



STRESS, SELF-ESTEEM AND PEER PRESSURE AMONG MIZO ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a period when numerous developmental changes as well as personal and social challenges are experienced. This generates the need to understand some of the crucial factors that may lead to inadequate development. The present study attempts to assess stress, self-esteem and peer pressure among Mizo adolescents. Seventy-eight (78) Mizo adolescents (39 males and 39 females) within the age range of 15-18 years, belonging to Aizawl city, served as subjects for the study. A significant negative correlation ($r = -0.40$; $p < 0.01$) was found between stress and self-esteem indicating high levels of stress that corresponds with low self-esteem. A negative correlation ($r = -0.18$; $p > 0.01$) and a positive correlation ($r = 0.14$, $p > 0.01$) is also found between peer pressure and self-esteem, peer pressure and stress respectively but is non-significant. Findings also indicated significant gender differences in stress ($F = 14.42$; $p < 0.01$) and self-esteem ($F = 33.96$; $p < 0.01$) with males ($M = 77.46$) having higher level of self-esteem than females ($M = 64.84$), and females ($M = 24.67$) having higher stress levels than males ($M = 19.67$).

Keywords: Stress, Self-esteem, Peer Pressure, Adolescents.

Introduction

Adolescence is a period characterized by development and multiple changes in all aspects of an individual's life, calling for new psychological adaptations.

Stress is a feeling of strain and pressure. Stress is a type of psychological pain. It is an internal state which can be

caused by physical demands on the body (diseased conditions, exercise, extremes of temperature and the like) or by environmental and social situations which are evaluated as potentially harmful, uncontrollable or exceeding our resources for coping life events and pressures of everyday life. Stress is a real or perceived imbalance between environmental demands

required for survival and an individual's capacity to adapt to these requirements (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The physical, environmental, and social causes of the stress are called stressors. (Morgan *et al.*, 1993). Stress is any circumstance that threatens or perceived to threaten one's well-being and thereby tax one's coping abilities. Chronic stress and a lack of coping resources available or used by an individual can often lead to the development of psychological issues such as depression and anxiety (Schlotz *et al.*, 2011).

Majority of the adolescents undergo stress, whatever the sources may be, internally it hampers the major functioning of the body. Most of the youngsters face multiple problems in their lives among which *peer pressure* and low *self-esteem* may serve as two of the factors.

Self-esteem refers most generally to an individual's overall positive evaluation of the self (Rosenberg *et al.*, 1995). It reflects an individual's overall subjective emotional evaluation of his or her own worth. Within normal populations, high self-esteem is characterized by a general fondness or love for oneself; low self-esteem is characterized by mildly positive or ambivalent feelings toward oneself. In extreme cases, low self-esteem people hate themselves, but this kind of self-loathing occurs in clinical populations, not in normal populations (Baumeister *et al.*, 1989). Self-esteem is composed of two distinct dimensions, competence and worth. The competence dimension (efficacy-based self-esteem) refers to the degree to which people see themselves as capable and efficacious. The

worth dimension (worth-based self-esteem) refers to the degree to which individuals feel they are persons of value (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983).

Self-esteem can be defined as an individual's general feeling of self-worth. It is reflected through positive feelings about oneself and is an overall value that one places on oneself as a person (Robins *et al.*, 2001). It is as whether someone views himself in a positive or negative way and displays confidence in his ability, credibility, value, and discernment (Gerrard *et al.*, 2000). Self-esteem also reflects how that individual thinks others view these qualities in him. Low self-esteem individuals do not react to threats by seeking affirmation; their self-doubt causes them to adopt a cautious and self-protective stance in their interactions with source or rejection (Anthony *et al.*, 2007). A negative correlation has been identified in the studies of Ryan & Brown (2003) and Mackie (2007). They have shown that self-esteem degree of adolescents decreases when they are exposed to peer pressure. Kapci (2004) states that not only children who are exposed to peer pressure but also the children who put pressure on the others are negatively affected by that pressure and that these children perceive themselves as nervous, lonely and with low self-esteem.

Peer pressure is feeling pressure from other age mates to do something for self and others. It is the direct influence on people by peers, or the effect on an individual who gets encouraged to follow their peers by changing their attitudes, values or behaviour to conform to those of the influencing group or individual.

Adolescence is a time when a person is most susceptible to peer pressure because peers become an important influence on behaviour during this period and peer pressure has been called a hallmark of adolescent experience. Peer Pressure is stronger day by day (Castrogiovanni, 2002). Teens spend more waking hours of their days directly interacting with their peers than they do with their family members. This interactive influence is more powerful than the influence of teachers, parents, or other authority figures in the teen's life (Treyner, 2009). When a teen is excluded from such peer group, the self-esteem may decrease greatly which may result in anxiety, feelings of inferiority and stress. Male to male peer pressure and female putting pressure on both males and females cause male adolescents to be exposed to more peer pressure (Woods *et al.*, 2004). Oral pressure, as a way of indirect peer pressure, is used more by male adolescents (Stockdale *et al.*, 2002; Nabuzoka, 2003).

From this study, it is expected that if one has low self-esteem, he/she is likely to have high stress which will make him/her more vulnerable to pressures from his/her peers. Also, individual with low self-esteem, when faced with peer pressure may experience a lot of stress. Stress can also result in low self-esteem which might make the individual to not have the ability to resist peer pressure and so on. In this way, the variables used in the present study- Stress, Self-esteem and Peer Pressure are deeply rooted and are connected with one another.

Objectives

1. To study the relationships between stress, self-esteem and peer pressure among Mizo adolescents.
2. To find out gender differences in stress, self-esteem and peer pressure among Mizo adolescents.

Hypothesis

1. A negative correlation is expected between stress and self-esteem, peer pressure and self-esteem, whereas a positive relation is expected between peer pressure and stress.
2. Female adolescents will have higher stress level, experience less peer pressure, and have lower self-esteem than male adolescents.

Method

Sample

A total of 78 students (39 males and 39 females) within the age range of 15-18years were selected from Helen Lowry School, Vaivakawn (Seventh Day Tlang), Aizawl, Mizoram to serve as subjects for the study. The study aimed to incorporate between - subjects design to study the behavioural measures among the participants. The participants were identified following the sampling procedure highlighted above. Before conducting the test, rapport was formed with the participants and the consent for participation was obtained followed by initial briefing and the explanation of the requirements for the psychological task.

Psychological Tools Used

- 1. The Stress Scale** developed by Dr. Vijaya Lakshmi & Dr. Shruti Narain is meant for adolescents in the age range of 12 to 24 years. Four dimensions were included in this scale and this scale consists of 40 items which measures the following four dimensions- Pressure, Physical Stress, Anxiety and Frustration respectively. The answers of those items which tally with the answers given in the scoring key are given a score of +1. If they did not tally, they are given a score of zero (0). Positive items are given a score of +1 on “Yes” and Zero on “No” and Negative items are given +1 on “No” and Zero on “Yes”. Higher the score, greater is the level of stress.
- 2. The Self-esteem Scale** developed by Dr. Santosh Dhar & Dr. Upinder Dhar can be administered on individuals regardless of age, gender and educational background. The scale is meant to identify differences between individuals and not rank them as good or bad, right or wrong, desirable or undesirable. All the statements are answered in terms of Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Not sure, Agree or Strongly Agree which are awarded the score of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively. Total score is the reflection of the overall self-esteem. Higher the score, higher the self-esteem.
- 3. Peer Pressure Scale** developed by Sandeep Singh and Sunil Saini is a uni-dimensional scale which gives estimate of peer pressure in adolescents. It is a self-report 5-point Likert scale measured on five categories, i.e.,

Strongly disagree (5), Disagree (4), Can't say (3), Agree (2), Strongly Agree (1). The score 1 represented the option 'strongly disagree' while option 5 on the scale represented the category 'strongly agree'. In order to avoid monotony on the part of the respondents, three reverse items have also been introduced. Positive items are scored from 1 to 5 and negative or reverse items scored from 5 to 1. The minimum and maximum score range in 25-125. High score is interpreted as high peer pressure and low score indicates less peer pressure. The questionnaire consists of 25 items in total.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics (**Table 1**) reveals that the mean age of the participants (Males=39 & Females=39) is 16.56 years. The mean of number of family members is (M=5.72), number of siblings is (M=2.90), birth order is (M=2.15), and number of close friends is (M=3.40).

From **Table 2**, we see that the reliability coefficients of the three Scales - Stress, Self-esteem and Peer Pressure are 0.81, 0.74 and 0.81 respectively. This indicates that they all have internal consistency and are highly reliable for use with the project population—Mizo adolescents. We can see that the mean score of Females is higher both in Stress (M=24.67) and Peer Pressure (M=73.59) as compared to Males (M=19.67) in Stress and

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Mean	SD	N
Age	16.56		79
Gender			
Males			39
Females			39
No of Family Members	5.72		78
No of Siblings	2.90		78
Birth Order	2.15		78
Close Friends	3.40		78

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and Reliability Coefficients (Cronbach alpha) for the behavioural measures

Scales	Reliability Coefficients of the Scales	Statistics	Male	Female	Total
Stress Scale	0.81	Mean	19.67	24.67	22.17
		SD	6.96	4.38	6.30
Self-Esteem Scale	0.74	Mean	77.46	64.85	71.15
		SD	10.56	8.43	11.42
Peer Pressure Scale	0.81	Mean	70.71	73.59	72.15
		SD	12.61	9.43	11.16

in peer pressure (M=70.71). The mean score of Females was, however found to be lower in Self-esteem (M=64.85) as compared to Males (M=77.46).

Correlations between stress, self-esteem and peer pressure are depicted in **Table 3** which highlighted a significant negative correlation between stress and self-esteem ($r = -0.40$; $p < 0.01$). Thus, we may say that higher the stress level of the individual, lower will be the self-esteem and lower the self-esteem of the individual, higher will be the stress level of that particular individual.

A non-significant positive correlation between stress and peer pressure ($r = 0.14$; $p > 0.01$) and a non-significant negative relationship between self-esteem and peer pressure ($r = -0.18$; $p > 0.01$) also re-

-vealed that some degree of relationship or association exists between stress and peer pressure as well as peer pressure and self-esteem. Higher stress is associated with more peer pressure but to a very low degree whereas higher levels of peer pressure is associated with low self-esteem. The degree of association is however very low in the sample. This non-significant finding is supporting the studies of Ryan (2000) and Markus (2005) which showed that self-esteem degree of adolescents decreases when they are exposed to peer pressure.

Table 4 shows that both Stress (F=14.42) and Self-esteem (F=33.96) are significant at 0.01 level of significance indicating that there is gender difference between males and females. Females are considered to have higher level of stress and

Table 3: Bivariate Correlation Coefficients of the Variables

Variables	Self-esteem	Peer Pressure
Stress	-0.40**	0.14
Self-Esteem	X	-0.18

***significant at 0.01 level*

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics and One-way ANOVA for Gender on the Behavioral Measures

Variables	Gender	Statistics			ANOVA			
		N	Mean	SD	Source	Variance	F	Sig
Stress	Male	39	19.67	6.96	Gender	Stress	14.42	.00
	Female	39	24.67	4.38				
	Total	78	22.17	6.30				
Peer pressure	Male	39	70.71	12.61	Gender	Peer Pressure	1.29	.26
	Female	39	73.59	9.43				
	Total	78	72.15	11.16				
Self Esteem	Male	39	77.46	10.56	Gender	Self Esteem	33.96	.00
	Female	39	64.85	8.43				
	Total	78	71.15	11.42				

low self-esteem as compared to males. However, Peer Pressure is not significant (F=1.29) which implies that there is no gender difference between males and females. Even though Females experience higher peer pressure than males, as it is mentioned above, it is not significant at 0.01 level of significance.

There is gender difference in both the levels of Stress and Self-esteem. This seems to corroborate findings in a survey conducted by Aqeel (2012) where parents say their teenage daughters have higher levels of stress than their teen sons, citing causes such as college prep tests and poor body image. Nearly one-third of parents (28%) say their teen is sad or depressed, with the level higher in girls (32%) than boys. According to Lindeman & Verkasalo (1995), adolescence is often a turbulent time, and it is marked by substantially increased rates of depressive symptoms, esp-

-ecially among girls. New research indicates that this gender difference may be the result of girls' greater exposure to stressful interpersonal events, making them more likely to ruminate, and contributing to their risk of depression.

Stress and self-esteem can be related as we can see from the findings. Since people with low self-esteem may also have poor social support systems, low levels of self-esteem could be correlated with a greater perceived level of stress. Self-esteem has been reported to predict stress in individuals with chronic disease (Adams & Weaver, 1986). Individuals with low self-esteem may lack the coping resources necessary to regulate environmental stressors (Schneiderman, 2005). Low self-esteem can lead to psychological effects that cause a person to be more susceptible to stressful situations. Consistent stress can gradually lessen a healthy self-esteem over

time as well. Conversely, high self-esteem can act as a sort of protection against high levels of stress and a context of low-stress can provide a great environment for individuals who could benefit from a higher self-esteem (Baumeister *et al.*, 2003).

Everybody, no matter what age, is faced with pressure to fit in. Some people might feel it more than others and might feel it more in some situations than others which may result in making decisions or choices that one does not really want to make or that are unsafe. It can be hard to go against the grain and resist social pressure. In teenage years, this pressure can be even stronger and most of the teens do not want to feel like an outsider (Roberts, 1999). The feeling of belonging and social acceptance is very strong at this stage of development. When teens are searching for their identity and the concepts that they want to define themselves by, social influences and peer interaction play a huge part in this process (Brown, 1998)

From the present study, findings indicate that there is no gender difference in peer pressure, which means that both males and females experience peer pressure but in different ways. Here, in the case of Mizo adolescents, religion (Christianity) may play some role in the sense that in the Mizo society, people often restrain themselves to engage in unwanted behaviors even when they are pressurised because they tend to regard such acts a sin. Also, in Mizo society, even though it is a patriarchal society, males and females are being treated indifferently with the increase of knowledge and progress in education. The collectivistic nature of the Mizo society may play some role as well.

Moreover, the present study simply indicates the intensity of peer pressure experienced by males and females but it does not necessarily mean that the form of peer pressure experienced by them are more or less alike, that is, the peer pressure received by boys may include pressure to smoke, to abuse drugs, date, drink, skipping classes, to act in a certain way to prove his masculinity and so on while for girls the pressure received from their peers may include the need to dress in a certain way, to lie, to engage in risk behaviours leading to physical and mental health problems, or to act in a way that would please their peers so that they may fit in and so on.

Summary and Conclusion

The present study has shown that some degree of relationship exists between Stress, self-esteem and Peer Pressure. Significant negative correlation is found to exist between Stress and Self-esteem. Non-significant negative correlation was found between Peer Pressure and Self-esteem and non-significant positive correlation between Peer Pressure and Stress. The result also shows that there is significant gender difference between males and females in both the levels of Stress (M=19.67, F=24.67) and Self-esteem (M=77.46, F=64.84) but not in peer pressure experienced by the participants. The findings of this study are expected to add to the existing literature on adolescents development especially with regards to the non-significant gender difference in peer pressure felt by the sample. The study faced limitations with regards to small sample size reducing the power of the study and may increase bias in terms of gender effects in

the variables studied. Therefore, further studies with a larger sample size may be needed in order to find more conclusive results. Comparisons could also be made between type of institutions (government vs. private school), residence (urban vs. rural) in order to understand their effect on the behavioural parameters. Future research could also benefit from including behavioural measures that mediate the relationships between stress, self-esteem and peer pressure among Mizo adolescents.

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