

Peer relation, self-esteem and assertiveness among selected adolescents in Ilorin, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined peer relation, self-esteem and assertiveness among selected adolescents in Ilorin. It adopted an ex-post facto design since the independent variables used were not manipulated. The independent variables are peer relation and self-esteem while assertiveness is the dependent variable. A total of 251 participants were purposively selected from three different public and private schools in the Ilorin Metropolis. There were 97 males and 154 females with their age ranging from 12-21years. 217 of the participants were 12-17 years of age and 34 were 18-21 years old. 142 were Christians and 109 were Muslims. 162 attended a single school and 89 attended mixed schools. 6 participants attended boarding schools and 245 attended day schools. Index of peer relation developed by Walter et al. (1986), Index of Self-esteem of Walter (1982) and Rathus' (1973) Assertiveness Schedule were used to assess peer relation, self-esteem and assertiveness with reliability coefficients of .94, .93 and .85 respectively. T-test for independent measures was used in testing the five hypotheses. Results showed that adolescent with higher self-esteem ($M=33.85$) were more assertive than those with lower self-esteem ($M=24.96$), [$t(249) = 4.22, P < .05$]. Adolescents with higher peer-relation are more assertive than those with lower level of peer-relation ($M=10.60$), [$t(249) = 5.16, P < .05$]. However, gender does not affect assertiveness [$t(249) = .08, P > .05$]. Also, the school attended does not determine the level of assertiveness [$t(249) = .23, P > .05$]. It was concluded therefore that, peer relation and self-esteem did influence assertiveness and it is recommended that parents and authorities should be of help to refer their children or ward to psychologists when experiencing behavioural problems.

Keywords: Peer Relation, Self-esteem, Assertiveness, Adolescent.

Introduction

Behaviour therapists have devoted a great deal of attention to assertive behaviour (Ivelina & Stoil, 2013). Assertiveness is an attitude and a way of relating to the outside world, back up by a set of skills for effective communication. To be truly assertive, you need to see yourself as

being of worth and as having a right to enjoy life. At the same time you value others equally respecting the rights to an opinion and to enjoy themselves (Bernard, 1996).

In a period as turbulent as adolescence, assertiveness does not come easily with their peer group but it is influenced by

several features. Many adolescents have difficulty in asserting their rights. (Alberti, 1974). Non-assertive person during social confrontations commonly experience anxieties, which interfere; with their attempts to take stand and express their true feelings (Filsinger, 1982). Peer group is a very important aspect when confronted in situation to assert their states and relationship in the group (Filsinger, 1982).

Assertiveness is a skill; it can be learnt and seen when displayed by an individual. It is accompanied with different kinds of emotional qualities. Assertion can occur with the feelings of pride and domination which can be seen when individual accord tense with respect and this lead to a feeling of superiority and in another vein individual whose right is being infringed upon has a feeling of inferiority with the self, Assertiveness reflects people's expression of their genuine feelings, standing up for their legitimate rights, and refusing unreasonable requests. (Okechi, Nwankwo, Nkiru, Obande & Chinenye, 2013).

Lack of assertiveness can affect ones relationship and quality of life, as you fail to communicate effectively and end up not getting what you want. Family life, career prospects and stress levels can all be affected by lack of assertiveness. According to behaviourists, non-

assertive behaviour is as a result of an individual's history of maladaptive habit formation, it is believed that assertive behaviour may be instigated, and fear of social conflict reciprocally inhibited it according to instrumental learning principles. Assertiveness training often consists of modeling of others assertive behaviour, role-play assertive response and receiving immediate reinforcement for appropriate assertive actions (Alberti, 1974). One of the myths about assertive behaviour is that it involves clear, calm thinking and respective negotiation within a space where each person is entitled to their opinion.

Self-esteem is highly essential for peers in order to prevent assertive problems. Peer group influences begin in childhood and become stronger as the individual approaches and reaches adolescence. Peer-relation provide a source of social support, developed skills and interests that give continuing feedback about children behaviours and served to legitimize a variety of activities in which the teenager might otherwise be hesitant to engage. The lack of acceptance of a person by peer group has repercussion on the individual's disposition and thus affecting his/her self-esteem and assertiveness. An individual who is not socially accepted by his/her peers; is liable to be depressed and lack self-esteem. This shows the extent the

influence relationship has on peers (Williams, 1990).

Children begin their lives in the social world of their families; however, as they mature they are introduced to the social world of peers and spend increasing amounts of time with kids their own age, this favourable and unfavourable attitudes lead to high or low self-esteem in individuals and also determine the level of assertiveness of the person. An individual evaluation of his or her self has a great bearing on which peer group or group behaviour they find most important or desirable. One research study discovered that college students, who evaluated themselves as having high self-esteem choose to join, emulate groups that comprised socio-economic status and elicit high level of assertiveness (Anderson, 1996). The group which children choose to compare themselves can in turn directly affect their self-esteem, self-evaluation and level of assertiveness. Students, who associated themselves with high status peer, further enhance their self-esteem and assertiveness. Although it can be daunting, the benefits of learning assertiveness are great. Assertiveness allows you to communicate better, command respect, and been listened to within respectful land negotiating relationships.

Contingency Theory of Self Esteem proposed by Williams (1990) noted that people tend to stake their self-esteem on their success in some area of life and not others; for James, some people stake their self-worth on being beautiful, thin or strong, moral virtues, professional success. Feelings of self-worth, self-respect and self-esteem depend on perceived success or failure in those domains on which self-worth is contingent (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001).

Attachment Theory as proposed by Bowlbys (1982),viewed attachment as the positive emotional bond that developed between a child and a particular individual as the most important form of social development that occurs during adolescent. According to Bowlbys (1982), children who are securely attached to their peers tend to be more socially and emotionally competent than their less securely attached peers. The nature of attachment between a child and his or her groups has a far reaching consequence far later in development. Self-esteem or self-concept is the totality of a complex organized and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence. Supporting this view, Williams (1995) proposed that self-esteem or self-image is inherently phenomenological and that it refers to the person's own view of him or

herself. Supporting this view also is Warfield (2002) who stated that self-concept is that internal picture we hold of us which may directly or indirectly interfere with our interactions with peers. It is “who we think we are” others hold different pictures of us that do not agree with who we think we are. Each of us communicate out of our self-image, while affected by temperament, self-esteem goes beyond our in-built personality style.

Adolescents are peer centered; their interaction with their peers may be egocentric (Hall, 1972). In a naturalistic observation, study of group discussions by male adolescent found out that most of the subject comments reflected joking, exaggeration, elaborations on truth or perceived invulnerability. However, when peer were interacting with an adult leader, many of their comments showed discouragement indicating discontent with the adult world, A boy remarked that adult leader were unable to take them seriously. Interaction with peers far exceeded those with adults (Newman 1996).

According to Gary (1965) who examines the role of peer relationship in child and adolescent development by tracking the major research findings from 1900s to the present, children begin their lives in the social world of peers and spend increasing amounts of time with

kids their own age. The type of relationship developed or formed differs from those they have with their parent and siblings and it teaches them unique skills that impact their development (Gary, 1965). On the basis of similarity or socialization process in which friends influence each other.

Newman (1996), reviewed that, peer relation could be related to culture; they suggest that, boys have more self-perception than girls from different cultures. In a longitudinal study by Newman (1996), on peer relation and self-esteem in boys and girls, he found out that self-image and achievement decline in girls but increase in boys from sixth to seventh grades with the manifesting increases in seventh to eighth grade and the boys showing stability. Stone (1983) also found that when boys and girls were given the same opportunities to make a group coerce and opportunity to influence group decisions the girls showed lower levels of self-confidence than the boys. Stone (1983) now concluded that sex related differences exist in the level of self-esteem and peer relationships even to the level of assertiveness.

Helburg (1983) in his study of peer relationship and their effect on assertiveness of children was able to differentiate the characteristics associated with children with low self-assertiveness

and low peer relation. The low assertive children, were found to have a negative perception of group relationship, they were not assured and unsociable. While those who were highly assertive, were found to be sociable and have positive perception of group relationship.

According to Kingsley's (1999) treatise on the sociology of parent and youth conflict and peer relationship, the society changes very rapidly, parents find it difficult to guide their children's relationships as it comes with age. Ruth (1996) criticizes Kingsley's idea that adolescent peer relationship has nothing to do with their feelings of wanting to be self-dependent, that a search for identifying may not necessarily lead to conflicts between child and their parents, but could be a booster for such adolescent and parent status.

Long et al (1995) found that people with particularly low self-esteem rely on group or collective self-esteem more than those with high personal self-esteem, it was also shown in a long study that adolescent who show high personal self-esteem discriminated not only between their group and others but also within their own group, as which group competitions may rely in attribute often out of the individuals control. Long et al (1995) concluded that adolescent with high personal self-esteem will also exhibit or elicit high assertiveness, while

adolescents who exhibit low personal self-esteem will be of low assertiveness or non-assertive. Long (1995) finally argued that gang membership is a positive step towards reducing low assertive behaviour in persons with low self-esteem.

Pertinent to the variables of interest, this study will attempt to find solutions to these problems relating to the influence of peer relation and self-esteem on assertiveness among adolescents, which have led to the following questions:

- I. Does low self-esteem predict assertiveness?
- II. Could peer relation predict assertive behaviours?
- III. Do type of school influence assertive behaviour?
- IV. Will adolescent in mixed school be assertive than those in other types of schools?
- V. Is there any difference between boarding school and day school students on assertiveness?

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between the psychological variables such as peer relation and self-esteem, and whether this relationship can influence assertiveness of adolescence. Also, to identify this problem and find solutions if any to adolescence low self-esteem, peer-relation and non-assertiveness and also to describe gender

difference in peer-relation and self-esteem.

Research Hypotheses

1. Adolescents with high self-esteem will be more assertive than adolescents with low self-esteem.
2. Adolescents with high peer relations will be more assertive than adolescents with low peer relations.
3. Male adolescents will be more assertive than female adolescents.
4. Adolescent who attended single school will be more assertive than those who attended mixed school.
5. Adolescents who attended day school will be more assertive than those who attended boarding school.

Method

Design

The study adopted an ex-post facto design since the independent variables used are already in existence and the researcher did not have control over the manipulation of the variables.

Sample and sampling Techniques

A total number of 251 Adolescents (being the subjects that possess the targeted characteristics for the research) were purposively selected as participants from three different public and private schools within Ilorin Metropolis. The authority of the schools gave their consent for the

study to involve their students while students who refused to sign the informed consent were excluded.

Participants

The Participants in this study are adolescents in secondary schools involving male and females Muslims and Christians from private and public school in Ilorin metropolis. There were 142 Christians and 109 were Muslims. Also, 217 participants were of the age 12-17 years and 18-21 were 34 in number. 162 attended single sex school and 89 attended mixed schools. 6 participants attended boarding schools and 245 attended day schools. The participants comprised of 97 males and 154 females with their age ranging from 12-21 years.

Instruments

A questionnaire divided into four sections was used in the study section.

Section A consists of all demographic information of participants.

Section B is of Index of Peer Relation (IPR): developed by Walter Hudson et al (1986). This is a 25-item scale designed to measure problems of inter personal relationship with peers given an induction of how cordial inter personal relationship with peers are. It has reliability coefficient of .94 and the norms obtained by Anumba (1995) for Nigeria samples 29.31 for males and 26.83 for females.

The norms obtained for America males and a female by Hudson (1986) was .35 for 107 students. Anumba also obtained a validity coefficient of .62 for Nigerian samples which correlated IPR with Hare self-esteem (SS) by Hare (1985). The present study has an Alpha coefficient of 0.56 and a Guttman Split-half of .79.

Section C, Index of self-esteem (ISE): it was developed by Hudson (1982). The 25 items inventory is designed to measure the self-perceived and self-evaluating components of self-concept which the sum total of the self-perceived and the other is perceived views of the self-held by a person. Hudson (1982) provided the original psychometric properties for American samples while Onighaiye (1996) provided the properties of Nigerian samples. The norms reported here are the mean score obtained by the general population. The American samples for male and female 30. While the Nigerian samples for male is 30.81 and female 32.04. Hudson (1982) obtained a coefficient alpha of .93 and a 2 hours test-retest coefficient of .92. Onighaiye (1992) obtained the following validity by correlating ISE with stated test concurrent validity with SCL to 90 by Derogatis et al (1973) in scale C – inter personal sensitivity, 42 scale D – depression = 48. Onighaiye also obtained a discriminate validity using ego identify scale (ESI) by Tan et al (1977) = 48. The

present study has an alpha coefficient of .71 and Guttman split half of .64.

Sections D, Rathus assertiveness schedule (RAS): this instrument is used to assess assertive behaviour and it was designed and developed by Rathus (1973). It has a 30 item schedule. The norm obtained for American samples was 294 for 68 samples while 48.25 and 48.61 were obtained for 200 Nigerian male and female respectively. Reliability coefficient obtained by Rathus (1973) were split half .77 and obtained by Anumba (1998) was a concurrent validity coefficient of .25 by RAS with index of peer relations by Hudson (1986).

Procedure

The study/research was carried out in Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State. The schools used were Saint Anthony Secondary School, Ilorin Government High School and Queen Elizabeth Secondary School. Questionnaires were administered to the participants during school hours in their various classes. A total of 251 questionnaires were administered to the participants after permission was sought and given by the public and private schools authorities. The instruments were administered in the following order; Index of peer relations (IPR) followed by index of self-esteem and Rathus assertiveness schedule (RAS). The instructions on each scale

were read to participants and enough time was given to fill the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Descriptive (means, SD, Percentages, range, etc) and inferential statistic (t-test for independent sample) analysis was used to analyse the data for this study.

Results

Table 1. Summary of t-test for independent measure showing the difference of high and low self-esteem on assertiveness.

Index of self-esteem	N	MEAN	SD	df	t	P
Higher self-esteem	131	33.85	20.76	249	4.22	<.05
Lower self-esteem	120	24.96	19.93			

The above result shows that adolescent with higher self-esteem scored higher ($M=33.85$, $SD=20.76$) on the self-assertiveness than those with lower self-esteem ($M=24.96$, $SD=19.93$) thus, there is a significant difference of self-esteem on assertiveness. [$t(249) = 4.22$, $P<.05$]. In this regard we can deduce that adolescent with higher self-esteem is more assertive than those with lower self-esteem.

Table 2. Summary of t-test for independent measure showing the difference of high and low level of peer-relation on assertiveness

Index of peer relation	N	MEAN	SD	df	t	P
Higher peer relation	150	26.39	27.30	249	5.16	<.05
Lower peer relation	101	10.60	17.17			

The result in table 2 showed that adolescent with higher peer relations will be more assertive than those with lower peer relations ($M=10.60$, $SD=17.17$), meaning that those with higher peer-relation are more assertive than those with lower level of peer-relation. [$t(249) = 5.16$, $P<.05$]. Hypothesis two was therefore supported. This implies that adolescent level of peer relation did influence assertiveness.

Table 3. Summary of t-test for independent measure showing that males will be more assertive than females

Gender	N	MEAN	S.D	df	T	P
Male	97	20.19	25.15	249	-0.8	>.05
Female	154	19.94	23.18			

The above table showed that males do not have significant influence on assertiveness than female. In this regard, one can deduce that an increase in assertive behaviour does not have anything to do with gender. Therefore, gender does not influence assertiveness. [$t(249)=-.08, P>.05$]. Hypothesis Three was not supported.

Discussion

The result of the study first showed that adolescents with higher level of self-esteem will be more assertive. The result was consistent with the findings of Long, (1995); Litorsky and Dusek (1985); Rosenberg (1965) studies which found that adolescents with higher personal self-esteem will exhibit or elicit higher assertiveness and this was found to be relevant according to the result obtained in this present study. This implies that, adolescents with high self-esteem are prone to be assertive.

The result of the second hypothesis, which stated that there will be a significant influence of peer-relation on assertiveness was found significant and this was supported by the findings of Helburg (1983), Blos (1962); who concluded that adolescents with low self-assertiveness were found to have a negative or low perception of group

relationship, they were not self-assured and were unsociable while those with higher assertiveness, were found to be sociable and have positive or higher perception of group of relationship and this was also found to be relevant according to the obtained result in the present study. This means that peer relation is a factor for self-assertiveness. The third hypothesis which stated that there would be an influence between male scores on assertiveness and female scores on assertiveness was not significant. It contradicted the findings of Stine and Bunker, (1982); Peterson and Newman (1990) who concluded that sex-related differences exist in determining level of self- esteem, peer-relation and assertiveness, they also found that self-image and achievement decline in girls but increases in boys from six to seven grades. This contradiction could be as a result of cultural belief and ethnic or racial difference. In some culture males

are trained to be assertive more than girls because it is believed that men must be strong and bold; but the revival for gender equality is really maintaining this balance of the present results. Some adolescents might have developed some defense mechanisms that might be helpful for increasing their level of assertiveness or undergo some training by modelling others who are assertive than they do e.g. role-play assertive response and receiving immediate reinforcement for appropriate assertive actions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the results of the study the type of school attended and gender that the adolescents belong to do not necessarily influence their level of assertiveness. It was also discovered in the study that the rate of self-esteem and level of peer-relation was seen as an important factor or variables than the other factors in the study for enhancing level of assertiveness of adolescents.

- i. Government and the society at large should provide well-equipped and conducive environment for adolescents' education –counselling programmes should be included in every school curricula to aid coping strategy which will assist the adolescents in the future in

building higher self-esteem to enhance higher level of assertiveness because individuals with low self-esteem and assertiveness might end up in all sort of social vices. Such adolescents are prone to depression and anxiety if not taking care of which might affect their performances and behaviour.

- ii. Programmes like debates, talk shows etc. that would foster social interactions amongst adolescents should be encouraged. This fosters peer relations and invariably would increase the level of assertiveness of the adolescents.
- iii. School authorities should assist in detecting children that exhibit signs of anxiety, depression and tends to be isolated from others, they should be referred for psychological assistance.
- iv. The government should involve psychologists to set up relevant educative programmes and policies that will enhance adolescents' development and provide financial assistance for the less privileged ones which

will directly reduce behaviour related problems both in family, school and the society in general.

- v. Parents should try as much as possible to avoid the things that will negatively influence their children (adolescents) self-esteem, peer relation and most importantly their level of assertiveness.
- vi. There should be more intimate relationship between the adolescents and their parents, the parents should as well be sensitive to their needs and all necessary support should be given when needed by the adolescents.

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