

Self-Esteem Variations among Undergraduates: The Role of Gender and Parental Educational Background

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the variations in self-esteem among undergraduate students, focusing on the influence of gender and parental educational background. Self-esteem, a critical component of psychological well-being and academic performance, is examined through a survey conducted on a diverse sample of undergraduate students. A total of two hundred and thirty-three (233) participants participated from the University of Uyo. Their ages range from 18 - 39, with a mean age of 23.66 (in years). The Rosenberg Self-esteem scale (RSES) Rosenberg, M. (1965) and basic demographics instruments were adopted in this study. The study utilized a cross sectional research survey design and the statistics used in analyzing the result was the t-test analysis. Two hypotheses were postulated and tested; the first hypotheses which stated that male undergraduate students will significantly have a higher self-esteem than their female counterparts were accepted. The second hypotheses which states that parent's educational attainment will significantly impact on the self-esteem of the undergraduate students was confirmed. The first hypothesis means that male undergraduates fair better in self-esteem construct than their female counterparts. The second hypothesis implies that undergraduates whose parents had high educational attainment reported more self-esteem than undergraduates whose parents had low educational attainment. Parents and guidance should endeavour to gain the at least a first degree to boost their wards or children's educational zest and boost their self esteem subsequently.

Key words: Self-esteem, career aspiration, psychological wellbeing, and parental educational background

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INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem can be seen as the overall evaluation of oneself in either a positive or negative manner. It is a critical psychological construct influencing numerous aspects of an individual's life (Malbi & Reasoner, 2011). It encompasses perceptions of one's competence and worthiness (Orth & Robins, 2019). The significance of self-esteem is particularly pronounced during university years, a period marked by substantial personal, social, and academic development. High self-esteem has been associated with better academic performance, healthier social interactions, and improved mental health (Zeigler-Hill, 2021). Conversely, low self-esteem can lead to adverse outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and academic underachievement (Sowislo & Orth, 2019).

Given the important role of self-esteem in student success and well-being, understanding the factors that influence it is of paramount importance. One influential factor is parental educational background. Research has shown a positive correlation between parental education levels and children's self-esteem (Thompson, 2020). Parents with higher educational attainment often provide a more supportive and stimulating home environment, promoting their children's academic success and personal development (Räty, 2019). These parents are likely to have higher expectations for their children's academic performance and to serve as role models, fostering a sense of competence and self-worth in their offspring (Dumont et al., 2020).

Additionally, higher parental education is frequently associated with better access to educational resources, enhancing a child's learning experiences and contributing to their self-esteem (Sirin, 2021).

Self-esteem, a crucial component of psychological well-being, is influenced by a myriad of factors, including substance use, gender, and parental educational background. This Study delves into the intricate relationships among these elements, exploring how they shape self-esteem and contribute to the overall development of individuals, particularly adolescents and university students.

The knowledge, attitudes, and practices surrounding substance use also play a critical role in how young individuals perceive themselves. Ajao (2014) highlights that university students' engagement with substances can adversely affect their self-worth, leading to a decline in self-esteem. The Drug Use Disorders Identification Test (DUDIT), as discussed by Berman et al. (2003), provides insights into the correlation between substance use disorders and self-esteem levels, emphasizing the negative impact of such disorders on individuals' self-perception. Social comparison processes, as theorized by Festinger (1954), further elucidate how individuals evaluate their self-worth. By comparing themselves to others, individuals assess their abilities and achievements, which significantly influence their self-esteem (Rutter, 1987).

This process is particularly relevant in academic settings, where students constantly measure their performance against their peers.

The relationship between hazardous drinking and self-esteem is well-documented. Nnam et al. (2021) indicate that substance abuse among students not only leads to manipulative behaviors but also negatively impacts their self-esteem. Similarly, Mariani and Williams (2021) explore adolescents' perceived risk of harm from substance use, such as cannabis, and how these perceptions influence their self-esteem. A higher perceived risk often correlates with lower self-esteem, highlighting the psychological burden of substance use awareness.

Gender differences in substance use patterns are profound and have significant implications for self-esteem. Studies by Peltzer and Ramlagan (2009) and Kyei and Ramagoma (2013) reveal distinct trends in alcohol consumption between male and female university students in South Africa. These differences in behavior and societal expectations contribute to variations in self-esteem among genders. Moreover, gender roles and parental influence play a critical role in shaping self-esteem. Alhyas et al. (2015) suggest that parental education and interaction impact adolescents' self-perception differently based on gender. Boys and girls may receive varying levels of support and expectations from their parents, affecting their self-esteem and overall development.

The educational background of parents is a significant determinant of adolescents' attitudes towards substance use and their self-esteem. Haddad et al. (2010) emphasize that higher parental educational levels are associated with better awareness and healthier attitudes towards substance use, which in turn positively influence self-esteem. Educated parents are more likely to instill values and behaviors that promote psychological well-being in their children. Parental education also impacts academic and career aspirations, which are closely linked to self-esteem. Eccles et al. (1983) discuss how parental expectations and educational backgrounds shape students' academic behaviors and self-perception. Higher parental education often leads to higher aspirations and better academic performance, boosting self-esteem.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the various environmental factors influencing self-esteem. This model emphasizes the importance of family, peers, and educational settings in shaping an individual's development. Similarly, Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory highlights the role of early attachment experiences with caregivers in the development of self-esteem. Secure attachments lead to higher self-esteem, while insecure attachments can contribute to lower self-esteem and potential substance use issues. Cultural and societal influences also play a crucial role in shaping self-esteem. Grace (2006) discusses how medical professionals' attitudes towards substance abuse reflect broader societal views, impacting individuals' self-esteem and their willingness to seek help. Societal stigma associated with substance use can further diminish self-esteem, creating a vicious cycle of psychological distress and substance abuse. Stress from academic and social pressures is another critical factor affecting self-esteem. Iloma et al. (2017) explore the dynamics of drug use and stress among Nigerian students, highlighting how stress can lead to substance use as a coping mechanism, further impacting self-esteem. Effective stress management and healthy coping strategies are essential for maintaining high self-esteem and preventing substance abuse.

Self-esteem is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including substance use, gender, parental educational background, and broader ecological and cultural contexts. (Umukoro et al.) Understanding these influences is crucial for developing interventions to enhance self-esteem and reduce substance use among adolescents and university students. By addressing the underlying factors and promoting healthy behaviors and attitudes, we can foster a supportive environment that nurtures psychological well-being and positive self-esteem. The exploration of these dynamics is integral to the ongoing discourse on self-esteem variations among undergraduates, emphasizing the role of gender and parental educational background in shaping the psychological landscape of young adults. (Schmidt, 2003)

Gender is another critical factor influencing self-esteem. It can be seen as the range of physical, biological, mental, and behavioral characteristics that differentiate between masculinity and femininity (Haig, 2004). It is a social category system based on biological differences. It is a central topic of discussion and research worldwide, particularly among academics and policymakers in Nigeria. Gender differences in self-esteem have been widely studied, with many researchers reporting significant disparities between males and females (Orth et al., 2020). Traditionally, males have been found to exhibit higher self-esteem compared to females, a trend observed across different age groups and cultural contexts (Bleidorn et al., 2019). These differences are often attributed to societal expectations, gender roles, and varying experiences during upbringing. Males may receive more encouragement to pursue ambitious goals and display assertiveness, traits associated with higher self-esteem (Robins & Trzesniewski, 2020). Conversely, females might experience societal pressures that undermine their self-worth, such as emphasis on physical appearance and relational qualities (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2018). Differences in academic performance between genders likely contribute to disparities in the allocation of cognitive roles in the workforce. Gender is often asserted to impact the development and expression of self-esteem. Several researchers have found significant differences between males and females (Sar Abadani Tafreshi, 2006). However, Hossaini (2002) indicated that gender is not a predictor of self-esteem among pre-university students.

The interplay between gender, parental educational background, and self-esteem is complex and multifaceted. While higher parental education generally contributes to better self-esteem, the impact of this factor may differ between males and females. Some studies suggest that the benefits of high parental education on self-esteem are more pronounced in females, potentially mitigating the gender disparity in self-esteem levels (Gan et al., 2020). However, other research indicates that males continue to exhibit higher self-esteem regardless of parental education, highlighting the need for a detailed understanding of these dynamics (McMullin & Cairney, 2021).

Given evolving societal norms and educational practices, it is crucial to revisit and update our understanding of these relationships. Recent studies have provided new insights into the factors shaping self-esteem among university students, reflecting changes in family structures, educational policies, and gender roles (Orth & Robins, 2019). By examining the variations in self-esteem among undergraduates through the lenses of gender and parental educational background, this research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and inform strategies for supporting student development. This comprehensive approach will help

educators, counselors, and policymakers create targeted interventions to enhance self-esteem and promote academic and personal success among university students.

Self-esteem is important in understanding performance, as highlighted by Gebauer et al. (2008). High self-esteem enhances the development of an individual's full potential across all ages, particularly among youth engaged in academic pursuits. It is vital for proficiency in various fields, impacting competence and overall development. Students with high self-esteem set ambitious goals and pursue them with determination, commitment, and resilience, maintaining hope even in the face of setbacks (Grantham & Ford, 2003). During university years, self-esteem significantly influences students' success and well-being, affecting their academic performance, social interactions, and mental health. Understanding this relationship is essential for educators, counselors, and policymakers aiming to support students in their academic and personal development. Studies indicate a significant positive correlation between parents' education and students' self-esteem (Andrea C. & Huan W., 2011; Sepahi et al., 2015). It can be hypothesized that a parent's educational attainment would influence their children academic performance and achievement, subsequently boosting the child's self-esteem at the undergraduate level. Parents with advanced education often have better resources to support their children's educational journeys, fostering an environment conducive to high self-esteem (Davis-Kean, 2005). They are also more likely to engage in positive parenting practices, such as providing emotional support and encouraging independence, which are crucial for the development of self-worth (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). This support can be especially influential during adolescence and young adulthood when individuals are forming their identities and self-concepts (Prakash, 2021).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES: This study aims to:

1. Investigate how parental educational background influences university students' self-esteem.
2. Explore gender differences in self-esteem among university students and analyze these differences within the context of parental educational background.
3. Assess the combined impact of parental educational background and gender on self-esteem exploring their interactions and collective influence.

HYPOTHESES

1. Male undergraduate students will significantly have a higher self-esteem than their female counterparts.
2. Parent's educational attainment will significantly impact on the self-esteem of the undergraduate students.

METHODOLOGY

Design and participants

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design conducted at the University of Uyo and Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, both located in the capital of Akwa Ibom State. Participants included two hundred and thirty-three (233) students, purposively sampled and recruited for the study. The sample consisted of one hundred and seventeen (117) males, representing 50.21%, and one hundred and sixteen (116) females, representing 49.79%. Their ages ranged from 18 to 39, with a mean age of 23.66 and a standard deviation of 4.61. Regarding marital status, the majority were single (160, 62.2%), followed by married individuals (51, 21.9%), those who reported being separated (17, 7.3%), divorced (4, 1.7%), and one widow (0.4%). Descriptive results of participants' location of residence showed that 175 (75.1%) lived in urban areas, while 58 (24.9%) lived in rural areas.

Instrument and procedure

This study utilized one standardized instrument for data collection: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), a widely used self-report instrument for evaluating individual self-esteem developed by sociologist Morris Rosenberg in 1965. The scale consists of 10 items measuring global self-worth by capturing both positive and negative feelings about the self, scored on a 4-point scale (Strongly Agree = 0, Agree = 1, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 3). The simplicity and quick administration of this scale make it a popular choice in both clinical and research settings for assessing self-esteem. Additionally, the questionnaire included demographic information such as age, gender, marital status, and locality. For the sampling process, all faculties were listed, written on pieces of paper, folded, and placed inside a box, four at a time. The researchers then randomly selected one faculty at a time, ensuring equal chance for selection. This method resulted in the selection of three faculties from the University of Uyo: Arts, Pharmacy, and Social Sciences. The same process was applied at the polytechnic, selecting the faculties of Engineering and Languages. The researchers, assisted by two research assistants from the respective institutions, administered the questionnaires. A total of 280 questionnaires were distributed, with necessary introductions and explanations about the study's academic purpose and confidentiality assurances provided to the students in their lecture halls. Of these, 32 questionnaires were not returned, and 15 were filled incorrectly, leaving 233 valid questionnaires for data analysis, representing a response rate of 83.21%. To investigate the impact of gender and parents' educational attainment on undergraduates' self-esteem, both

descriptive and inferential statistics were employed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 20. Descriptive statistics included means, standard deviations, percentages, and correlation coefficients, while inferential statistics involved the use of T-tests to test the study hypotheses.

RESULTS

Descriptive results in the table 1) shows that the age of participants ranged from 18 to 39 years with a mean age of 23.66 years and standard deviation of 4.61. Male undergraduates were 117 (50.2%) and female undergraduates were 116 (49.8%). Furthermore, marital status of participants shows that 160 (68.7%) were single, married undergraduates were 51 (21.9%), separated undergraduates were 17 (7.3%), those divorced were 4 (1.7%) and widowed participant was 1 (0.4%). Localities of undergraduates were examined and the outcome indicated that those who reside in rural area were 58 (24.9%) and those who reside in urban areas were 175 (75.1%). The correlation matrix results in (Table 2) revealed that educational attainment was negatively related to age ($r = -.18$; $p < 0.01$); while self-esteem was positively associated with gender ($r = .18$; $p < 0.05$), marital status ($r = .13$; $p < 0.05$) and educational attainment ($r = .22$; $p < 0.05$).

Hypothesis One: Male undergraduate Students will significantly have a higher self-esteem than their female counterparts.

The independent subject t-test presented in (Table 3) shows significant difference between male and female undergraduates on self-esteem [$t(231) = -2.39$, $p < 0.05$]. This was corroborated by the mean scores as male undergraduates reported higher mean scores on self-esteem than female undergraduates ($x = 61.62$ vs. 54.84). The meaning of this is that that male undergraduates fair better in self-esteem construct than their female counterparts. Therefore, the first hypothesis which stated that male undergraduate students will significantly have a higher self-esteem than their female counterparts was accepted.

Hypothesis Two: Parent's educational attainment will significantly impact on the self- Esteem of the undergraduate Students

Table 4 presents the results of an independent samples t-test, revealing a significant difference in self-esteem scores among undergraduates based on their parents' educational attainment [$t(231) = 1.09$, $p < 0.05$]. This analysis categorizes parents' educational attainment into two groups: low (no formal education, primary, and secondary education) and high (college, diploma, degree, and post-graduate education). The mean self-esteem scores for undergraduates with parents in the high

Table 1: Summary of frequencies and percentages of demographic variables among undergraduate students (N = 233).

Demographics		N	%
Age		233	100.0
Minimum	18 years		
Maximum	39 years		
Mean age	23.66 years		
Standard Deviation	4.61		
Gender			
Male		117	50.2
Female		116	49.8
Marital Status			
Single		160	68.7
Married		51	21.9
Separated		17	7.3
Divorced		4	1.7
Widowed		1	0.4
Locality			
Rural		58	24.9
Urban		175	75.1
Total		233	100

Table 2: Summary of zero-order correlation matrix of study variables in exploring the association of demographic factors and key study variables in the study

Variables	Age	GE	MS	LO	EA	SE
Age	1					
GE	-0.08	1				
MS	0.02	0.04	1			
LO	-0.02	-0.02	-0.05	1		
EA	-0.18**	-0.06	-0.09	0.03	1	
SE	0.06	0.18*	0.13*	-0.03	0.22**	1

Note: GE = Gender; MS = Marital Status; LO = Locality; EA = Educational Attainment; SE = Self-Esteem. *Correlation significant at the 0.05 level, **Correlation significant at the 0.01 level

Table 3: Summary table of independent t-test showing the difference between male and female undergraduates on their self-esteem scores

Criterion	Gender	N	Mean	Std	Df	T	P
Self-esteem	Male	117	61.62	22.11	231	-2.39	<0.05
	Female	116	54.84	24.03			

educational attainment group were 64.34, while the mean scores for those with parents in the low educational attainment group were 58.08. This indicates that undergraduates with parents who had higher educational attainment reported higher self-esteem than those whose parents had lower educational attainment. Consequently, the second hypothesis, which stated that parents'

educational attainment would significantly impact the self-esteem of undergraduate students, was confirmed.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to explore the impact of various factors on the self-esteem of undergraduates, with a particular

Table 4: Summary of independent t-test showing the difference between the levels of educational attainment on self-esteem scores of undergraduates

Criterion	Educational attainment	N	Mean	Std	Df	T	P
Self-esteem	High	122	64.34	25.29	231	1.09	<0.05
	Low	111	58.08	23.46			

focus on the influence of gender, parents' educational attainment, school-related factors such as teachers and peer activities, and demographic factors including age. Conducted at the University of Uyo and Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, the research sought to understand how these elements interplay to shape students' perceptions of their self-worth. Data collection involved a total of 233 students from the University of Uyo, who responded to a partially structured and open-ended questionnaire. The respondents were selected using simple random sampling and systematic sampling methods. The primary objectives of the study were to determine whether male gender significantly correlates with higher self-esteem compared to female gender and to assess the impact of parents' educational attainment on the self-esteem of undergraduate students. The findings revealed several key insights. Firstly, male students reported a higher mean score in self-esteem, suggesting that male undergraduates tend to have higher self-esteem compared to their female counterparts. This difference highlights the potential influence of gender on self-esteem levels among undergraduates. Additionally, the study found that age has an effect on self-esteem, indicating that as students grow older, their self-perceptions may evolve.

Another significant finding was the impact of parents' educational attainment on students' self-esteem. Students whose parents had higher educational attainment reported higher self-esteem. These students often felt more motivated and were driven to achieve academic excellence, making their parents and teachers proud. Teachers, in turn, recognized their efforts by providing rewards and encouragement, further boosting their self-esteem. Conversely, students with lower self-esteem often linked it to their parents having lower educational attainment or not being educated at all, suggesting a strong correlation between parental education and students' self-worth.

Based on these findings, the study drew several conclusions. The gender of undergraduates significantly impacts their self-esteem, both positively and negatively. Recognition of an individual's self-worth plays a crucial role in their motivation and academic success. Furthermore, the educational attainment of parents is a critical factor in shaping students' self-esteem. Students who feel valued and supported by their parents' educational achievements are more likely to strive for academic excellence and maintain a higher self-esteem.

In summary, this study underscores the importance of gender, age, and parents' educational attainment in influencing the self-esteem of undergraduates. It highlights the need for supportive environments that recognize and nurture students' self-worth, encouraging them to achieve their full potential academically and personally.

The study's findings revealed significant insights into the impact of parents' educational attainment on the self-esteem of undergraduates. The analysis utilized a t-test to examine the mean difference in self-esteem between students whose parents had high educational attainment and those with low educational attainment. For this categorization, parents with no formal education, primary, or secondary education were classified under low educational attainment, while those with college, diploma, degree, or postgraduate education were classified as having high educational attainment. The results showed a significant difference in mean scores, with students from high educational attainment backgrounds scoring 64.34 compared to 58.08 for those from low educational attainment backgrounds. This finding confirmed the second hypothesis, which posited that parents' educational attainment would significantly impact the self-esteem of undergraduate students.

Based on these findings and conclusions, several recommendations are proposed. Parents' educational attainment can significantly influence the self-esteem development of undergraduates for multiple reasons. Firstly, parents serve as primary role models, and their educational achievements shape the perceived importance of education within the family. Higher levels of parental education often create an environment that values learning and academic success. This positive atmosphere can enhance the self-esteem of undergraduates, as they are more likely to perceive their educational pursuits as significant and worthwhile.

Secondly, the level of support and guidance undergraduates receive is affected by parental educational attainment. Parents with higher educational backgrounds are typically better equipped to offer academic assistance, mentorship, and encouragement. Such a support system is crucial for the development of self-esteem, as students feel more capable and valued when they have a network of individuals who understand and appreciate their academic challenges.

Furthermore, parental educational attainment influences the expectations placed on undergraduates.

Parents who have achieved higher levels of education often have higher expectations for their children's academic performance. While this can create pressure, it also motivates students to strive for excellence. Meeting or exceeding these expectations fosters a sense of accomplishment, thereby boosting their self-esteem. In conclusion, parents' educational attainment plays a vital role in shaping the self-esteem of undergraduates. It does so by instilling values and importance on education within the family, providing a supportive environment, and setting high expectations that drive academic achievement. The positive impact of parental involvement and support in education is instrumental in enhancing the confidence and self-worth of undergraduates, leading to better academic and personal outcomes

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