

**SELF ESTEEM AMONG ONLY CHILDREN AND
CHILDREN WITH SIBLINGS**

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ABSTRACT

The aim was to study the differences in Self Esteem among Only Children and Children with Siblings. It was hypothesized that (i) there will be a significant difference between Only Children and Children with Siblings in their Self Esteem; (ii) there will be significant gender differences among Only Children in Self Esteem and; (iii) there will be significant gender differences among Children with Siblings in Self Esteem. Between – groups design was used for the study. Only Children and Children with Siblings (30 in each category) between the age group of 18 – 20 years, both male and female participants (15 in each category) were selected as the sample, using purposive sampling technique. Dr. Karunanidhi's Self Esteem Inventory was administered on the sample. The findings of the study indicates that there is a significant difference in Self Esteem between Only Children and Children with Siblings in self esteem; there is no significant gender difference among Only Children in Self Esteem and; there is no significant gender difference among Children with Siblings in Self Esteem.

Keywords: Self Esteem, Only Children, Children with Siblings.

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INTRODUCTION:

Self esteem is the collection of beliefs or feelings that we have about ourselves, or our “self-perceptions”. How we define ourselves influences our motivations, attitudes and behaviors and affect emotional adjustment. Healthy self esteem is a child’s armour against the challenges of the world. Self Esteem refers to a person’s overall evaluation about his or her self-worth or self-image. Kids who feel good about themselves have an easier time handling conflicts and resisting negative pressures. Abraham Maslow, in his theory of hierarchy of needs, emphasized on the Esteem needs and placed it at the fourth level in the pyramid. He differentiated between two types of esteem: esteem from others and self-esteem, the latter often depending on the former. We want to be respected by others for our achievements and our abilities. We also want this respect to translate into self-esteem. Research on high self-esteem persons has examined the strategies these people use to get through life. High self-esteem persons appear to maintain their positive evaluation through the ups and downs of everyday life. One strategy identified by Brown and Smart(1991) is that, following failure in one area of life, the high self-esteem person often will focus on other areas of life in which things are going well. Larsen (2000a; Larsen & Prizmic, 2004) identifies this strategy as one of the most effective but least used strategy for overcoming feelings of failure. Self esteem is one of the important factor required by anybody to succeed in life. It is a well proven concept that if you can build self esteem at your adolescent period it will last all through your life. Adolescence is one period in which boys and girls face with many problems and issues. The adolescent’s self-worth depends on their being competent at something they value and in being valued by people who are important to them. An Only Child is a child who does not have any siblings, either biological or adopted ones. A child with siblings is a child who has one or more siblings, either biological or adopted.

Adler (Weiten,1998), best known for his theories regarding striving for superiority, was also concerned with the effects of birth order on personality. Adler's theory stressed the social aspect of personality development and therefore proposed the possibility of birth order and its significance in the interpersonal relationships of family life. Families may have an only child for a variety of reasons, including family planning, financial and emotional or physical health issues, stress in the family, time constraints, fears over pregnancy, advanced age, infertility, personal

preferences, and death of a sibling. As far as self-esteem is concerned, the chief focus of any right-thinking modern parent, only children are smack in the middle of the pack. Surveys show that firstborns have the highest self-esteem, because they compare themselves with their smaller brothers or sisters. Last-borns score the lowest, because they're always the littlest, unable to do as much as their elders. Middle-borns and onlies score in between, but for different reasons: middle-borns because they're bigger than some siblings and smaller than others, and onlies because "their self-esteem development process is unaffected by comparison with others." They are, in other words, who they are. The present study focuses on the self esteem among only children and children with siblings. Since the concept of the 'only child' is the trend of the day, this study tries to verify the difference between only children and children with siblings in self esteem. It also focuses on the gender differences among only children and among children with siblings in self esteem.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

A study conducted at Hyderabad, India, investigated the levels of self esteem in Indian adolescents. The results showed insignificant results, which showed that there was no difference in the levels of self esteem between the two groups. Although when the individual means of the genders were found, it turned out that females had higher levels of self esteem than males. Unlike other studies which showed that boys have higher self esteem than girls, this study revealed that there are no differences in the level of self esteem between them.

Research conducted in Indian context suggests that socio emotional problems like loneliness, adjustment difficulties with parents and interpersonal conflicts are very common in adolescence which may lead to impaired feelings of Self esteem (Parmar P et al 2008). In cultures that tend to be more individualistic, for example the United States, the whole process surrounding self-esteem in popular and academic areas is that all individuals possess a self, and therefore, self-esteem.

Looking at the past researches, higher levels of self-esteem have been associated with better coping skills, emotional stability, positive affect, and an increased improvement in quality of life perceptions. On the other hand, lower levels of self-esteem have been known to encourage anxiety, depression and criminal behavior which are all emotional and behavioral disorders. (Quatman & Watson, 2001).

A study was conducted by Pinky Bomb, Dr. Jean Ispa and Dr. Duane Rudy related to Social skills and siblings in India. Analyses of social skills of children with and without siblings revealed no significant difference between the two groups on aggressive, asocial and prosocial behavior. Additionally, warmth and conflict in children's sibling relationships were not associated with their social skills. The interaction of warmth and conflict was significant for asocial behavior. A significant correlation between warmth and conflict was observed.

According to a study by Ruut Veenhoven and Maykel Verkuyten, only children do not differ from nonsingletons in the global appreciation of themselves. In fact, they show somewhat more self-esteem. Studies among youths focus on social and cognitive functioning. Only children appear consistently brighter; they score slightly higher on intelligence tests and do better in school (e.g., Zajonc & Marcus, 1975; Claudy, Farrel, & Dayton, 1979). The latter study also found only children to be more mature, more sensitive socially, more fastidious and more cultured. Participating more in the life of adults, they are more like little adults.

According to Brophy (1989), only children are often seen as high-achieving, motivated, and successful compared to their counterparts who have siblings.

Bernice Sorensen, in contrast, used qualitative methods in order to discover what only-children themselves understand, feel or sense about their lives that are lived without siblings. Her research showed that they are very much affected by societies stereotype of the only-child whether or not the stereotype is true or false. She argues in her book, *Only Child Experience and Adulthood*, that growing up in a predominantly sibling society affects only children and their lack of sibling relationships can have an important effect on the way they see themselves and others, as well as, on the way they interact with the world.

According to a study conducted by Brophy in 1989, Only children seem to have better self-esteem and they are higher achievers than children who have siblings. According to the study done by Koontz in 1989, lack of siblings has repercussions for the only child's later social interactions.

Only children lack social interaction within the family structure as a consequence of the absence of potential sibling playmates. A study conducted by Mueller and Vandell (1995) found that children with older siblings offering an outlet for interaction were more responsive socially to other children of their own age. This interaction propels them into social situations in which they actively seek out playmates in settings away from home. The foundation for developing healthy

peer relations is laid in the home at an early age. Many studies have been done in China about the characteristics of only children to determine if, indeed, they are little emperors. However, these studies have, in turn, found that only children are similar to, inferior to, and superior to other children (Falbo and Poston 1993).

Birth order and sibling relations may also be consequential for children's self-esteem. On the basis of both reflected appraisals and social comparisons, we would expect first-borns to have higher self-esteem than later-born children. Research, however, provides only modest (and inconsistent) support for these expectations (Blake 1989). Oldest and only children do seem to have higher self-esteem than later-born children, but the differences are not significant. The effects of birth order may be suppressed or mitigated by the influence of several other features of the sibling system, such as sex composition of the sibling order, child spacing, family size, age and sex of target child, and age and sex of next oldest sibling. Without taking into account the effect of these other variables, the influence of birth order on self-esteem may largely disappear (Gecas and Pasley, 1983).

Prof. Nazirul Hasnain and Ms. Parul Adlakha, Department of Psychology, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India conducted a study on Self-Esteem, Social Maturity and Well-Being Among Adolescents With And Without Siblings. The study was designed to investigate the differences in the levels of self-esteem, social maturity and well-being between adolescents with and without siblings. It also investigated the percentage of variance counted by social maturity and self-esteem in the well-being of adolescents with and without siblings. No significant differences were obtained between adolescents with and without siblings on self-esteem and well-being. However, significant difference was found between adolescents with and without siblings on social maturity showing that adolescents without siblings had higher social maturity score than adolescents with siblings. The results of regression analysis showed significant contribution of social maturity and self-esteem together in well-being of adolescents without siblings, but independently they did not contribute significantly to their well-being.

METHODOLOGY:

AIM: To study the difference between Only Children and Children with Siblings in relation to their Self Esteem.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To study the significance of difference between Only Children and Children with Siblings in relation to their Self Esteem.
2. To study the gender differences in Self Esteem among Only Children.
3. To study the gender differences in Self Esteem among Children with Siblings.

HYPOTHESES:

1. There will be a significant difference in Self Esteem between Only Children and Children with Siblings.
2. There will be significant gender differences among Only Children in Self Esteem.
3. There will be significant gender differences among Children with Siblings in Self Esteem.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS:

1. An **Only Child** is a child with no siblings, either biological or adopted.
2. A **child with siblings** is a child who has one or more siblings, either biological or adopted.
3. **Self-Esteem** refers to a person's overall evaluation of his or her self-worth or self-image.
4. The term '**Children**' is used in a broader sense to mean 'adolescents' who are an only child or child who has siblings.

NEED FOR THE PRESENT STUDY:

The concept of 'Only Child' has gained importance over the past few decades. The parents of the present generation give many practical reasons, both economical and personal, for having an only child. The concept of joint family, sharing and inter-dependency are slowly being replaced by the concept of nuclear family, being self-oriented and self reliant. Parents want to provide the best to their only son or daughter and at the same time have time for themselves as most of them are career oriented. Irrespective of all these factors, many theorists and researchers have stressed the importance of sibling relationships as a key factor in personality development. Hence, this study intends to understand whether having or not having a sibling makes a difference in influencing one's self esteem.

VARIABLES:

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE:

- Being an only child or a child with sibling.
- Gender.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE:

- Self Esteem.

INTERVENING VARIABLE:

- Structure of the family – Nuclear or Joint Family.
- Socio-Economic Status.

INCLUSION CRITERIA:

- Adolescents who dwell with their family; who belong to nuclear family and; middle class socio-economic status.

EXCLUSION CRITERIA:

- Adolescents who dwell in hostel, paying guest accommodation or relative's residence; who belong to joint family and; who belong to upper and lower class socio-economic status.

DESIGN AND SAMPLE:

Between groups design was used for the study. Using the purposive sampling technique, Only Children and Children with siblings aged between 18-20 years (30 each), both male and female participants (15 each), were selected as the sample.

TOOLS USED:

- Self Esteem Inventory developed by Dr. S. Karunanidhi (1996), which consists of 83 items and six domains, was used to assess the Self Esteem.
- Kuppuswamy's Socio-Economic Status Scale, revised version(2012), was used to determine the Socio-Economic Status of the Sample.

ANALYSIS OF DATA: Independent Samples 't' test was computed.

DISCUSSION:

The aim of the study was to verify the difference between Only Children and Children with Siblings in their Self Esteem. It was hypothesized that there will be a significant difference in Self Esteem between Only Children and Children with Siblings; there will be significant gender differences among Only Children in Self Esteem and; there will be significant gender differences among Children with Siblings in Self Esteem.

Table-1 showing the statistical analysis of the Only Children and Children with Siblings on Self Esteem.

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	't'
Only Children	30	237.8333	26.49149	2.203*
Children with Siblings	30	222.4667	27.52019	

Note: * 0.05 level of significance

**0.01 level of significance

NS – Not significant.

Table-1 shows the results of Only Children and Children with Siblings on Self Esteem. Independent sample 't' test was computed and the obtained 't' value is **2.203** which is **significant** at **0.05 level**. This indicates that there is a significant difference in Self Esteem between Only Children and Children with Siblings in self esteem thereby accepting the hypothesis. Also, when the means of the two groups are compared, it can be seen that Only children have scored higher on self esteem than the Children with Siblings. This finding is supported by a study conducted by Ruut Veenhoven and Maykel Verkuyten, only children do not differ from nonsingletons in the global appreciation of themselves. In fact, they show somewhat more self-esteem. Studies among youths focus on social and cognitive functioning. Only children appear consistently brighter; they score slightly higher on intelligence tests and do better in school (e.g., Zajonc & Marcus, 1975; Claudy, Farrel, & Dayton, 1979). Studies have also found only children to be more mature, more sensitive socially, more fastidious and more cultured. Participating more in the life of adults, they are more like little adults. According to Brophy (1989), only children are often seen as high-achieving, motivated, and successful and have better self-esteem compared to their counterparts who have siblings.

Table-2 showing the gender differences in Self Esteem among Only Children.

Self Esteem	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	't'
Only Children Males	15	236.2	26.92	0.32 NS
Only Children Females	15	239.46	26.88	

Note: NS – Not significant.

Table-2 shows the gender differences in Self Esteem among Only Children. 't' test was computed to find the difference between Only Children males and Only Children females in Self Esteem. The 't' value obtained is **0.32** which is **not significant** at 0.05 level. This indicates that there is no significant difference between Only Children males and Only Children females in Self Esteem thereby rejecting the hypothesis. Whereas a study done by Quatman T. and Watson C.M in USA on gender differences in adolescent self-esteem found that, the relationship between gender and global self-esteem in adolescence, while modest, was well established, with males consistently scoring higher on self esteem than females. This result may be due to cultural differences also.

Table-3 showing the gender differences in Self Esteem among Children with Siblings.

Self Esteem	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	't'
Children with siblings Males	15	224.13	24.96	0.31 NS
Children with siblings Females	15	220.8	30.65	

Note: NS – Not significant.

Table-3 shows the gender differences in Self Esteem among Children with Siblings. 't' test was computed to find the difference between Children with Siblings males and Children with Siblings females in Self Esteem. The 't' value obtained is **0.31** which is **not significant** at 0.05

level. This indicates that there is no significant difference between Children with Siblings males and Children with Siblings females in Self Esteem thereby rejecting the hypothesis. Studies assert that Self esteem plays an important role in people's life. Self esteem affects the academic achievement, social and personal responsibility of males and females. For people of all ages, the development of full human potential is enhancing through high self esteem (American Journal of Scientific Research, 2009). According to Robson (1998), self esteem is the sense of contentment and self acceptance that results from a person's appraisal of his own worth, significance, attractiveness, competence, and ability to satisfy his aspirations. With all these, many research studies show mixed results in relation to the gender differences that exist among adolescents.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:

The objective of the study was to study the significance of difference between Only Children and Children with Siblings in relation to their Self Esteem; to study the gender differences in Self Esteem among Only Children and; to study the gender differences in Self Esteem among Children with Siblings. The findings revealed that there is a significant difference in Self Esteem between Only Children and Children with Siblings in self esteem; there is no significant difference between Only Children males and Only Children females in Self Esteem and; there is no significant difference between Children with Siblings males and Children with Siblings females in Self Esteem.

IMPLICATIONS:

Self Esteem is an important factor which influences one's personality. Research findings have shown that having a sibling or being an only child has its own impact on the self esteem of individuals. Today, 'having an only child' is the choice of many parents. Such parents have their own subtle worries about their child's overall development in a sibling-less environment. In this direction, the findings of the present study may help in reducing their worries about their child's development as it indicates that only children have a better self esteem compared to children with siblings.

LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY:

- The sample size considered for this study is small as it was a pilot study.
- Sample was limited to Bangalore.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- The study could be repeated using a larger sample and from different places.

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