent during the adolescent years (Heinrich and Gullone, 2006). Various studies indicate that young people especially are susceptible to loneliness. Loneliness is particularly prevalent amongst young adults between 18 and 25 (Lauder *et al.*, 2006). Studies have shown that males and females have different social needs and friendship structures (Inderbitzen-Pisaruk *et al.*, 1992). For instance, adolescent girls have more intimate friendships than boys. These findings suggest that there may be gender differences in the variables that are associated with adolescent loneliness. Hansson and Jones (1981) studied 80 male and 101 female American undergraduates and found gender differences in terms of coping mechanisms which may be differentially available to men and women. Loneliness has been associated to low self-esteem (Weiss, 1973). Research conducted in the Indian context suggests that socio-emotional problems like loneliness, adjustment difficulties with parents and interpersonal conflicts are relatively common in adolescence, and may contribute to impaired feelings of self-esteem (Parmar and Rohner, 2008).

Schutte *et al.* (2002) found that higher emotional intelligence EI was associated with an increase in positive mood state and higher state self-esteem. Individuals with higher EI also showed less of a decrease in positive mood and self-esteem after a negative state. Numerous evidences exist that self-esteem is positively related to emotional functioning, including several predictors of life satisfaction (Moreno *et al.*, 2009) and subjective happiness (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2006). Teo and Nur Afiah (2010) surveyed a total of 200 university students to ascertain if gender, personality traits and social support were associated with self-esteem. The results showed that gender was not significantly associated with self-esteem. Whilst all the personality and social support factors were found to be associated with levels of self-

esteem, only extraversion, openness to new experiences, conscientiousness, emotional stability and total amount of social support were found to predict self-esteem. Benedict (1997) examined the relationships among types of loneliness and learned resourcefulness, self-esteem, and gender among a sample of 625 college students. Results of multiple regression analyses revealed that self-esteem and gender significantly predicted the experience of global loneliness (as measured by the full-scale R-UCLA), intimate loneliness, and social loneliness. Silk *et al.* (2003) examined links between emotion regulation and adjustment in a sample of 152 adolescents in Grades 7 (M age=12) and 10 (M age=15). Adolescents who reported more intense and labile emotions and less effective regulation of these emotions also reported more depressive symptoms and problem behavior. Saleh *et al.* (2006) investigated the relationship between loneliness, self-esteem, self-efficacy and gender among United Arab Emirates college students. The respondents were 495 college students from Al Ain University of Science and Technology. The findings of the study showed that females reported higher loneliness compared to their males counter mates. Lower self-esteem and lower self-efficacy were associated with high levels of loneliness. However, self-esteem emerged as the most significant predictor of loneliness accounting for 22.9% of the variance, self-efficacy and gender each accounted for an additional 6.5% of the variance in loneliness. All three predictors explained 29.4% ($R = .543$) of total variance. Rey *et al.* (2011) examined the relationship between perceived emotional intelligence, self-esteem and life satisfaction in a sample of 316 Spanish adolescents (179 females and 137 males), ranging in age from 14 to 18. It was found that perceived emotional dimensions, particularly mood clarity and repair, showed positive associations with life satisfaction. Self-esteem also correlated significantly and positively with levels of adolescents' satisfaction with life. Garnefski *et al.* (2004) studied focuses on comparability of men and women in (a) the extent to which they use specific cognitive emotion regulation. In a general population sample of 251 males and 379 females, data were obtained on symptoms of depression and the use of nine cognitive emotion regulation strategies. Significant differences were found in the strategies Rumination, Catastrophizing and Positive refocusing: women reported to use these strategies more often than men.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives :

- To study difficulties in emotional regulation among male and female college students.
- To study loneliness among male and female college students.
- To study self-esteem among male and female college students.
- To study relationship between difficulties in emotional regulation, self-esteem and loneliness of college students.

Hypothesis :

There will be no significant difference between male and female college students on difficulties in emotional regulation

There will be no significant difference between male and female college students on loneliness

There will be no significant difference between male and female college students on

self-esteem

There will be no relationship between difficulties in emotional regulation, loneliness and self-esteem.

Sample :

The sample consisted of 150 college undergraduates. Amongst them 50% were males and 50% were females. 48 adolescents belonged to rural area and 102 belonged to the urban area. The mean age range of the participants was 18.5 years. The participants were college students studying in first, second and third year of different streams in various colleges of the Jammu city viz. G.C.W. Parade, M.A.M. College. All the participants were selected using purposive sampling method. Criteria for inclusion were any student who was 18 years of age and fluent in reading English.

Tools :

- Socio-demographic record sheet
- Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz and Roemer 2004)
- UCLA loneliness scale (Russell *et al.*, 1980)
- Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed at assessing the difficulties in emotional regulation, loneliness and self-esteem among male and female college students. Significant differences were found between males and females on Impulse control difficulties and Lack of emotional awareness and on Self esteem. Significant correlation was found between Difficulties in emotional regulation, Self esteem and Loneliness.

The first objective was to assess the difficulties in emotional regulation among male and female college students. Total scores on difficulties in emotional regulation scale revealed no significant difference between the two groups, whereas subscale scores on impulse and aware revealed significant differences between the two groups. Mean scores of these groups indicates that males are high on Impulse control difficulties as compared to females and on the dimension aware mean scores indicates that females are high on lack of emotional awareness compared to males. Hence, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the difficulties in emotional regulation among male and female college students is rejected. A meta-analysis of gender differences in temperament showed that girls are better at inhibiting inappropriate behavioral responses than boys (Else-Quest *et al.*, 2006). Findings that female adolescents have lack of emotional awareness than their male counterparts are consistent with findings that adolescent females score higher on measures of maladaptive coping than adolescent males (Hampel and Petermann, 2006).

The second objective was to study loneliness among male and female college students. The results obtained on the scale indicate no significant gender differences on loneliness. Hence, second null hypothesis *i.e.*, there will be no significant difference between male and female college students on loneliness is accepted.

The third objective was to study the self-esteem among male and female college students.

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The results indicate that there is significant difference between male and female college students on self esteem. Mean scores indicate females are high on self esteem as compared to males. Hence, the null hypothesis that there will be no significant difference between male and female college students on self-esteem is rejected. Results of gender differences on self-esteem are not consistent across different studies. Gender and self-esteem Studies in a wide range of western countries have determined that adolescent females, on average, have a lower sense of self-esteem than adolescent males (Baumeister, 1993). Several researchers studied self esteem and gender among students and found significant difference in self esteem between males and females SarAbadaniTafreshi (2006) and Naderi *et al.* (2009).

The fourth objective to study relationship between difficulties in emotional regulation, self-esteem and loneliness of college students. Scores obtained indicate a significant positive

Table 1 : Independent t-test results showing gender differences on difficulties in emotional regulation scale

Variables	Male(N=75)		Female(N=75)		T	P
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Non-accept	15.6800	4.82438	16.3600	5.16391	.833	.406
Goals	14.9867	3.45431	15.5600	3.68063	.984	.327
Impulse	16.7200	3.84342	15.0533	3.89696	2.637	.009*
Aware	19.0667	4.33195	20.3333	3.61055	1.945	.05*
Strategies	21.5867	5.28663	21.2133	5.37837	429	.669
Clarity	14.3067	2.63025	14.6800	2.74679	.850	.397
Total score	1.0263	15.83511	1.029	15.27097	142	.887

Table 2 : Independent t-test results showing gender differences on loneliness and self-esteem scale

Variables	Male (n=75)		Female (n=75)		T	P
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Loneliness	25.00	10.78	23.506	9.708	.891	.374
Self-esteem	18.2267	5.10848	20.0533	3.87958	2.46	0.01*

Table 3 : Correlation between difficulties in emotional regulation, loneliness and self-esteem scores

Variables		Difficulties in emotional regulation	Loneliness	Self-esteem
Difficulties in emotional regulation	Pearson correlation	1	.349**	-.295**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	150	150	150
Lonely	Pearson correlation	.349**	1	-.378**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	150	150	150
Self-esteem	Pearson correlation	-.295**	-.378**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	150	150	150

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

correlation between difficulties in emotional regulation and loneliness *i.e.*, with an increase in difficulties in emotional regulation, there is an increase in loneliness. A significant negative correlation was found between emotional regulation and self esteem which means higher the difficulties in emotional regulation, lower is the self esteem. A significant negative correlation was found between loneliness and self esteem, *i.e.* higher the loneliness, lower is the self esteem. Hence the null hypothesis that there will be no relationship between difficulties in emotional regulation, loneliness and self-esteem is rejected. One study found that adolescents who reported greater ability to distinguish among moods and high mood repair skills indicated greater global self-esteem. As the evidence provided by Schutte *et al.* (2002) suggests, it may be reasonable to assume that the understanding and regulation of components of EI with regard to moods may facilitate positive affect in the self-evaluative process. Individuals high in EI may be able to maintain higher positive mood states and higher self-esteem states because their understanding and regulation abilities enable them to counter some of the influence of negative situations and maximize the influence of positive situations (Salovey *et al.*, 1999; Schutte *et al.*, 2002). Low self-esteem was found to be associated with feelings of loneliness. Individuals with low self-esteem are likely to feel rejected and are disapproving of others, in addition they may lack self-confidence and social skill required for initiating and developing relationships; factors that are related to loneliness (Hoffman *et al.*, 2004).

Conclusion :

This study provides an insight about emotional regulation, loneliness, self esteem and gender differences. The results indicate that emotion regulation training and training for enhancing self-esteem may be useful for adolescents. The results of the study add to a growing understanding about the mental states of female and male adolescents which assists with the development for intervention programs for those at risk. Our review suggests greater attention to be paid to adolescents and provides scope for further exploration.

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