



**Confidence Gap: A comparative study between Self-Esteem & Perceived Social Support
in Gen-Y vs. Gen-Z**

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Abstract

This research employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between self-esteem and perceived social support in 181 participants using snowball sampling. Standardized measures assessed self-esteem using Rosenberg Scale of Self-Esteem (RSES) and perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others using The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). Non-parametric tests were used due to non-normal data distribution. The study found a significant positive correlation between self-esteem and perceived social support for Gen Z participants. This indicates that Gen Z individuals with higher self-esteem reported stronger support networks. However, this correlation wasn't significant for Gen Y. This suggests a potential generational difference in how social support impacts self-esteem. The study acknowledges limitations and suggests future research using longitudinal designs with larger and more representative samples could provide a more comprehensive picture. This research contributes to a growing body of

knowledge on self-esteem, social support, and their interplay across generations, paving the way for future research to create more effective support systems for young adults.

Keywords: *Generational differences in self-esteem and perceived social support, Gen-Z and Gen-Y*

Introduction

Humans are inherently social beings whose well-being is deeply intertwined with the quality of their social relationships. This study investigates the link between self-esteem and perceived social support in young adults (aged 18-45) from Gen Y (Millennials) and Gen Z. Perceived social support refers to the feeling of having a reliable network of caring people. Research suggests positive mental health is associated with both high self-esteem and strong social connections. Feeling supported by loved ones (friends, family) enhances self-worth and stability, improves mood, and aids in navigating challenges.

Numerous studies reveal a positive link between social support and self-esteem. Research on young adults (Lu et al., 2023), high school students (Maslihah, 2023), and older adults (Hutagalung & Suryadi, 2021) consistently shows that feeling supported by family, friends, and even romantic partners (Jeong, 2022) is associated with higher self-esteem. Interestingly, some research suggests a two-way street (Harris & Orth, 2020) where high self-esteem can lead to better social interactions and stronger social networks (Richter & Finn, 2021). Moreover, social support appears to act as a buffer against mental health problems (Adamczyk & Segrin, 2015) and contributes to overall well-being (Shi's, 2022).

However, the relationship between social support and self-esteem isn't always straightforward. Some studies suggest that self-esteem might be a stronger influence on perceived social support quality, particularly in adolescents (Marshall et al., 2014).

Additionally, factors like age (Jiang et al., 2018) and gender (İkiz & Çakar, 2010) can influence how people seek and perceive social support. Overall, this research highlights the complex interplay between social support and self-esteem, emphasizing their importance for mental health and well-being across different life stages.

This study addresses a research gap by focusing on young adults (Gen Y and Gen Z) during a crucial developmental period marked by significant life decisions. It aims to examine how social support networks and self-esteem interact within this specific age range and across generations.

Methodology

This study received ethical approval from JAIN University Bangalore's Department of Psychology and Institutional Ethics Committee. Participants provided written informed consent after a detailed explanation of the study's purpose and procedures. Confidentiality was assured, with data securely stored by the researcher.

A quantitative, cross-sectional design was used to explore relationships between variables at one point in time. A correlational approach examined the relationship between perceived social support and self-esteem. A sample of 181 participants (aged 18-45, cisgender) was recruited through snowball sampling, a non-probability method where existing participants refer to others who meet the criteria. Sociodemographic information was collected, followed by self-report measures to assess perceived social support and self-esteem. Inclusion criteria were age 18-45 and cisgender identity. Individuals residing outside Bangalore were excluded. Data was collected through self-report surveys measuring perceived social support and self-esteem.

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) tool measures perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others. It has high reliability and

validity. *The Rosenberg Scale of Self-Esteem* (RSES) scale measures self-esteem using a 4-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate greater self-esteem.

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) described continuous variables, while frequency and percentages described categorical variables. Non-parametric tests were used due to non-normal data distribution. The Mann-Whitney U test compare means between genders and generations for perceived social support and self-esteem. Spearman's Rho explored the relationship's strength and direction between these variables in both generations.

Results

Table 1

4.1.1 Descriptive Statistics: Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	125	69.1	69.1	69.1
	Male	56	30.9	30.9	100
	Total	181	100	100	

Referring to Table 1, the study sample consisted of 181 for this study comprising 181 participants, consisting of 125 females and 56 males, all of whom provided informed consent, reflecting their voluntary participation.

Table 2

4.1.2 Descriptive Statistics: Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Pursuing Bachelors	27	14.9	14.9	14.9
	Pursuing Graduation	27	14.9	14.9	29.8
	Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS)	68	37.6	37.6	67.4
	Master's degree (e.g. MA, MS, MEd)	52	28.7	28.7	96.1
	Doctorate or professor	7	3.9	3.9	100
	Total	181	100	100	

Referring to Table 2, Educational backgrounds varied as follows: 27 individuals pursuing a Bachelor's degree, 27 engaged in pursuing their graduation, 68 participants holding a Bachelor's degree, 52 having attained a Master's degree, and 7 individuals with a doctorate or in a professional occupation.

Table 3*4.1.3 Descriptive Statistics: Marital Status*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single (never married)	123	68	68	68
	For 4.5 Years	3	1.7	1.7	69.6
	For more than 5 Years	31	17.1	17.1	86.7
	Divorced	1	0.6	0.6	87.3
	For more than 6 Months	6	3.3	3.3	90.6
	For 1 Year	4	2.2	2.2	92.8
	For 1.5 Years	2	1.1	1.1	93.9
	For 2 Years	2	1.1	1.1	95
	For 2.5 Years	2	1.1	1.1	96.1
	For 3 Years	2	1.1	1.1	97.2
	For 3.5 Years	3	1.7	1.7	98.9
	For 4 Years	2	1.1	1.1	100
	Total	181	100	100	

Referring to Table 3, marital status, the majority of participants were single (123), while smaller numbers were reported for varying marital durations: 3 participants for 4.5 years, 31 for more than 5 years, 1 divorced individual, 6 for more than 6 months, 4 for 1 year, 2 for 1.5 years, 2 for 2 years, 2 for 2.5 years, 2 for 3 years, 3 for 3.5 years, and 2 for 4 years.

Table 4*4.1.4 Descriptive Statistics: Employment*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Unemployed and currently looking for work	18	9.9	9.9	9.9
	Employed	57	31.5	31.5	41.4
	Self-employed	8	4.4	4.4	45.9
	Student	89	49.2	49.2	95
	Homemaker	8	4.4	4.4	99.4
	Retired	1	0.6	0.6	100
	Total	181	100	100	

Referring to Table 4, the sample included 18 individuals who were unemployed and actively seeking work, 57 employed participants, 8 self-employed individuals, 89 students, 8 homemakers, and 1 retiree.

Table 5*4.1.5 Descriptive Statistics: Residence type*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Urban	130	71.8	71.8	71.8
	Rural	8	4.4	4.4	76.2
	Semi-Urban	43	23.8	23.8	100
	Total	181	100	100	

Referring to Table 5, the distribution of participants by residence type. The majority of participants (71.8%, n=130) resided in urban areas. A smaller proportion lived in semi-urban areas (23.8%, n=43), while only a small percentage (4.4%, n=8) resided in rural areas.

Table 6*4.1.6 Descriptive Statistics: Generation*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	GENZ	142	78.5	78.5	78.5
	GENY	39	21.5	21.5	100

	Total	181	100	100	
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Referring to Table 6, Generational distribution indicated a dominance of Gen-Z participants, representing 142 individuals, while Gen-Y accounted for 39 individuals.

4.2 Inferential Statistics

Table 7

4.2.1 Comparison of Total Scores between SETOTAL and MSPSSTOTAL Groups Using Mann-Whitney U Test

	SETOTAL	MSPSSTOTAL
Mann-Whitney U	1328.5	2297.5
Wilcoxon W	11481.5	12450.5
Z	-4.978	-1.628
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0.104

Referring to Table 7, it revealed a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in self-esteem scores between Gen Y and Gen Z. However, no significant difference ($p > 0.05$) was found in perceived social support scores between the generations.

Table 8

4.2.2 Correlation Between SETOTAL and MSPSSTOTAL Scores in Gen-Y

			SETOTAL	MSPSSTOTAL
Spearman's rho	SETOTAL	Correlation Coefficient	1	.320**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0
		N	181	181
	MSPSSTOTAL	Correlation Coefficient	.320**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0	.
		N	181	181
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Table 8 shows the correlation between self-esteem (SETOTAL) and perceived social support (MSPSSTOTAL) in Gen-Y. There is a no significant correlation ($\rho = .420$, $p > .001$) between self-esteem and perceived social support in Gen-Y.

Table 10**4.2.3 Correlation Between SETOTAL and MSPSSTOTAL Scores in Gen-Z**

			GENZPSS	GENZSE
Spearman's rho	GENZPSS	Correlation Coefficient	1	.311**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	143	143
	GENZSE	Correlation Coefficient	.311**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	143	143
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Table 9 shows the correlation between self-esteem (SETOTAL) and perceived social support (MSPSSTOTAL) in Gen-Z. There is a significant correlation ($\rho = .000$, $p < .001$) between self-esteem and perceived social support in Gen-Z.

Table 10**4.2.4 Correlations between SETOTAL and Subscales in Gen-Z (Significant Other, Family, Friends)**

			GENZSE	Friends Subscale	Family Subscale	Significant Other Subscale:
Spearman's rho	GENZSE	Correlation Coefficient	1	.214*	.222**	.216**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.01	0.008	0.009
		N	143	143	143	143
	Friends Subscale	Correlation Coefficient	.214*	1	.414**	.501**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.01	.	0	0
		N	143	143	143	143
	Family Subscale	Correlation Coefficient	.222**	.414**	1	.395**

		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.008	0	.	0
		N	143	143	143	143
	Significant Other Subscale:	Correlation Coefficient	.216**	.501**	.395**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.009	0	0	.
		N	143	143	143	143
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						

Table 10 shows in Gen-Z, self-esteem showed significant positive correlations ($p < .05$) with all perceived social support subscales: significant others ($\rho = .216$), family ($\rho = .222$), and friend support ($\rho = .184$). Family support had the strongest positive correlation with self-esteem among these subscales.

Table 11

4.2.5 *Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Comparison of Total Scores between MSPSSTOTAL and SETOTAL by Gender*

	MSPSSTOTAL	SETOTAL
Mann-Whitney U	3398	3131
Wilcoxon W	4994	11006
Z	-0.313	-1.134
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.754	0.257

Table 11 shows the analysis, which found no significant gender differences in perceived social support ($p = 0.754$) or self-esteem ($p = 0.257$).

Discussion of Results

This study examined self-esteem, perceived social support, and generational differences in young adults (18-45) from Gen-Y and Gen-Z. While both generations reported

similar average levels of self-esteem and social support, a key finding emerged: the relationship between these two factors differed significantly.

For Gen-Z, a positive correlation was found between self-esteem and perceived social support. This means individuals with higher self-esteem perceived stronger support from friends, family, and romantic partners. This aligns with previous research highlighting the positive influence of perceived social support on self-esteem (Lu et al., 2023; Maslihah, 2023). A strong social network may contribute to a sense of belonging, validation, and security, potentially bolstering self-esteem in Gen-Z. Interestingly, this positive correlation wasn't significant for Gen-Y. This suggests a potential generational difference in how social support impacts self-esteem.

Research by Cao et al. (2022) suggests Gen-Z might rely more on technology and online social support, whereas Gen-Y might value traditional support networks (Miftahussa'adah, 2022). The study's measures may not have fully captured the types of social support most relevant for Gen-Y.

Mărgărițoiu and Eftimie (2022) suggest a possibility of higher self-esteem in Gen-Z within a European context. Cultural norms and social environments may influence how social support is perceived and its impact on self-esteem.

Generational experiences can shape self-esteem and social support needs. Gen-Y may have grown up during a period with different social dynamics compared to Gen-Z, potentially leading to a less pronounced link between the two factors.

Limitations

The study acknowledges limitations that may affect generalizability. The sample size (181) and snowball sampling method could introduce bias. The sample skewed towards Gen-Z (78.5%) and females (69.1%), and the age range (18-45) excludes experiences of younger

adolescents and older adults. Additionally, non-normal data distribution necessitated non-parametric tests, and the cross-sectional design hinders establishing causality. Future research using longitudinal designs could provide a more comprehensive picture.

Implications

This study sheds light on generational differences in the self-esteem-social support link. Understanding these variations can inform support programs. For Gen-Z, where social connections seem to boost self-esteem, programs could focus on building strong social networks. Gen-Y programs might require a different approach to address the weaker link between social support and self-esteem. The study also highlights the importance of social support for Gen-Z's well-being, suggesting schools and mental health professionals can play a role in promoting strong social connections.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study contributes to a growing body of knowledge on self-esteem, social support, and their interplay across generations. By acknowledging the limitations and potential causes behind the observed differences, future research can build upon these findings to create more effective support systems for young adults in the future.

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