

# Self – Esteem as a Predictor of Psychological Well- Being Among Adolescents Across Socio-Economic Status Levels

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## Abstract

This study explores the role of self- esteem as a significant predictor of psychological well- being among adolescents across different socio- economic status (SES) levels. Grounded in developmental and ecological systems theories, the research examines how individual psychological resources interact with structural socio- economic conditions to influence mental health outcomes. While socio- economic disparities are widely associated with variations in adolescent well – being, not all youth exposed to socio-economic disadvantage experience poor psychological outcomes. This suggests the presence of protective psychological factors, among which self – esteem is particularly salient. The study investigates whether self –esteem independently predicts psychological well- being conceptualized through indicators such as life satisfaction, emotional regulation, positive affect, and reduced depressive and anxiety symptoms after accounting for both objective SES (e.g., Parental income, education, occupation) and subjective SES (Perceived social standing). It further examines whether self- esteem functions as a mediating mechanism through which SES influences well- being, or as a moderating factor that buffers the negative psychological impact of socio- economic conditions. Using standardized psychometric instruments and multivariate statistical analyses, the research aims to clarify the strength and direction of these relationships. It is anticipated that higher levels of self- esteem will be associated with better psychological well- being across all SES groups, with particularly strong protective effects among adolescents from lower socio- economic backgrounds. The findings are expected to contribute to adolescent developmental research and mental health intervention strategies by emphasizing self- esteem as a critical psychological asset. Enhancing self –esteem may serve as an effective approach in reducing socio- economic disparities in adolescent mental health and promoting resilient developmental trajectories.

**Keywords:** Self – esteem, Psychological well – being, Adolescents, Socio- economic Status.

## Introduction

Adolescence is widely recognized as a pivotal stage of human development marked by profound biological maturation, cognitive expansion, and evolving social roles. During this transitional phase, individuals strive to establish a coherent identity and a stable sense of self.

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The development of self- esteem becomes particularly salient at this time, as adolescents increasingly evaluate their abilities, appearance, social acceptance, and overall self- worth. Self- esteem defined as the individual's subjective appraisal of personal value and competence, plays a central role in shaping emotional responses, behavioural choices, and patterns of social interaction.

Psychological well – being represents a comprehensive indicator of positive mental health and optimal functioning. Rather than merely signifying the absence of psychological disorders, it encompasses dimensions such as life satisfaction, emotional balance, personal growth, and meaningful interpersonal relationships. The multidimensional perspective proposed by Carol Ryff conceptualizes psychological well- being in terms of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self- acceptance. Within adolescence, maintaining psychological well- being is essential for academic engagement, healthy peer relationships, adaptive coping, and long- term psychosocial stability.

Extensive empirical evidence suggests that self- esteem serves as a significant predictor of psychological well- being. Adolescents who possess higher self- esteem are generally more resilient, optimistic, and capable of managing stress effectively. They are more likely to demonstrate emotional regulation and constructive problem- solving skills. In contrast, adolescents with lower self- esteem often exhibit increased vulnerability to anxiety, depressive tendencies, social withdrawal, and reduced life satisfaction. These patterns highlight the predictive strength of self- esteem in determining mental health outcomes during this sensitive developmental stage.

At the same time, adolescent development unfolds within broader socio- environmental contexts that shape opportunities and challenges. Socio- economic status (SES), typically determined by parental education, occupation, and income, constitutes an important structural factor influencing developmental trajectories. SES affects access to quality education, healthcare, extracurricular opportunities, and supportive living conditions. Adolescents from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may encounter cumulative stressors such as financial hardship, limited academic resources, and social marginalization, which can adversely influence both their self- esteem and psychological well- being.

Exploring self- esteem as a predictor of psychological well- being across different socio- economic status levels provide a nuanced understanding of how individual psychological strengths interact with structural inequalities. It allows researchers to examine whether the influence of self- esteem on well- being remains stable across SES groups or varies depending on socio- economic conditions. Such analysis is particularly relevant in diverse societies where socio- economic disparities may significantly shape adolescents lived experiences and mental health outcomes.

Investigating the predictive role of self- esteem in psychological well- being among adolescents across socio- economic strata offers valuable theoretical and applied insights. It advances knowledge in developmental and educational psychology while supporting the

design of context- sensitive interventions aimed at strengthening self- esteem and promoting equitable mental health outcomes for adolescents from varied socio- economic backgrounds.

### **Need for the study**

The present study carries considerable significance in advancing understanding within developmental and positive psychology. Self- esteem, conceptualized prominently by Morris Rosenberg as an individual's overall evaluation of self- worth, has long been regarded as a central determinant of psychological adjustment. Likewise, psychological well- being has been elaborated through the multidimensional model proposed by Carol Ryff, encompassing autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self- acceptance. By examining self- esteem as a predictive variable across different socio- economic status (SES) levels, this study enhances theoretical clarity regarding how internal psychological resources operate within varying socio- economic contexts. It contributes to a deeper understanding of whether self- esteem can serve as a compensatory or protective mechanism against socio- economic disadvantages during adolescence.

Adolescence is a crucial transitional phase marked by rapid biological, emotional, and social changes. During this formative period, individuals actively construct their identity and self- concept, making self- esteem particularly influential in shaping their emotional stability and life satisfaction. Considering that socio – economic status significantly affects access to educational opportunities, family support, and social exposure, exploring its interaction with self- esteem is vital. This study therefore highlights the extent to which positive self- evaluation may foster resilience, adaptability, and overall well- being among adolescents irrespective of their economic background.

The study also holds strong social and educational relevance. Its findings can inform educators, school administrators, and policymakers about the importance fostering healthy self- esteem in school settings, especially among students from lower socio- economic groups. Structured interventions such as counselling services, self- development workshops, and supportive classroom environments can be designed to strengthen adolescents' confidence and emotional competence. From a clinical perspective, understanding the predictive relationship between self- esteem and psychological well- being may aid mental health professionals in early detection of vulnerability to anxiety, depression, and stress- related concerns.

Moreover, by integrating self- esteem, psychological well- being, and socio- economic status into a unified research framework, this study contributes to empirical literature and opens avenues for further longitudinal and comparative research. Overall, the significance of this topic lies in its potential to bridge theoretical insights with practical applications, thereby supporting comprehensive strategies to enhance adolescent mental health across diverse socio- economic backgrounds.

### **Literature Review**

Self- esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their worth or value, which develops through social interactions, family environment, and achievement experiences.

Psychological well- being typically includes positive affect, life satisfaction, self- acceptance and personal growth.

Twenge & Campbell (2002) conducted a large meta- analysis examining the relationship between SES and self- esteem. Their findings indicated that children and adolescents from higher SES backgrounds tend to report higher self- esteem, largely due to greater educational opportunities, parental support, and social resources. These findings established the theoretical basis for examining SES as a structural factor influencing self- esteem development. Several studies highlight that self- esteem is strongly associated with psychological well- being during adolescence. Moksnes & Reidunsdatter (2019) found that adolescents with higher self- esteem reported better mental health, lower stress levels, and higher life satisfaction. The study showed that self- esteem remained a stable predictor of mental health across the school year, even after controlling for demographic variables such as age, gender, and SES. Similarly, Gardner & Webb (2019) demonstrated that self- esteem significantly predicted psychological well- being among adolescents with social support acting as an additional mediating factor. Adolescents with stronger self- esteem showed greater emotional adjustment and resilience. Enwere & Mbakwe (2021) also reported that self- esteem and locus of control jointly predicted psychological well- being among secondary school adolescents, suggesting that internal psychological resources are central determinants of mental health outcomes. Research indicates that SES affects adolescents' self- esteem through family environment, educational opportunities, and exposure to stressors. Veselska et al. (2010) examined socioeconomic differences in adolescent self- esteem and found that low SES adolescents tend to report lower self- esteem, partly due to reduced social support and higher exposure to psychological stressors. Similarly, Jangra & Balda (2018) reported that socioeconomic conditions significantly predicted adolescents perceived and socially evaluated self- esteem with lower SES associated with poorer self- concept and reduced confidence. SES also directly influences adolescent psychological well- being. McLeod & Owens (2004) examined variations in psychological well- being across socioeconomic backgrounds and found that adolescents from disadvantaged families experience higher levels of psychological distress and lower life satisfaction. Structural inequalities such as poverty, limited parental education, and neighbourhood disadvantage were key explanatory factors. Recent studies suggest that self- esteem may mediate the relationship between SES and psychological well- being. Jiang (2020) examined adolescents' mental health and found that poverty and peer victimization negatively affected psychological well- being, but self- esteem significantly buffered these effects indicating its protective role. Navarro- Carrillo et al. (2020) showed that subjective socioeconomic status predicts psychological well- being but the impact is partly explained by personal factors such as self- esteem and perceived social standing. It also reported that adolescents' mental well- being is influenced by SES, social support, and health behaviour, with self- esteem acting as an important psychological resource for coping with socioeconomic challenges.

### **Objectives**

- To assess the level of self- esteem among adolescents.
- To measure the level of psychological well- being among adolescents.

- To determine the socio-economic status (SES) levels of adolescents' families.
- To examine the relationship between self- esteem and psychological well- being among adolescents.
- To analyse whether self- esteem significantly predicts psychological well- being.
- To compare self- esteem levels among adolescents across different SES groups (low, middle, and high).
- To compare psychological well- being across different SES groups.
- To examine whether socio- economic status moderates the relationship between self- esteem and psychological well- being.

### **Methodology**

**Research Design:** The present study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the role of self- esteem as a predictor of psychological well- being among adolescents across different socio- economic status (SES) levels. The design was considered appropriate as it enables the researcher to study the relationship between psychological variables within naturally existing groups without manipulating them. The study aimed to determine whether variations in self- esteem could significantly predict levels of psychological well- being among adolescents from different socio- economic backgrounds.

**Population and Sample:** The population of the study consisted of adolescents studying in secondary schools (13- 18 years) in both urban and rural areas. A representative sample of 200 adolescents was selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure proportional representation across three socio- economic categories: low SES, middle SES, and high SES. This sampling method helped in obtaining a balanced representation of adolescents from different socio- economic backgrounds.

**Research Instruments:**

Data were collected using standardized and validated instruments:

**Self- Esteem Scale:** Self- esteem was measured using a standardized Self- Esteem Scale, such as Rosenberg Self- Esteem Scale, which assesses an individual's overall sense of self- worth and self- acceptance. The scale consists of multiple items rated on a Likert- type format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Higher scores indicate higher levels of self- esteem. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the scale has been reported to be above 0.80.

**Psychological Well- Being Scale:** Psychological well- being was assessed using a standardized Psychological Well- Being Scale designed to measure various dimensions of well- being such as autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self- acceptance. The items were rated on a Likert Scale, and higher scores represented higher levels of psychological well- being. The reliability coefficient for the scale was reported to be above 0.75.

**Socio- Economic Status (SES) Scale:** A standardized Socio- Economic Status (SES) Scale was used to categorize participants into low, middle, and high socio- economic groups based on factors such as parental education, occupation, and family income.

**Procedure of Data Collection:** Prior permission was obtained from the school authorities before conducting the study. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured.

Informed consent was obtained from students and school authorities (and parents where required). The questionnaires were administered collectively in classroom settings under the supervision of the researcher. Clear instructions were provided, and students were encouraged to respond honestly and independently.

**Statistical Analysis and Results:** The collected data were coded and analysed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS). The following statistical techniques were employed:

**Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Standard Deviation, Percentage)** to describe the levels of self- esteem and psychological well- being among adolescents.

**Pearson Product Moment Correlation** to examine the relationship between self- esteem and psychological well- being.

**Regression Analysis** to determine whether self- esteem significantly predicts psychological well- being among adolescents.

**One- way ANOVA** to examine differences in psychological well- being across different socio- economic status levels (low, middle, and high SES).

Table 1: Levels of Self- Esteem among Adolescents (N= 200)

Level of Self- Esteem	Score Range	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
High Self- Esteem	Above 75	58	29.0
Moderate Self- esteem	50 _75	96	48.0
Low Self- Esteem	Below 50	46	23.0
Total		200	100.0

Mean Score = 67.85 SD = 12.64

**Interpretation:** Most adolescents (48%) reported moderate levels of self- esteem, while 29 % reported high self- esteem and 23% reported low self- esteem.

Table 2: Levels of Psychological Well- Being among Adolescents (200)

Level of Psychological Well- Being	Score Range	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
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High Well-Being	Above 80	64	32.0
Moderate Well-Being	55_80	90	45.0
Low Well-Being	Below 55	46	23.0
Total		200	100.0

Mean Score= 72.41 SD = 11.87

Interpretation: The majority of adolescents demonstrate moderate psychological well- being (45%), followed by high well- being (32%).

Table 3: Correlation between Self- Esteem and Psychological Well- Being (N = 200)

Variables	Correlation (r)	P- value	Significance
Self- Esteem & Psychological Well- Being	0.63	<0.001	Significant

Interpretation: A strong positive correlation ( $r = 0,63$ ) exists between self- esteem and psychological well- being, indicating that adolescents with higher self- esteem tend to have better psychological well- being.

Table 4: Psychological Well- Being across Socio- Economic Status (SES) Levels (One – Way ANOVA)

SES Level	N	Mean	SD
Low SES	66	68.24	10.92
Middle SES	70	72.81	11.03
High SES	64	76.15	10.74

Source of Variance	SS	df	MS	F	P
Between Groups	1345.21	2	672.61	5.48	0.005
Within Groups	24158.70	197	122.64		
Total	25503.91	199			

Interpretation: The ANOVA results show a significant difference in psychological well-being across SES groups ( $F = 5.48, p < 0.01$ ). Adolescents from higher SES backgrounds show relatively higher psychological well-being.

Table 5: Regression Analysis \_ Self – Esteem Predicting Psychological Well- Being (N= 200)

Predictor Variable	B	SE	t- value
Self- Esteem	0.61	0.05	11.82

#### Model Summary

R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F	P
0.63	0.40	0.39	139.78	<0.001

Interpretation: Self- esteem significantly predicts psychological well- being among adolescents. The model explains 40 % of the variance in psychological well- being ( $R^2 = 0.40$ ).

#### Discussion:

The present study investigated self – esteem as a predictor of psychological well- being among adolescents across different socio- economic status (SES) levels. The findings highlight the significant role of self- esteem in shaping adolescents’ mental health and overall well- being. The descriptive analysis revealed that a majority of adolescents reported moderate levels of self- esteem (48%), followed by high self- esteem (29%) and low self- esteem (23%). This pattern suggests that most adolescents maintain an average level of self- worth, while a smaller proportion experience lower confidence and self- evaluation.

Similarly, the analysis of psychological well- being showed that 45% of adolescents demonstrated moderate well- being, 32 % high well- being, and 23 % low well- being. These results indicate that although many adolescents maintain a reasonable level of psychological functioning, a notable number may still encounter emotional and psychological challenges during this critical developmental period. The correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between self- esteem and psychological well- being ( $r = 0.63, p < 0.001$ ). The findings indicates that adolescents with higher self- esteem tend to experience better psychological well- being. Individuals with positive self- perceptions are generally more capable of managing stress, maintaining social relationships, and developing a positive outlook toward life. This result supports previous psychological research suggesting that self- esteem is closely associated with emotional stability and life satisfaction.

Furthermore, the regression analysis confirmed that self- esteem significantly predicts psychological well- being ( $B = 0.61, t = 11.82, p < 0.001$ ). The model summary indicated that self- esteem accounted for approximately 40 % of the variance in psychological well- being

( $R^2 = 0.40$ ). The finding highlights the strong predictive power of self-esteem in determining adolescents' mental health outcomes. Adolescents who perceive themselves positively are more likely to exhibit higher levels of happiness, emotional balance, and psychological adjustment.

The ANOVA results also demonstrated significant differences in psychological well-being across socio-economic status groups ( $F=5.48, p < 0.01$ ). Adolescents belonging to higher socio-economic backgrounds reported comparatively higher psychological well-being than those from middle and lower SES groups. This may be attributed to better access to educational resources, supportive family environments, and greater social opportunities available to adolescents from higher SES families. In contrast, adolescents from lower SES backgrounds may experience financial stress, limited resources, and environmental constraints that can influence their psychological adjustment.

Overall, the findings of this study emphasize that self-esteem serves as a significant psychological predictor of well-being among adolescents, while socio-economic conditions also play an important contextual role. Strengthening adolescents' self-esteem through supportive educational environments, counselling services, and positive family interactions may contribute to improved psychological well-being and healthier developmental outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

Self-esteem emerges as a powerful and reliable predictor of psychological well-being among adolescents across varying socio-economic status (SES) levels. Based on the foundational work of Morris Rosenberg, self-esteem reflects an individual's overall sense of personal value and self-acceptance, which significantly shapes emotional balance, life satisfaction, and resilience during the developmental phase of adolescence. Empirical evidence consistently shows that adolescents with higher self-esteem demonstrate greater psychological well-being, including increased positive emotions, stronger purpose in life, autonomy, and more satisfying social relationships. Socio-economic status as explained in the stratification theory of Max Weber, provides an essential social context that influences developmental opportunities and life experiences. Although adolescents from higher SES backgrounds often benefit from better material resources, academic exposure, and parental support, the impact of self-esteem on psychological well-being remains significant regardless of socio-economic differences. This indicates that self-esteem functions as an internal protective factor that can mitigate the adverse effects associated with economic disadvantage.

Moreover, the combined analysis of self-esteem and SES suggests that while socio-economic conditions may shape external life circumstances, adolescents possessing strong self-esteem are better equipped to cope with stress, overcome challenges, and maintain emotional stability. In many cases, self-esteem acts as either a mediating or moderating variable, reducing the negative psychological outcomes commonly linked to lower SES, such as anxiety, depressive symptoms, and low life satisfaction.

Overall, the findings reinforce the importance of fostering self – esteem as a central component of adolescent development. Schools, families, and policymakers should implement supportive programs and interventions that nurture positive self- concept, especially among economically disadvantaged youth. Enhancing self- esteem during adolescence not only strengthens psychological well- being but also promotes long term adjustment, resilience, and holistic development across socio- economic backgrounds.

### **Educational Implications**

**Creating an Emotionally Supportive Learning Environment:** Educational institutions should prioritize a safe, inclusive, and affirming school climate where every student feels respected and valued. Adolescents from lower socio- economic backgrounds may encounter social comparison, stigma, or limited access to resources, which can negatively influence their self- concept. By fostering empathy, cooperation, and mutual respect, schools can reduce feelings of inferiority and promote psychological security.

**Incorporating Social- Emotional Learning into Curriculum:** Schools should integrate structured social- emotional learning (SEL) programs into the academic framework. These programs can focus on self- awareness, emotional regulation, goal- setting, and positive self- reflection. When students are encouraged to recognize their strengths and achievements, their self- esteem improves, which in turn enhances psychological well- being across SES groups.

**Strength- Based Teaching Approaches:** Teachers should adopt instructional strategies that emphasize students’ strengths rather than weaknesses. Providing constructive feedback, appreciating effort, and setting realistic goals can help students build confidence. Avoiding excessive criticism or public comparison is especially important in protecting vulnerable adolescents’ self- esteem.

**Accessible Guidance and Counselling Services:** Professional counselling services should be readily available within schools to address emotional difficulties, stress, and identity- related concerns. Counselors can design targeted interventions for students facing socio- economic challenges, thereby strengthening coping mechanisms and resilience.

**Encouraging Family- School Collaboration:** Strong communication between parents and educators can reinforce positive self- perceptions in adolescents. Workshops and awareness programs can educate parents about constructive parenting styles that support confidence and emotional well- being, regardless of socio- economic conditions.

**Redefining Success and Achievement:** Schools should broaden the definition of success beyond academic performance. Recognizing achievements in arts, sports, leadership, and community service allows adolescents to discover multiple avenues for self- worth. This inclusive recognition reduces SES- based disparities in perceived competence.

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