

THE IMPACT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS ON SELF-ESTEEM OF SUDANESE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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PSİKOLOJİK GERİLİMİN SUDANLI ORTAOKUL ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN ÖZSAYGISI ÜZERİNE ETKİSİ

Öz

Psikolojik gerilimler ve özsaygı, herkesin hayatının bazı dönemlerinde başa çıkmak zorunda olduğu yaygın konulardır. Bu makalenin amacı, psikolojik gerilimler ile özsaygı arasında bir ilişki varsa bunu keşfetmektir. Bu çalışma 350 Sudanlı ortaokul öğrencisi üzerinde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcılar, Sudan'ın Gezira eyaletinde bulunan Al. Kamleen bölgesinde yer alan ortaokul öğrencileridir. Katılımcılar, psikolojik gerilim ve özsaygıları ölçülmek amacıyla incelenmiştir. Katılımcıların psikolojik gerilim ve özsaygılarını ölçmek için Fontana & Rida Abouserie Psikolojik Gerilim Ölçeği ve Rosenberg Özsaygı Ölçeği (RSES; 1965) kullanılmıştır. Deneklerin psikolojik gerilim ve özsaygılarını incelemek için Pearson korelasyon tekniği kullanılmıştır. Negatif önemli bir ilişki belirlenmiştir ($r = 0.64-$, $p < .001$). Psikolojik gerilim, özsaygı ile ilikilidir. Psikolojik gerilimde, cinsiyet açısından bayanlar ve yerleşim yeri açısından da şehirde ikamet edenler lehine istatistiksel açıdan önemli farklılıklar vardır. Aynı zamanda özsaygıda da cinsiyet açısından bayanlar ve yerleşim yeri açısından da şehirde ikamet edenler lehine istatistiksel açıdan önemli farklılıklar vardır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ortaokul, Psikolojik Gerilimler, Özsaygı.



Abstract

Psychological Stress and self-esteem are common issues that everyone has had to cope with at some time in their lives. The purpose of this study was to discover if there is a correlation between Psychological stress and self-esteem. (350) Sudanese secondary school students were used for this study. The participants were secondary school students attending Al. Kamleen Locality, located in Gezira State-Sudan. Participants were surveyed to measure their psychological stress and self-esteem. Psychological stress scale for Fontana & Rida Abouserie, and Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES;1965) were used to measure the participants' psychological stress, and self-esteem. A Pearson correlation was calculated examining the relationship between subjects' psychological stress and self-esteem. A negative significant correlation was found ($r = 0.64-$, $p < .001$).

Psychological stress was related to self-esteem. In Psychological stress, there are statistical significant differences due to gender, in favor of females, and due to residence, in favor of urban. In Self-esteem, also, there are statistical significant differences due to gender, in favor of females, and due to residence, in favor of urban.

Keywords: Secondary students, Psychological stresses, Self-Esteem.



Introduction

Psychological stress, as most of psychological disorders, which face the individual, and affect his adaptation with the society. The ability of individuals to function effectively in dealing with life challenges has been a topic of interest in psychology (Phinney & Haas, 2003). One of life challenging for many of today's young people (students) is the affection of psychological stress on their self-esteem at secondary schools. In general, studying at secondary schools is a stressful time for most students in Sudan. This is the time when most young adults are struggling with their new found freedom and negotiating developmental tasks, focusing on interpersonal relationships and juggling that with academic concerns (Beard, Elmore & Lange, 1982).

1- Psychological Stress.

In psychology, ***stress*** is a feeling of strain and pressure. Symptoms may include a sense of being overwhelmed, feelings of anxiety, overall irritability, insecurity, nervousness, social withdrawal, loss of appetite, depression, panic attacks, exhaustion, high or low blood pressure, skin eruptions or rashes, insomnia, lack of sexual desire (sexual dysfunction), migraine, gastrointestinal difficulties (constipation or diarrhea), and for women, menstrual symptoms. It may also cause more serious conditions such as heart problems. Also, experimental research which has been performed on animals, also displayed results relating to stress and negative effects on the body. It has been shown that stress contributes to the initiation and development of specific tumors within the body (Cohen, Janicki, Miller, 2007)

Stress has been classified as a host of potentially unpleasant or dangerous events that include unavoidable pain, excessive noise and fatigue under strenuous work conditions as well as more routine life changes (Mischel, 1986). It be external and related to the environment, but may also be created by internal perceptions that cause an individual to have anxiety or other negative emotions surrounding a situation, such as pressure, discomfort, etc., which they then deem stressful (Fiona Jones, Jim Bright, Angela Clow, 2001)

People define stress in many ways. They usually define it according to the events or situations that may occur in their life. Stress is defined as a

mental or physical tension or strain (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1982). Stress is an individual phenomenon, unique to each person and setting (Hudd et al., 2000). Perlin has suggested that there are two major types of stressors: life events and chronic strains. Life events research considers the extent to which the accumulation of a series of experiences can create a stressful impact. Stress from chronic strain results in role overload; conflicting roles in an individual's life that produce competing, and potentially conflicting demands over time (Pearlin, 1985, as cited in (Hudd et al., 2000).

Psychological Stress is now recognized as an inevitable aspect of life, but what makes the difference in human functioning is how people cope with it (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Scheier, Weintraub & Carver; 1986; Kim & Duda, 2003). Most people manage to maintain reasonable health and functioning under stressful conditions (Folkman, 1992).

Psychological Stress could be categorized into different levels. The levels of stresses depend on how an individual copes with the given situation. For example, the Social Readjustment Rating Scale scores offer a measure of current degree of stress. This scale indicates that the more change in life is going through, the more stress is experiencing. (Holmes & Masuda, 1974)

Generally, a significant but modest association has been found between degree of stresses and physical illness. More stressful life events take a somewhat greater physical and emotional toll on most, but not on all people (Rabkin & Struening, 1976). Reactions to stresses also depend on the individual's psychological environment. Individuals generally respond better to stresses when they have social ties and support, that is, close friends and groups to which they belong. (Antonovsky, 1979). Individuals are able to cope better when they can share their experiences with others. When individuals are members of a group to which they "belong", they can receive emotional support, help with problems, and even a boost to self-esteem (Mischel, 1986).

2- Self-esteem.

Self-esteem is a widely used concept both in popular language and in psychology. It refers to an individual's sense of his or her value or worth, or the extent to which a person values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991).

Self-esteem is generally considered the evaluative component of the self-concept, a broader representation of the self that includes cognitive and behavioral aspects as well as evaluative or affective ones (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). While the construct is most often used to refer to a global sense of self-worth, narrower concepts such as self-confidence or body-esteem are used to imply a sense of self-esteem in more specific domains. It is also widely assumed that self-esteem functions as a trait, that is, it is stable

across time within individuals. Self-esteem is an extremely popular construct within psychology, and has been related to virtually every other psychological concept or domain, including personality (e.g., shyness), behavioral (e.g. task performance), cognitive (e.g., attributional bias), and clinical concepts (e.g. anxiety and depression). While some researchers have been particularly concerned with understanding the nuances of the self-esteem construct, others have focused on the adaptive and self-protective functions of self-esteem (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991).

3- Development of Self-esteem

Experiences in a person's life are a major source of self-esteem development. The positive or negative life experiences one has, creates attitudes toward the self which can be favorable and develop positive feelings of self-worth, or can be unfavorable and develop negative feelings of self-worth. In the early years of a child's life, parents are the most significant influence on self-esteem and the main source of positive and/or negative experiences a child will have. The emphasis of unconditional love, in parenting how-to books, represents the importance of a child developing a stable sense of being cared for and respected. These feelings translate into later effects of self-esteem as the child grows older (Olsen, Breckler, Wiggins, 2008).

During the school years, academic achievement is a significant contributor to self-esteem development. A student consistently achieving success or consistently failing strongly affects their individual self-esteem (Crocker, Sommers, Luhtanen, 2002). Social experiences are another important contributor. As children go through school they begin to understand and recognize differences between themselves and their classmates. Using social comparisons, children assess whether they did better or worse than classmates in different activities. These comparisons play an important role in shaping the child's self-esteem and influence the positive or negative feelings they have about themselves (Butler, 1998-Pomerantz, Ruble, Frey, Grenlich, 1995). As children go through adolescence peer influence becomes much more important, as adolescents make appraisals of themselves based on their relationships with close friend (Thorne, Michaelieu, 1996). Successful relationships among friends are very important to the development of high self-esteem for children. Social acceptance brings about confidence and produces high self-esteem, whereas rejection from peers and loneliness brings about self-doubts and produces low self-esteem. (Leary, Baumeister, 2000).

Parenting style can also play a crucial role in self-esteem development. Students in elementary school who have high self-esteem tend to have parents who are caring, supportive adults who set clear standards for their child and allow them to voice their opinion in decision making. Although studies thus far have reported only a correlation of warm, supportive

parenting styles and children having high self-esteem it could easily be thought of as having some causal effect in self-esteem development. (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, Dornbusch, S. M., 1991).

Childhood experiences that contribute to healthy self-esteem include being listened to, being spoken to respectfully, receiving appropriate attention and affection and having accomplishments recognized and mistakes or failures acknowledged and acceptance. Experiences that contribute to low self-esteem include being harshly criticized, being physically, sexually or emotionally abused, being ignored, ridiculed or teased or being expected to be "perfect" all the time (N.P. n. d., 2012).

4- Self-evaluation

Self-esteem requires "a self-evaluation processes in which individuals compare their description of themselves as they are *Real Self* with their description of themselves as they would like to become *Ideal Self* and as they fear becoming *Dreaded Self*. Self-esteem depends on living up to one's ideals (F Clark, Vladimir T. Khmelkov, 1998).

Self-evaluation is important because the subject is able to assess what they know, what they do not know and what they would like to know. They begin to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, and will be able to set goals that they know they can attain with the new knowledge they have about themselves (www.ndt-ed.org).

There are four levels of self-evaluation development in relation to the Real Self, Ideal Self, and the Dreaded Self. The Real, Ideal, and Dreaded Selves develop in a sequential pattern on cognitive levels -moral judgment stages, ego development stages, and self-understanding (F Clark Power, Vladimir T. Khmelkov, 1998)

1. Individuals describe their *Real*, *Ideal*, and *Dreaded Selves* with stereotypical labels, such as "nice" or "bad "Individuals describe their *Ideal* and *Real Selves* in terms of disposition for action or as behavioral habits. The *Dreaded Self* is often described as being unsuccessful or as having bad habits
2. Individuals describe their *Ideal* and *Real Selves* in terms of traits that are based on attitudes as well as actions. *The Dreaded Self* are often described as have failed to meet social expectations or as self-centered.
3. Individuals describe their *Ideal* and *Real Selves* as having a unified identity or character. Descriptions of the *Dreaded Self* focus on a failure to live up to one's ideals or role expectations often because of real world problems.

Development brings with it increasingly complicated and encompassing moral demands. As individuals develop their depiction of their Dreaded Selves become increasingly more realistic and more plausible.

Studies have been conducted in an effort to discover findings of a *correlation between stress and self-esteem*. There is evidence of a positive correlation and a negative correlation of the two factors. The question is that does stress really affect a person's self-esteem? Results from the Abouserie (1994) study show that students with high self-esteem are less stressed than those with low self-esteem. Self-esteem would therefore appear to have an important influence on students' stress levels. Conclusions also suggest that enhancing students' ability to cope with stress can be done by enhancing a students' self-esteem. However in another study results could not determine whether higher levels of stress lead to reduced esteem or whether the pattern worked in the opposite direction (Hudd et al., 2000. Lundgren (1978) suggests that it is assumed that an important determinant of stress involves certain types of disjunctions in interpersonal relationships- specifically, discrepancies between the way in which individuals view themselves, the ways in which they perceive others as responding to them, and the ways in which others actually do evaluate them. These discrepancies are all characteristics of self-esteem.

A research study conducted by Ashley N. Polk, examined the *effects of stress on self-esteem*, found weak correlation- that was not significant-. Stress is not related to self-esteem (webclearinghouse.net)

Objectives of the study.

The main objectives of the present study are:

1. To find out the relationship between psychological stress and self-esteem as reported by Sudanese secondary school students.
2. The researcher wanted to get the statistical significance of psychological stress and self-esteem among the Sudanese secondary school students according to some demographic variables (*gender - residence*).

Research Methodology

Participants.

The participants were secondary school students, from Al. Kamleen Locality -Gezira State-Sudan. (161were *males* and 189 were *females*, 208were *rural*, while 147 were *urban*, a total of 350).

Research Instruments

The participants completed two instruments:

Psychological stress scale for Fontana & Rida Abouserie. The measure has three factors consisting of three points, with corresponding three values of: 1-always: 2-to some extent: 3-never. The level of self-esteem was measured at baseline using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; 1965). Participants reported their agreement, on a three-point Likert scale (1=disagree, 2=hesitant, 3=agree) on 10 statements concerning self-perceived aspects of self-esteem. Internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's alpha of these scales indicated their suitability for application in the Sudan. Data analyzed by (SPSS).

Findings:

The first aim of this study was to find out the relationship between psychological stress and self-esteem as reported by Sudanese secondary students. The statistically significant correlation between Psychological Stress and Self-Esteem is presented in the table 1.

Table 1. The correlation between Psychological stress and Self-Esteem

Variables	n	r	Probability	Result
Psychological Stress	350	0.64-	p <.001	sig
Self-Esteem				

This negative statistically significant correlation indicates the relationship between psychological stress and self-esteem as reported by Sudanese secondary school students.

The second aim of the study was to find out the statistical significant differences of psychological stress and self-esteem among the Sudanese secondary school students according to some demographic variables (gender male-female, residence, rural-urban). The table below indicates the statistically significant differences.

Table 2. Statistical significance test results for psychological stress and self-esteem

Variables	Samples	Means	Sd	T-test	Probability
Psychological Stress					
males	161	2,42	,56	4,84	p <.001
females	189	2,78	,63		
rural	208	2,62	,66	4,26	p <.044
urban	147	2,32	,55		

<i>Self-Esteem</i>					
males	161	2,42	,68	4,21	<i>p</i> < .031
females	189	2,78	,57		
rural	208	2,69	,69	4,43	<i>p</i> < .025
urban	147	2,38	,52		
<i>df</i> = 348					

The findings of the present study highlights the statistical significant differences of psychological stress and self-esteem as reported by the Sudanese secondary school students according to some demographic variables, (gender *male-female*, residence, *rural-urban*) In psychological stress, there are statistically significance differences due to gender, infavor of females, and due to residence, infavor of urban. In self-esteem, also, there are statistically significance differences due to gender, infavor of females, and due to residence, infavor of urban.

Discussion:

Results from survey completed by the Sudanese secondary school students indicated that *psychological stress* was negatively related to *self-esteem*, and significantly moderated the relationship between *psychological stress* and *self-esteem*.

The results from this study uncontradicted results found in previous studies. In the Abouserie (1994) study results showed a negative correlation between stress and self-esteem, indicating that students with high self-esteem are less stressed than those with low self-esteem. In another study results showed the relationship between stress and self-esteem was strong and clear but it remains unclear whether higher levels of stress lead to reduced esteem, or whether the pattern work in the opposite direction (Hudd et al., 2000). Also the study of Ashley N. Polk showed weak correlation- that was not significant-. Stress is not related to self-esteem (*webclearinghouse.net*)

According to this finding we can say that psychological stress is an affecting factors everyone's life. Daily events in life can be stressful. Psychological stress can also be a factor in other areas in a person's life. Psychological stress can affect a person's self-esteem in ways people would believe it would not. When a person is stressed most of the time the person focuses so much on the stressor they don't realize the stress they are having may be affecting other areas in their lives.

Stress can have devastating consequences in individual cases and there is some suggestion that personality variables may play a part in stress-susceptibility (Linn & Zippa, 1984, as cited in Abouserie, 1994).

The study of de Man, et al,(2008) showed that, one hundred and ninety seven adolescent boys and girls who attended high school and worked part-time participated in a study of the relationship between ego-identity, self-esteem, psychological stress. Correlation analyses showed that ego-identity was positively related to self-esteem. The results of mediation analyses showed that when self-esteem was controlled, ego-identity had no effect on and psychological strain, suggesting that self-esteem is a single, dominant mediator in this relationship.

It is not always possible to avoid stressful situations, but techniques for spotting the buildup of psychological stress and coping with that psychological stress can help to modify the relationship between self-esteem and psychological stress. High levels of psychological stress can cause lower self esteem, but this effect can be minimized if psychological stress is spotted early. Relaxation techniques, time-management programs, and other tools for coping with psychological stress can reduce the impact of psychological stress on self esteem.

The result raises the question, what is the significance of psychological stress and self-esteem to Sudanese secondary students' behavior?

It may be suggested that, as a major influence socialization has had on the norms that govern family functioning in Al. Kamleen society is crucial in determining secondary students self-esteem. Also, as secondary students go through adolescence peer influence becomes much more important, as adolescents make appraisals of themselves based on their relationships with close friends. Successful relationships among friends are very important to the development of high self-esteem for the secondary students. Social acceptance brings about confidence and produces high self-esteem, whereas rejection from peers and loneliness brings about self-doubts and produces low self-esteem.

A study by Youngs Jr. et al. (1990) was conducted among (2,154) high school students; the sample was spread evenly among male and female in North Dakota. The students were from urban and rural community schools. The surveys used were standard Life Experience Surveys. The Stress Life Experience survey listed 36 events that could be negative or positive. Scoring for this survey considered the number of experiences such as changing schools, illness, and relationships. Each experience was rated by the student for the positive or negative effect.

The results showed that as the number of stressful life experiences increased overall stress, and level of self-esteem decreased. The events

causing negative effect were stronger per event. Positive events had only slight effects.

Through these studies conducted by researchers, they found that a critical factor in the type of response one gives is related to one's level of self-esteem. The higher the level of self-esteem, the less individuals feel threatened by different world views. They found that raising the level of self-esteem significantly reduced the level of psychological stress, both emotionally and physiologically.

Finally, they concluded that a requirement for cultures that value tolerance, open-mindedness, and respect for those who are different is the fostering of self-esteem.

Conclusion.

This study has indicated that self-esteem is an important factor in determining Sudanese secondary students' psychological stress. The model that emerged from the study also provided insight in the ways that healthy personalities are promote Sudanese secondary students' wellbeing .

The findings of this study are also useful for parents, teachers, school guidance councilors, in aiding their understanding of Sudanese secondary students 'behaviors, and helping then achieve more academically, and transit successfully to University stage.

Hopefully, the research will contributes to a better understanding of secondary students' needs. Recognizing the factors that may influence the process of the transition to university stage, could increase the awareness of policy makers. This then could lead to the development and implementation of programmers to facilitate this transition.



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