

PEER RELATIONSHIP AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG UNDERGRADUATES OF UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of peer relationship on self-esteem among undergraduates at the University of Lagos, with the aim of examining the influence peer relationship has on self-esteem. The study used a cross-sectional survey design, involving 400 undergraduates. Data was collected from across various faculties with the Index of Self-Esteem (ISE) scale that, measured self-esteem, and the Community and Youth Collaborative Institute School Experience Surveys, (CAYCI) Peer Relationship Scale by (Anderson-Butcher, et al., 2013) to elicit information on peer relationships. The result show that, peer relationship significantly influenced the experience of low self-esteem among undergraduates ($B = -0.111$, $t = 21.87$, $p < .05$) with poorer peer relationships associated with low self-esteem. The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 4.97$, $p < .05$). This study's findings underscore the importance of positive peer relationships in enhancing self-esteem. This finding suggests that interventions aimed at improving peer interactions could be effective in boosting self-esteem.

Key Words: Peer Relationship, Self-esteem, Undergraduates, Low self-esteem

1. BACKGROUND

Self-esteem is a concept that is widely recognized by many professionals like teachers, counsellors, Psychologies and so on, and several definitions have been ascribed to self-esteem. According to the American Psychological Association, (APA), it refers to how individuals view their qualities and attributes, (APA, 2024). Self-esteem involves the set of negative or positive evaluations individuals have about themselves, (Monteiro et al., 2022). This self-image, which involves judgment, can be positive or negative, (McLeod, 2023). Self-esteem can be viewed from two categories or perspectives that is, low self-esteem and high self-esteem (Cherry, 2023). Ideally, a balance between extremes is preferable, as very high or very low self-esteem can be harmful (Cherry, 2017).

Self-esteem functions like a mirror, reflecting self-perception and the value attributed to one's worth, it exists on a spectrum rather than as a binary concept (Jordan et al., 2017). This trait serves as a protective mechanism and motivational force for pursuing goals (Leary, 1998). High self-esteem is linked to effective coping strategies, whereas low self-esteem may result to avoiding certain situations, (Ozer, & Korkman, 2022). Self-esteem is a significant aspect in determining overall health, quality of life, and mental well-being, with an influence on mental anguish, depressive symptoms, and even suicidal thoughts. (Asanoh., 2024; Aggarwal,et al., 2023; Woods, & Hanish, 2021; Zheng et al., 2014; Evans, 1997). Studies have pointed to low self-esteem as a risk factor in various emotional, psychological, and behavioural issues (Paudel et al., 2020; Leary, Schreindorfer, & Haupt, 1995). It is also suggested to be correlated with the experience of depressive symptoms, particularly among college students (Paudel et al., 2020). Additionally, self-esteem plays a role in social connections, activities, and external feedback (Liu, et al., 2021; Kemis, 2003).

Research has consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between healthy self-esteem and factors like psychological well-being, feeling valued by others, and good body image (Asanoh., 2024; Aggarwal,et al., 2023; Woods, & Hanish, 2021; Zheng et al., 2014; González et al., 2007; Keyes, 2006). Conversely, low self-regard is related to negative outcomes such as depression, health issues, and antisocial behaviour (Asanoh., 2024; Aggarwal,et al., 2023; MacPhee & Andrews, 2006; Stinson et al., 2008; Niregi, 2006). While debates persist about its stability, data

suggest fluctuations in self-esteem, especially during adolescence (Huang, et al., 2022; Bialecka-Pikul, et al., 2019).

The current study investigated the impact of peer interactions on the self-esteem of undergraduate students. Peer relationship, according to La Greca & Harrison, (2005), is the interpersonal relationships formed through social interactions among peers at similar psychological development stages. The relationship is a type of social support and dominates the interaction among university students (Chai et al., 2018). According to studies, good peer connections lead to improved emotional control and social integration, (Kucaba, et al., 2022). However, peer interaction may be demanding, as well as beneficial, (Rubin, et al., 2011). People's behaviour is influenced by their social environment and how they interpret social situations, which in turn affects their actions (Atiri, & Popoola, 2017). Studies have indicated a beneficial association between peer interactions and strong self-esteem, for example, (Hidayati,

2016) found a significant relationship existed between self-esteem and peer relations, emphasizing the substantial influence of the environment, particularly the quality of the relationships with peers, parents, and surroundings. Similarly, (Nurmalasari, 2015) found a positive correlation between peer relations and self-esteem among adolescents with lupus, suggesting that improved peer relations enhance self-esteem, (Hidayati, 2016). Positive relationships foster self-esteem and, social acceptance leading to constructive behaviours like self-acceptance and confidence, while low self-esteem is linked to low self-confidence, feelings of inadequacy, negative thought habits, and scholastic difficulties (Asanoh., 2024; Aggarwal,et al., 2023).

The association between peer relationships and self-esteem suggest that, positive peer relationships provide emotional support, boosting the individual's confidence and security, reducing anxiety, depression, and stress, and promoting emotional stability, (Asanoh., 2024; Aggarwal,et al., 2023; Woods, & Hanish, 2021; Zheng et al., 2014). These relationships help individuals learn vital skills like conflict resolution, effective communication, and empathy, which are crucial for maintaining healthy relationships, (Allo Health, 2023). Peer relationships are vital for closeness, love, a sense of inclusion, solid support, and increased self-worth, (Sharon, et al., 2018; Erdley et al., 2001). It is crucial for both current and future well-being, as positive peer relationships in early years

contribute to increased social competence and acceptance later on and contributes to having a good self-esteem, (Truong, & Joshi, 2024; Shin, 2016; Umukoro & Okurame, 2017).

Conversely, poor peer relationships can lead to negative outcomes, including early school withdrawal, delinquency, substance abuse, and mental health problems (Long, et al., 2020; McDougall et al., 2001; Woodward & Fergusson, 1999). Engaging in positive peer relationships is associated with higher levels of emotional well-being, pro-social behaviours, and positive self-beliefs (Li, et al., 2023 Schoeps, et al., 2020; Rubin et al., 2009). Positive psychological qualities such as happiness and optimism are highly related to helpful peer interactions in adolescence, (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2008) which denotes good check psychological well-being. The transition to university life is a critical period for undergraduate students, marked by significant social and emotional adjustments. Studies conducted on university students revealed that 29.5% of participants exhibited low self-esteem, indicating a significant problem within this population (Ketata et al, 2021). The study identified several risk factors associated with low self-esteem, including living in urban regions and studying in private universities (Ketata et al, 2021). In another study conducted among medical undergraduate students, the prevalence of poor self-esteem and mental discomfort was 19.0% and 19.7%, respectively. Students with poor self-esteem were five times as likely to experience emotional anguish, (Gidi et al., 2021) which is an indicator of poor psychological well-being.

Self-esteem has long been recognized as a crucial factor in the overall life satisfaction. Research repeatedly shows that those with strong self-esteem have better mental health, academic performance, and social relationships (Rosenberg, 1965; Baumeister et al., 2003). Low self-esteem has been connected to a variety of psychological disorders, including depression, anxiety, and poor academic performance (Asanoh., 2024; Aggarwal,et al., 2023; Orth & Robins, 2013).

Among the factors influencing self-esteem, peer relationships has emerged as a critical component, especially in the university setting where students often form new social networks away from their families (Rubin et al., 2019). Peer relationships during this time can profoundly impact students and their self-esteem (Rubin et al., 2015). Peer relationships can be either positive or negative. Positive peer connections give important support and a sense of belonging, but bad relationships can be harmful (Pittman & Richmond, 2008). One significant issue with peer relationships is peer

rejection or exclusion, which can lead to feelings of low self-worth, loneliness, and depression, thereby undermining self-esteem, (Long, et al., 2020; Demir & Weitekamp, 2007; Umukoro & Gandonu, 2014).

Similarly, negative peer interactions can predispose students to low self-esteem; this include behaviour such as bullying, harassment, or conflict cause significant stress and anxiety, further compromising students' mental health (Ibrahim, et al., 2024; Ahmed, et al., 2022; Berndt, 2002; Kling et al., 1999). Unfavorable social comparisons, especially concerning academic performance, physical appearance, or social status, can also contribute to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem (Merino, et al., 2024; Misriya, 2024; Ryff, 2019; Staudinger et al., 1999). These negative self-assessments erode self-esteem and foster a negative self-image,, (Merino, et al., 2024; Misriya, 2024). The negative effect of peer relationships on students can be severe, including decreased academic performance and engagement due to stress and anxiety (Shuman, 2019; Bruffaerts et al., 2018;), mental issues such as addiction to smart phones use as a result o loneliness depression and anxiety (Atiri, et al., 2020; Ghrouz et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2019), and substance abuse as a coping mechanism (Bewick et al., 2010; Nogueira & Sequeira, 2020). In extreme cases, these impacts can lead to suicidal ideation or attempts (Mortier et al., 2018).

From the assertions above, a lot of research has been conducted concerning self-esteem and the impact peer relationships has on the self-esteem of people especially adolescents and young adults, (Raboteg-Saric, et al., 2018; Mujiyati and Adiputra 2018; Long et al. 2021) but very few this studies were conducted in Nigerian environment, ((Ibrahim, et al., 2024; Ahmed, et al., 2022; Uwakwe et al., 2017). The present study hopes to add to the body of knowledge concerning self-esteem in Nigeria by exploring the impact peer-relationship has on self esteem of undergraduates in the University of Lagos hence this study. From the foregoing, this research answered the question concerning the impact peer relationships has on the self-esteem of undergraduates of the University of Lagos. The current study hypothesized that; Peer relationships will significantly influence self-esteem among undergraduates of the University of Lagos. For the rest of the paper, Section 2 focuses on the literature review in which both the theoretical and empirical perspectives will be highlighted. The third section is dedicated to the methods adopted for the study while Section 4 presents the results obtained from the analyses. The final section provides a summary of the discussion and conclusions in line with the results obtained.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The current study is based on the Social Cognitive Theory by, (Bandura, 1986). The Social Cognitive Theory suggests, that, internal processes like self-awareness, beliefs, perceptions, and values can influence behaviour. Grounded in Social Learning Theory and research, this theory explores how socialization, stress, and coping impact self-esteem. Bandura proposed that internal processes interact with the environment to shape behaviour. In the context of the self-esteem model, expectancies represent cognitive processes. Thus, from this viewpoint, self-esteem interacts with environmental elements such as family dysfunction, peer relationships, and/or performance goals. For instance, studies are cited illustrating the role of self-esteem in goal-directed behaviour (Patterson, 1986). Patterson's research underscores the connection between a child's non-compliance and self-esteem.

2.2 Empirical Review

Uwakwe et al (2017) investigated the impact of peer interaction, the school and home on the self-esteem of adolescents in the Aba metropolis. The study involved 290 SS2 students (147 males, 143 females) from six secondary schools, with approximately 50 respondents randomly selected from each school using simple random sampling. The respondents self-reported their self-esteem on the Hare self-esteem scale. Data was analyzed by the t-test for independent samples, and it revealed that peer interaction significantly influenced the self-esteem of adolescents. Raboteg-Saric, et al., (2018) study investigated the contribution of the quality family relationships (that is attachment to parents and family cohesion) and relationships with peers (closeness to peers and social acceptance) predict the overall self-esteem of adolescents. Two hundred and twenty one (221) students, (116 girls and 105 boys) were selected from two vocational schools and one secondary grammar school in a mid-sized Croatian city. Attachments to parents and peers were evaluated using the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment, and family cohesiveness was examined using the Family cohesiveness Scale of the Colorado Self-Report Measure of Family Functioning. The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents was used to assess adolescents'

assessments of their overall self-worth and social acceptability among peers. The findings revealed that peer acceptance considerably boosts both boys' and girls' overall self-esteem.

Mujiyati & Adiputra (2018) conducted a study to examine the impact of peer groups on the self-esteem of students from Lampung and Java in Indonesia. The research employed an ex-post facto research method, involving 40 Grade XI students from SMK Negeri Talangpadang Lampung in the academic year 2016/2017, with 20 students from the Lampung tribe and 20 from the Java tribe. The instrument used is a questionnaire of peer groups and self-esteem questionnaires. Regression analysis was utilised to assess the results, revealing a significant influence of peer groups on student self-esteem. Peer groups were found to contribute 34.9% to students' self-esteem. Panwar & Gorsy (2016) conducted research focusing on the self-esteem and peer group relationships of adolescents in single-parent families in India. This descriptive study utilised a quantitative research approach with a survey research design. Data were collected from two schools in Kollam District, Kerala – one aided school and another government school – with a sample size of 51 students ranging from 8th to 12th standard. The instruments used were the Adolescent Social Self-efficacy Scale and Personal Evaluation Inventory PEI. Statistical analysis involved simple percentages and chi-square, utilising SPSS 20 version. The study's findings indicate a significant relationship between the self-esteem and peer group relationships of adolescents from single-parent families.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Setting

This study was conducted in the University of Lagos in three faculties.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised 31,408 undergraduate students at the University of Lagos, based on university estimates. Using the Taro Yamane formula with a significance level of 0.05, the researcher determined a sample size of 394 students, later adjusted to 400 students.

$$n = N/1+N(e)^2$$

where n = the required sample size

N = Population size

1 = Constant

e = the assumed error of margin or level of significance

$$(e)^2 = 0.0025$$

The assumed error or margin is 5% or 0.05. When 5% is multiplied by 5%, the result is 0.0025, thus, $e^2 = 0.0025$. The error margin of 5% or 0.05 implies that a 95% confidence level is absorbed.

In calculating the sample size, the result is as follows:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$$

$$n = 31408 / (1 + 31408(0.0025))$$

$$n = 394.96$$

$$n = 400 \text{ (Approximately)}$$

Participant selection employed the accidental sampling technique, a non-probability method involving the selection of individuals from faculties near the researcher's location.

3.2 Research Design

A cross-sectional survey design was utilized for this study. This approach enabled the researcher to collect data simultaneously on the variables of the study. The independent variables in the study were peer relationships, and sex differences while the dependent variable is, self-esteem. No variables were actively manipulated during the study.

3.3 Instruments

A self-report questionnaire, made up of questions eliciting information on respondent's bio-data

and two scales measuring the variables of interest in the study namely; the Index of Self-Esteem, and the CAYCI Peer Relationship Scale was used to gather data for the study.

The Index of Self-Esteem (ISE; Hudson, 1982) is considered a highly reliable and valid tool for measuring self-esteem. This self-report questionnaire consists of 25 items and is specifically designed to evaluate self-esteem issues related to how individuals perceive themselves subjectively or how they believe others perceive them. Respondents rate each item on a scale ranging from 1 (rarely or never) to 5 (most or always). The ISE is intended for individuals aged 12 and above and aims to capture both positive and negative feelings individuals have about themselves, making it a one-dimensional inventory. Hudson (1982) validated the ISE by comparing it with Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1979), resulting in a strong concurrent validity coefficient of .83, indicating substantial agreement between the two measures. The ISE has been widely used in clinical settings and research involving Nigerian populations, proving to be a reliable and valid instrument. Hudson (1982) also reported a high coefficient alpha of .93, indicating strong internal consistency, and a two-hour test-retest coefficient of .92, demonstrating stability over time. Onighaiye (1996) further validated the ISE by correlating it with the Interpersonal Sensitivity Scale and Depression Scale of the SCL-90, obtaining concurrent validity coefficients of .46 and .38, respectively. When scoring and interpreting the Index of Self-Esteem (ISE) by Hudson (1982), there's a process of direct scoring and reverse scoring for different types of items. Negatively worded items have their scores reversed, while positively worded items remain unchanged. For example, items 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 15, 18, 21, 22, 23, and 25 are reversed, whereas items 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20, and 24 are not reversed. The scoring system generates scores that range from 0 to 100. Lower scores suggest fewer signs of depression, while higher scores indicate more significant distress. Clinically, thresholds are set at 30 and 70: scores above 30 suggest a notable self-esteem issue, while scores at or above 70 signal severe distress.

The CAYCI Peer Relationship Scale developed by Anderson-Butcher et al. (2016) is a 4-item measure designed to assess students' perceptions of their peer relationships. The scale has high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 for the full sample Anderson-Butcher et al. (2016). The alpha coefficients were also high across gender (males = 0.86, females = 0.84) and race/ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic = 0.86, Other = 0.85) groups Anderson-Butcher et al., (2016). The scale produces scores ranging from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating more positive peer

relationships.

3.4 Procedure

The researcher distributed the research protocol to students at their various faculties after the researcher had introduced the research and objectives of the study. The researcher had earlier received approval from the University of Lagos Ethics and Research Committee. Participants who freely consented to be part of the study were then handed the questionnaire to complete. Completed questionnaires were retrieved from the participants upon their completion. The researcher reviewed the questionnaires upon collection to ensure they were filled correctly. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and no personal information was required. They were also encouraged to provide honest answers. Participants received guidance on how to complete each part of the questionnaire. The researcher ensured a comfortable and suitable environment for participants during the questionnaire administration.

4. RESULT

This chapter presents the results of gathered data from four hundred ($n = 400$) undergraduates of the University of Lagos. The study investigated the influence of peer relationships on self-esteem and psychological well-being in undergraduates of the University of Lagos.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Distribution of Respondents

SN	Variable	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean(SD)
1	Sex	Male	178	41.5	2.02(.74)
		Female	222	58.5	1.82(.63)
2	Age	16-20 years	101	24.4	1.62(2.42)
		21-25 years	242	62.2	1.57(2.14)
		26-30 years	50	11.4	1.38(3.56)
		31-35 years	4	1	1.25(1.50)
		36 years above	3	1	1.7(0.50)
3	Level of study	100 level	92	23.0	1.39(0.51)
		200 level	104	26.0	1.85(0.68)
		300 level	81	20.3	2.00(0.50)
		400 level	106	26.5	2.28(0.61)
		500 level	16	4.0	2.37(0.95)
		600 level	1	0.3	1.00(0.01)
4	Ethnicity	Yoruba	259	64.8	1.98(2.27)
		Hausa	27	6.8	1.81(3.02)
		Igbo	60	15.0	1.68(2.78)
		Others	54	13.5	1.90(2.39)

5	Faculty	Arts	38	9.2	1.81(0.60)
		Basic Medical Science	22	5.5	1.72(0.63)
		Education	72	18.0	1.88(0.64)
		Science	54	13.5	1.74(0.70)
		Law	16	4.0	2.12(1.08)
		Medicine	17	4.3	1.29(0.58)
		Pharmacy	13	3.3	1.76(0.43)
		Engineering	26	6.5	1.96(0.87)
		Environmental sciences	9	2.3	1.86(0.60)
		Management sciences	41	10.3	1.97(0.52)
		Social sciences	92	23.0	2.18(0.64)
		Total	400	100	1.86(0.62)

Hypotheses Testing

Frequency and Percentage of Self-Esteem

Sex	Self-Esteem Category	Frequency	Percentage	Confidence Interval
Female	Low Self-Esteem	55	24%	18.7%-31.0%
	High Self-Esteem	167	75.2%	69.0%-81.3%
Male	Low Self-Esteem	31	17.4%	11.8%-23.0%
	High Self-Esteem	147	82.6%	77.0%-88.2%

Hypothesis Peer relationships will significantly influence low self-esteem among undergraduates. This hypothesis was tested using linear regression.

Table 2: Linear regression analysis summary table showing results of peer relations as a predictor of self-esteem

Dependent variable: Self-Esteem

Predictor	B	T	P	R	R ²	F	P
Peer Relationship	-.111	21.87	.00	.111	.012	4.97	< .05

Results obtained from the table show peer relationship has a statistically significant influence on self-esteem. Specifically, the negative coefficient suggests that poorer peer relationships are associated with lower self-esteem. This result is consistent with the hypothesis, implying that undergraduates who experience less supportive or more negative peer relationships tend to have lower self-esteem. The R-value of 0.111 signifies a very weak positive correlation between peer

relationships and self-esteem, while the R^2 value of 0.012 indicates that only 1.2% of the variance in self-esteem can be explained by peer relationships. Although the effect is statistically significant, its practical significance appears limited due to the small proportion of variance explained. The F-value of 4.97, with a p-value less than 0.05, confirms that the regression model is statistically significant.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study investigated the influence of peer relationship on the dimension self-esteem among undergraduates at the University of Lagos, with the aim of examining the influence peer relationship has on self-esteem. The study found that peer relationships have an influence on self-esteem among undergraduates. This result is in line with previous research. For instance, Uwakwe et al (2017) found that peer interaction had a significant impact on adolescents' self-esteem. Similarly, Raboteg-Saric et al (2018) demonstrated that peer acceptance was a key predictor of overall self-esteem in adolescents. Mujiyati and Adiputra (2018) also reported that peer groups significantly influenced self-esteem, with peer groups contributing substantially to students' self-esteem. Furthermore, Panwar and Gorsy (2016) highlighted a significant relationship between peer group relationships and self-esteem in adolescents. These studies collectively support the notion that peer relationships play a crucial role in shaping self-esteem, aligning with the findings. In contrast with several past studies, Miething et al. (2016) observed positive correlations between the quality of friendship networks and psychological well-being, indicating that better network quality enhances well-being.

Similarly, Karçkay (2016) reported significant correlations between different facets of friendship quality and psychological well-being, suggesting that supportive friendships lead to improved well-being. These studies highlight the importance of supportive peer relationships in promoting psychological well-being, which contrasts with the findings of this study. The discrepancies might arise from differences in study methodologies, sample characteristics, or the specific aspects of peer relationships evaluated. The overall findings imply that while peer relationships is an important factor in self-esteem. This calls for a more comprehensive approach to student well-being, one that considers multiple dimensions, including mental health, social support, and

personal development. Universities should strive to create environments that not only foster academic success but also promote overall well-being by integrating these factors into their student support services and campus policies

The study concludes that peer relationships play a significant role in shaping low self-esteem among undergraduates, though their practical impact is relatively modest. Poorer peer relationships are associated with lower self-esteem, yet they do not significantly influence the experience of higher psychological well-being. The study underscores the significant role that peer relationships play in the development and maintenance of self-esteem among undergraduates. This finding suggests that interventions aimed at improving peer interactions could be effective in boosting self-esteem. Educational institutions should consider promoting positive peer environments through group activities, mentoring programs, and counselling services, which can help students build supportive networks that enhance their self-worth and overall academic experience.

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