



A Study on Self Esteem and Empathy among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Empathy is putting oneself in someone else's position and feeling what they are feeling. Having empathy enables us to build those social connections. Empathy is a form of compassion, and it is important because otherwise an individual could care less about what others are going through. It is a fundamental aspect of human social interaction and plays a crucial role in building and maintaining relationships. Self- Esteem refers to an individual's evaluation of his/her worth. Self-Esteem is self- assessment; this perception and evaluation can be positive and pleasant or unpleasant. An individual with low self-esteem hides themselves from new challenges and awkward social situations while high self-esteem is generally associated with positive outcomes such as confidence, happiness, and resilience. The research aimed to study the relationship of Self-esteem and Empathy among young adults. Standardized tools were used to measure self-esteem and empathy among young adults. A total sample of 30 in the age of 18-25 years was collected. The results found out that there is an insignificant relation between Self-Esteem and Empathy. To overcome the

emerging problem of self-esteem among adults there are various ways. The first step is to identify, and then challenge your negative beliefs about yourself and then identify the positive in them. In general, positive internal dialogue is a big part of improving your self-esteem. In addition, striking up conversations with strangers is a great approach to improve your capacity for empathy. Being truthful with oneself also helps.

Keywords: Self-Esteem, Empathy, Gender difference, Young Adults.

INTRODUCTION

“Be faithful to that which exists within yourself”

Andre Gide

Young adulthood is a period of development that occurs between the age of 18 to 25 years. During this time, young adults undergo significant changes in their personal and professional lives. Many young adults are attending college or university, exploring different fields of study, and preparing for the workforce. Moreover, this stage is marked by significant changes in the personal relationships. This period is also marked by a transition from relationships with parents to more independent relationships with peers. This can be a time of great joy and fulfilment, but it is full of challenges and conflicts as individuals adjust to the demands of their present lives which lead to great stress.

Self-esteem is a state of mind, feeling and acting that denotes acceptance, respect, and self-belief. Self-esteem must come from inside and not depend on outside factors like possessions, status, or other people's acceptance. Additionally, when you have a healthy

self-esteem, a person doesn't feel the need to criticize others to feel good about yourself. Self-Esteem is typically observed as a continuous dimension ranging from high to low. However, self-esteem became generalized in the 1960s. Self-esteem is of two types; high self-esteem which could be called positive self-esteem and the other one is low self-esteem or negative self-esteem. High self-esteem is a state of feeling assured, deserving, and respected by oneself whereas negatively evaluating oneself are what lead to low self-esteem.

Self-esteem has been found to be the most dominant and powerful predictor of happiness (Furnham & Cheng, 2000). The study explores the relationship between self-esteem, empathy and cyber bullying among young adults. The author presents a comprehensive review of literature on the subject, examining research on self-esteem, empathy, and cyber bullying. The literature review establishes that self-esteem is an important factor in cyber bullying behavior. Low self-esteem has been found to be associated with higher levels of cyber bullying perpetration and victimization. The author also explores the impact of empathy on cyber bullying, noting that individuals who are more empathic tend to be less likely to engage in cyber bullying behaviors. The author suggests that future research should explore the impact of interventions aimed at improving Self-esteem and empathy on cyber bullying behavior (Balakrishnan & Fernandez, 2018).

A research study was conducted by Srivastava and Agarwal (2013) on 120 young adults who were selected from Lucknow city (60 Males and 60 Females). The data was collected using a self-administered interview schedule along with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale. After analyzing, the results found that male have better self-esteem than females. Also, there was a non-significant difference between gender and self-esteem which states that self-esteem was not influenced by gender.

The investigation of the relationship between social Self-Esteem and family functioning in young adults is done by (Gorbett & Kruczek, 2008) where the result found out that birth order and gender were non-significant. Dan and Raz (2015) examined a study on ADHD, Self-Esteem, and Test Anxiety among adults. A study was done on females diagnosed with ADHD and controlled with ADHD. The result found out that participants with ADHD exhibited significantly higher levels of TA (Test Anxiety) and lower level of Self-Esteem compared with controls. They also concluded that interventions for ADHD should include components aimed at reducing Test Anxiety.

A research study conducted by Khalid and Naqvi (2016) examined the relationship between pet attachment and empathy among young adults of age range 18 to 26 years from both public and private universities. CENSHARE pet attachment survey (Holcomb et al., 1985) was used to measure pet attachment and Multidimensional Scale and Emotional Empathy (Caruso & Mayer, 1998) was used to measure empathy. The result showed a significant positive relationship between pet attachment and empathy. Moreover, the result showed women scoring higher on pet attachment and empathy as compared to men.

A cross-cultural study was conducted to examine differences in self-compassion and empathy among Chinese and American undergraduates. However, significant differences were found in self-kindness, common humanity, isolation, and over-identification. American students reported significantly higher scores on the Fantasy and Empathic concern. Gender differences were stable across groups (Birkett, 2014).

Beadle et al. (2015) investigated age-related differences in relationship among empathy and prosocial behavior. 24 younger and 24 older healthy adults were observed. The results found that older adults showed greater prosocial behavior due to the empathy induction than

younger adults. There was a positive association between state emotional empathy ratings and prosocial behavior in older, but not in younger adults, and preliminary evidence for higher state emotional empathy levels in older adults with higher trait cognitive empathy.

Self Esteem

According to Rosenberg (1965) “self-esteem is one’s positive or negative attitude towards oneself and one’s evaluation of one’s own thoughts and feelings overall in relation to oneself.”

Self-Esteem is regarded as a personal psychological characteristic relating to self- judgment based on one’s values about humans (Alesi et al., 2012). Self-Esteem is defined as “a global barometer of self-evaluation involving cognitive appraisals about general self-worth and affective experiences of the self and that are linked to these appraisals” (Murphy et al., 2005).

Wang and Ollendick (2001) defined self-esteem as “an evaluation of oneself followed by an emotional reaction towards oneself.” The evaluative and affective elements are present in all extent definitions and theories of self-esteem. “Self-Esteem is a positive or negative orientation towards oneself, and an overall evaluation of once worth or value” (Caprara et al., 2010).

According to Nupur and Mahapatro (2016) a cross-sectional study between gender and self-esteem was conducted on 203 young adults of age group 20-25 years studying and residing in Raipur, UP in India. The data was analyzed by using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale and the result found out that men are higher in self- esteem than women. They also concluded that policy efforts should address sex specific needs to elaborate further on the areas of gender inequalities.

Szcześniak et al. (2021) examined the correlation between self-esteem and life-satisfaction. The main goal of the present study was to consider self-promotion and self-deprecation as potential mediators between life satisfaction and self-esteem. The data of 328 young adults were collected in Poland through an anonymous self-administered battery of questionnaires on the internet platform by completing the Satisfaction and Life Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Self-Presentation Style Questionnaire. A high and positive correlation coefficient was obtained between self-esteem and life-satisfaction. The level of self-esteem correlated positively with the style of self-promotion and negatively with the style of self-deprecation. Similarly, life satisfaction was positively associated with self-promotion and negatively with self-deprecation. Moreover, both self-promotion and self-deprecation acted as mediators between life-satisfaction and self-esteem.

Sprecher et al. (2013) did a study to examine the joint effects of race and gender on young adults in the Midwestern U.S. University from a large sample of 7552 students. Consistent with prior research, the result found that men had higher self-esteem than Whites, Hispanics, and Asians. Also no gender differences were found among blacks and that the higher self-esteem of blacks in relation to other races was greater in women than in men. The effects of race and gender did not change controlling for social class and other demographic variables, did not differ across domains of self-esteem, and were not affected by period.

Empathy

According to Gagan (1983), empathy refers to “a skill to identify one’s emotions on one hand, while transmitting them on the other.” According to the research, empathy plays a significant role in a therapeutic relationship.

The term “empathy” was coined over one hundred years ago by Titchener, an adaptation of the German word “Einfühlung” (Wispé, 1986). The discussion of empathy even dates to the beginnings of philosophical thought (Stotland et al., 1978).

Frans de Waal (2008) defined empathy as “the capacity to be affected by and share the emotional state of another, assess the reason for said individual’s state and finally identify with that individual by adopting his or her perspective.” Empathy generally refers to “being able to accurately perceive the emotional state of others and includes the consequences that this capability has on the individual” (Spreng et al., 2009).

Shima et al. (2021) conducted a study that aimed to clarify the relationship between levels of physical activity and self-reported empathy participants were divided into low, moderate, high physical activity groups. Levels of physical activity in a usual week were measured based on the SV-IPAQ and the scores for cognitive and affective empathy were measured based on QCAE. The results found that people with moderate or high physical activity level showed significantly higher self-reported cognitive empathy compared to people with low physical activity level. Physical activity level in the usual week showed a significant positive correlation with self-reported cognitive empathy scores but not with self-reported affective empathy scores. Moreover, findings imply that an increase in physical activity contributes to better cognitive empathy in healthy young adults.

The study sought to determine the nature of the relationship between internal sage and empathy among 1000 young adults. The result showed that, in general, going online had very small negative impacts upon cognitive and affective real-world empathy and actually improved time spent in face-to-face communication. Also, virtual empathy scores were lower than real-world empathy in both females and males. Finally, both real-world empathy and

virtual empathy are positively related to social support, but real-world empathy demonstrated a 5 to 6 times stronger relationship (Carrier, 2015).

Research on the relationship between age and self-reported empathy by Schieman and Gundy (2000) the sample of 1567 individuals from 1985 communities from south-western Ontario was taken. The result shows that patterns in socioeconomic status, dispositional attributes contribute more to the negative association between age and empathy. Conversely, a more positive balance of interpersonal relationships and greater religious involvement among older adults conceals about 20 percent of the size of the age and empathy association. Moreover, findings show that women report significantly more empathy and that the gender gap closes at older ages. Also, higher education significantly moderates the negative age-empathy association. Collectively, the finding highlights the emotional significance of age-associated personal and social factors over the life course.

Methodology

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to investigate the correlations of self-esteem and empathy among young adults.

Hypothesis

- It is expected that there will be a positive significant correlation between self-esteem and empathy.
- There will be no gender difference in empathy.
- There will be no gender difference found in self-esteem.
- It is expected that there will be a significant impact of self-esteem on empathy.

Sample

A total sample of 30 young adults in the age range of 18 to 25 years was collected from Tricity (Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula).

Measures

The following standardized tests and tools were used:

- **Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ):** The questionnaire was developed by Spreng et al. (2009). The scale has 16 items. It measures empathy as a primarily emotional process. The TEQ demonstrated the strong convergent validity, correlating positively with behavioral measures of social decoding, self-report measures of empathy, and negatively with the measure of autism symptomatology. The responses are given on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4(always). Some items were reverse scored. It includes questions such as “When someone else is feeling excited, I tend to get excited too”, “Other people’s misfortunes do not disturb me a great deal”, “It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully” and so on.
- **Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale (RSES):** The questionnaire was developed by Rosenberg (1965). It is a brief 10-item scale. It measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. The responses are given on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 3(strongly agree) to 0 (strongly disagree). The scale ranges from 0-30. Scores between 15 and 25 are within normal range; scores below 15 suggest low self-esteem. It includes questions such as, “I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others”, “I feel that I have a

number of good qualities”, “All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure” and so on.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through Google forms. Each participant was thanked for their cooperation. Standardised psychological tests were administered to the participants.

Analysis of Data

Scoring for all the given tests was done as per the scoring instructions given in the manuals. The raw scores were tabulated and subjected to various statistical analyses. Keeping in view the objectives of the study, statistical analysis Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation Analysis was conducted. Correlation analysis was carried out to test the relationship between the variables. Before carrying out statistical tests, the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were checked. The responses that emerged through the semi structured interview schedule were analysed qualitatively and the results are presented in the form of tables, bar graphs and pie-charts.

Results

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation scores of 30 young adults with variables self-esteem and empathy.

	Self esteem	Empathy
N	30	30
Mean	19.1	44.1
Standard deviation	4.09	6.45

Table 2

Correlation Matrix of self-esteem and empathy among 30 young adults

	Self esteem	Empathy
Self esteem	—	
Empathy	0.087	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .001$**

Discussion of Results

The results reveal that there is no significant positive correlation between self-esteem and empathy ($r = 0.087$) for the total sample. The result of the present study rejects the hypothesis that there will be a positive significant correlation in Self- Esteem and Empathy. Results of the present study contrast with the study conducted by Supervia et al. (2023). The study aimed to analyze the relationship between empathy, self-esteem and satisfaction with life in an ex-post facto descriptive design. Data of 1117 adolescent students was collected using Basic Empathy Scale (BES), The Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSE), and The Satisfaction with Life scale (SWLS). The results showed that there is a significant correlation between self-esteem and empathy, self-esteem and satisfaction with life variables.

The pattern of results is inconsistent with the previous findings of Huang et al. (2019) who conducted a study on a sample of 1690 medical students from 3 institutes. The study examined the relationship between Self-Esteem and Empathy to explore other possible methods to improve their empathy. Descriptive analysis, Independent sample T-Test, One-way ANOVA, and Linear Regression were used to analyze the data. The results found out that there is a significant correlation between self-esteem and empathy.

Also, evidence from a previous study by Ala et al. (2019) on 935 students from various schools, investigating social-emotional health, empathy and self-esteem, a positive correlation between the adolescents' social emotional health and their self-esteem and empathy was reported. The findings of the present study can help us to work with young adults so that by increasing their empathy, which is teachable, we can also aim to increase their self-esteem. This can ensure a happy and healthy life for young adults, as they move forward in their life.

Conclusion

The aim of this investigation was to study self-esteem and empathy among young adults where empathy was putting oneself in someone else's position and feeling what they were feeling. Having empathy enables us to build those social connections. Empathy was a form of compassion, and it was important because otherwise an individual could care less about what others were going through. Self-esteem refers to an individual's evaluation of his/her worth. Self-Esteem was self-assessment; this perception and evaluation was positive and pleasant or unpleasant. An individual with low self-esteem hides himself from new challenges and awkward social situations. The research aimed to study the relationship of Self-Esteem and Empathy among young adults. A total sample of 30 in the age of 18-25 years was collected. The results had found that there was an insignificant positive relation between self-esteem and empathy.

Suggestions

People's mental health and the quality of their connections with others benefits from their efforts to develop a healthy sense of self-worth and social empathy. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. It is an important aspect of emotional intelligence and plays a crucial role in building and maintaining positive relationships. Here are some ways to improve empathy by practice active listening as it involves giving one's full attention to the speaker and focusing on their words and emotions. It also involves asking questions to clarify and understand their perspective. By practicing active listening, one can better understand and connect with others. Reading fiction can increase empathy by exposing one's to different perspectives and experiences. Fictional stories can help one understand how others feel and think in different situations. Moreover, by practicing mindfulness which involves being present in the moment and focusing on one's thoughts and emotions. By practicing mindfulness, one can increase one's awareness of emotions and better understand

the emotions of others. By volunteering one can increase empathy by exposing one to different people and situations. It can help one to understand the challenges others face and the impact of one's actions on others.

Self-compassion entails being patient and forgiving with oneself, just as one would be with a close friend. This has the potential to boost confidence and quieten critical thoughts. Negative thoughts and beliefs that contribute to low self-esteem or a lack of empathy should be identified and challenged and should be replaced with optimistic and practical ideas. Boosting one's sense of self-worth can be as simple as setting goals one can achieve and working towards them. Mindfulness training entails paying attention in the here and now, without judgment, to one's internal experiences (emotions and thoughts). This has the potential to boost self-respect and compassion by increasing one's awareness of, and decreasing one's negative thoughts about, oneself. Doing good deeds for other people will help one feel more connected to them and increase one's capacity for empathy. A sense of accomplishment and contribution can do wonders for one's sense of self-worth. One should be encouraged to help in overcoming poor self-esteem or a lack of empathy, talking to a therapist or counsellor might be a great first step. It's important to keep in mind that developing higher levels of both self-esteem and empathy requires time and work. An individual's emotional health and the quality of their interactions with others might benefit from the following practices: self-compassion; challenging negative thoughts; goal setting; mindfulness; acts of kindness; seeking support.

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