Research Paper

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Self- Esteem in Married and Unmarried Female College Students

Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Marriage as an institution in Indian context seems to work as a moderator for self-esteem, especially among women. Parents of middle class households feel that their daughters are safer when married. The present study was done against this backdrop to find out the difference in the level of self- esteem among married and unmarried women college students. The sample consisted of 82 college students (41 married and 41 unmarried). The data was collected from the various colleges in Coimbatore. The tool used was Rosenberg's Self- Esteem Questionnaire. The results revealed that there is no significant difference in the level of self- esteem among married and unmarried women college students.

INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem reflects a person's overall subjective emotional evaluation of his or her own worth. It is a judgment of oneself as well as an attitude toward the self. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs and emotions such as triumph, despair, pride, and shame (Hewitt, 2009). The relationship between gender and global self-esteem in adolescence, while modest, has been well established, with boys consistently scoring higher than girls (Quatman and Watson, 2001). A National Longitudinal Survey (Elliot, 1995) found that married women had higher self-esteem than unmarried women.

Research has found that high self-esteem correlates highly with self-reported happiness (Baumeister, Campbell, Kreuger and Vohs, 2003). The relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction is stronger in individualistic cultures (Schimmack and Diener, 2003). Additionally, self-esteem has been found to be related to forgiveness in close relationships, in that people with high self-esteem will be more forgiving than people with low self-esteem (Eaton, Wardstruthers and Santelli, 2006).

People with low self-esteem are more likely to minimize the consequences of risky behavior, rationalize decisions, and remain convinced that certain behaviors will cause no harm to themselves, nor others. This may contribute to behaviors like drinking, taking drugs and engaging in early sexual intercourse as well as other risk taking behaviors (Baumeister and Campbell, 2003). Abraham Maslow states that psychological health is not possible unless the essential core of the person is fundamentally accepted, loved and respected by others and by her or his self. Self-esteem allows people to face life with more confidence, benevolence and optimism, and thus easily reach their goals and self-actualize (Branden, 1990). Other than increased happiness, higher self-esteem is also known to be correlated with a better ability to cope with stress and a higher likeliness that the individual takes on difficult tasks relative to those with low self-esteem (Daniel, Daniel and Daniel, 2009).

The universality of marriage throughout history and around the world shows that it meets a variety of fundamental needs. Marriage is usually considered the best way to ensure orderly rising of children. Ideally, marriage offers a source of intimacy, friendship, affection, sexual fulfillment and companionship. It presents an opportunity for emotional growth through a bond that is more reciprocal than the bond with parents and more committed than both with siblings, friends or lovers (Papalia and Olds, 1992).

Studies done from 1950s to the 1970s found that married people were happier than singles. Either marriage brought happiness or happy people tended to marry. Young wives reported much less stress after marriage (Campbell, Converse and Rogers, 1975). Apparently marriage was still seen as an accomplishment and a source of security for a woman. Women see marriage as a place to express and talk about emotions; they consider the sharing of confidences a measure of intimacy.

A longitudinal study of 132 college seniors found that women who committed themselves during their 20s to career, family or both developed more fully than women who had no children and who choose work beneath their capabilities. Between age 27 and the early 40s, women who had faced the challenges of career or parenthood became more disciplined, independent, hard-working, and confident and improved their "people skills" compared with women who had made neither kind of commitment, they were more dominant, more motivated to achieve, more emotionally stable, more goal oriented, and more interested in what was going on in the world (Helson and Moane, 1987). This research suggests a range of satisfactory life structures is possible for young women who formed dreams and set about making them come true (Papalia and Olds, 1992).

Procedure

The sample consisted of 82 college students (41 married and 41 unmarried in the age range of 21- 32. The data were collected from the various colleges and universities in Coimbatore who were pursuing their graduation, post graduation, M. Phil and Ph. D. The measures used were the Case Study Schedule and the Self- Esteem Questionnaire. The Case Study Schedule was tailor made for the present study on women college students. The schedule has demographic details such as age, sex, marital status, educational qualification etc. The Self- Esteem Questionnaire constructed by Dr. Florence Rosenberg is a 10 item self-report rating scale.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Self-esteem of the Sample

N= 82

Marital Status	N	Mean (SD)
Married	41	30.20 (3.82)
Unmarried	41	30.24 (3.98)

High self- esteem a feeling of self worth- pays dividends. People who feel good about themselves (who strongly agree with self-affirming questionnaire statements) have fewer sleepless nights,

succumb less easily to use drugs, are more persistent at difficult tasks, are less shy and lonely, and are just plain happier (Crocker and Wolfe, 1999; Leary, 1999; Tafarodi and Vu, 1997).

Table 1 shows that the mean self- esteem and the standard deviation of married participants are 30.20 and 3.82 respectively and that of unmarried participants are 30.24 and 3.98 respectively. According to the norms given by author of the tool, Rosenberg, the participants of the study on the whole have high self-esteem.

Table 2: Independent Sample T- Test of Self- Esteem of the Sample

		Levenson's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Individual Score	Equal variances assumed	0.134	0.72	-0.057	80	0.955	-0.04878	0.86108	-1.76239	1.6648
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.057	79.859	0.955	-0.04878	0.86108	-1.76244	1.6649

Table 2 shows Independent sample t- test of self- esteem in married and unmarried women college students. From this we can conclude that there is no significant difference in level of self-esteem between married and unmarried women college students of the study. The unmarried female college students might get support from their family members and peer group. This external motivation contributes for their high- level of self- esteem. Also the non- existence of the family commitments give them a sense of independence which boost their level of self- esteem. On the other hand the married students who are pursuing their higher studies have good level of self- esteem. The reasons might be that they feel confident about themselves which automatically enhance their self- esteem. They are internally motivated and have a positive feeling about their future. Of late marriage is not a barrier for many women who are willing to continue their higher education.

Limitations of the Study

- The sample size was restricted to 82 due to time constraints.
- The data collection was done only in a small region of Coimbatore and the results may vary in the other parts of the country.
- Psychological interventions were not given to the sample due to time constraints.

Recommendations for Further Research

- Findings of the current study might lead researchers to explore new psychological aspects of women and their related psychological aspects.
- The research might be expanded to the diversified and cross-cultural sample from different cities and provinces in India as well as with male for comparison purposes.
- Researches can be conducted involving interventions and focusing on other variables such as Emotional intelligence, Adjustment, Spiritual intelligence, Well- being etc. among women.
- Longitudinal researches can be conducted on larger sample of women with interventions.

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