

Gender Differences in Negative Self-Concept among Schooling Adolescents

Halimah Awang^{1*}, Wah Yun Low², Wen Ting Tong², Whye Lian Cheah³, Helen Benedict Lasimbang⁴ and Hamizah Mohd Hassan⁵

¹*Social Wellbeing Research Centre, University of Malaya, Malaysia*

²*Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya, Malaysia*

³*Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Malaysia*

⁴*Faculty of Medicine and Health Services, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia*

⁵*National Population and Family Development Board, Malaysia*

***Corresponding Author:** Halimah Awang, Social Wellbeing Research Centre, University of Malaya, Malaysia.

Received: August 13, 2018; **Published:** September 21, 2018

Abstract

This study examined gender differences in negative self-concept among adolescents aged 13 to 18 years in selected secondary schools in East Malaysia. Data were collected using self-administered questionnaire between March to July 2015. Three aspects of negative self-concept were examined namely negative self-evaluation, cognitive inefficiency and lack of motivation, each of which was measured by six, five and four related statements, respectively. Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statements. A total of 2858 respondents completed the survey which comprised of about 65 percent female and 35 percent male. Chi-square tests were performed to examine the proportion of respondents who agreed on the items across the two sexes. With regard to the six items related to negative self-evaluation, significantly higher proportion of female than male respondents admitted that they feel they are not as good as others (49.5% and 45.6%, respectively), they feel like they are not needed (27.7% and 21.1%, respectively), they feel like giving up (22.7% and 16.8%, respectively) and they are confused with their identities (32.1% and 24.4%, respectively). The results indicate that of the five items related to cognitive inefficiency, only one item shows significant gender difference, that is, female respondents who agreed that they take a long time to decide a matter (58.8%) is significantly higher than male respondents (48.7%). On items related to lack of motivation, significantly higher proportion of female than male respondents agreed that they feel tired most of the time (39.8% and 34.5%, respectively) and that they dislike going out on social outing (18.5% and 13.3%, respectively). However the opposite is true on the item that they feel they have not done anything with 15.9% among female respondents and 19.1% male respondents. Given that positive self-concept is an important component influencing positive adolescent development and academic performance, more efforts are needed to detect signs of negative self-concept early enough, at home or school, so that interventions can be carried out at this early stage. Conscious efforts need to be directed at narrowing the gaps between girls and boys.

Keywords: Gender Differences; Negative Self-Concept; Schooling Adolescents

Introduction

Adolescence is a transitional period in the human life span, stretching between childhood and adulthood which encompasses elements of biological, physical and psychological growth, and social transitions. However, the definition of the age of adolescence seems to pose a conundrum due to the variation in the onset and endpoint of the changes that occur during this phase of life.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescents as those between the ages of 10 and 19 years while other definitions include those aged between 13 to 19 years, and 12 to 18 years. An expanded and more inclusive definition of the age of adolescence, 10 to 24 years was suggested to correspond more closely to adolescent growth as the transition period from childhood to adulthood now occupies a greater portion of the life course than ever before [1]. As reported by UNICEF, there are 1.2 billion adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19 years representing 16 percent of the world's population with more than half of them living in Asia and 277 million (13.0%) in East Asia and the Pacific [2].

For most adolescents, this is the phase of both disorientation and self-discovery whereby they experience biological, physical and psychological changes for development of healthy behaviours which can determine the future pattern of adult health. However, this is also the phase full of curiosity and experimentation which can influence adolescents towards certain behaviours and place them at risk of undesired consequences. They usually underestimate their susceptibility to infection and unable to conceptualize the long-term effects of their behaviours [3]. For example, they tend to engage in risky sexual behaviours but had lower use of health care system, which put them at high-risk to be infected [4].

Teenage years is a particularly hard time as children are experiencing a lot of changes in their bodies and in their feelings. Throughout these years as they struggle to leave behind their childhood, many adolescents are faced with various issues related to, among others, identity, self-concept, negative attitudes, internal control, risky behaviour, school performance and environment, sexuality, sibling rivalry and pressures from peers. Research has shown the importance of positive self-evaluation and high self-esteem as a driving force for a positive adolescent development and academic achievement [5-8]. Past studies have also shown that there are gender differences with respect to emotional and psychological development among adolescents [6,9-13]. While there have been a few studies conducted on adolescent psychology in Malaysia [14,15], the focus of these studies are on adolescents living in Peninsular Malaysia. Thus this study examined three important aspects namely negative self-evaluation, cognitive inefficiency and lack of motivation among adolescents in East Malaysia and whether there were gender differences with respect to these three aspects which may hinder the process of a positive adolescent development.

Methods

Data were obtained from a survey using anonymous, self-administered questionnaire involving adolescents aged 13 to 18 years in selected schools in East Malaysia which consists of two states, Sabah and Sarawak. The survey was carried out from March to July 2015. Consent and ethics approval for the study were obtained from the Ministry of Education, Malaysia and the researchers' universities, respectively with written informed consent obtained from both the students and their parents prior to the survey. The questionnaire contained information on personal, family and school characteristics as well as items related to adolescent psychology.

The variables of interest in the study were negative self-evaluation which contained six statements, cognitive inefficiency which contained five statements and lack of motivation with four statements. Respondents were asked to answer their level of agreement based on four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree. However, for purposes of analysis the four response categories were collapsed into two namely disagree and agree. The proportion of respondents who agreed with a particular statement was observed and Chi-square tests were performed to examine gender differences in the proportion of respondents who agreed, respectively. Completed questionnaires were received from 2858 respondents, available for analysis, with 1396 responses from Sabah and 1462 from Sarawak. Of the total respondents 1010 were male (35.3%) and 1848 female (64.7%).

Results

Negative Self-evaluation

Generally, respondents had good evaluation about themselves. Those who reported negative self-evaluation based on the average proportion of respondents who agreed on all six items listed in table 1 comprised of about 29 percent. Female respondents registered a

significantly higher proportion of negative self-evaluation than male on four statements namely, “I feel I am not as good as others”, “I feel like I am not needed”, “I feel like giving up” and “I am confused of who I really am”.

Statement	Respondents who Agreed			
	Total	Male	Female	Chi-square
I feel I am not as good as others	1375 (48.1)	461 (45.6)	914 (49.5)	3.808*
I feel like I am not needed	725 (25.4)	213 (21.1)	512 (27.7)	15.101**
I feel like giving up	590 (20.6)	170 (16.8)	420 (22.7)	13.856**
None of the work that I did was fruitful	372 (13.0)	139 (13.8)	233 (12.6)	0.768
I am confused of who I really am	839 (29.4)	246 (24.4)	593 (32.1)	18.828**
I am not satisfied with what I have done	1127 (39.4)	390 (38.6)	737 (39.9)	0.439

Table 1: Respondents who agreed on items related to negative self-evaluation.

*Significant at 5%; **Significant at 1%.

Cognitive inefficiency

Based on the average proportion of respondents who agreed with the five items listed in table 2, 40 percent of the respondents perceived themselves to have poor cognitive efficiency. More than half of them admitted that they took a long time to decide on a matter and to complete a task. The average proportion of respondents who perceived themselves to have poor cognitive efficiency was higher among females than males.

Statement	Respondents who Agreed			
	Total	Male	Female	Chi-square
I feel I am not able to control of what happened	926 (32.4)	314 (31.1)	612 (33.1)	1.226
I take a long time to decide a matter	1578 (55.2)	492 (48.7)	1086 (58.8)	16.693**
I take a long time to complete a task	1459 (51.0)	497 (49.2)	962 (52.1)	2.120
I am not able to think properly	662 (23.2)	244 (24.2)	418 (22.6)	0.870
I am not able to concentrate on study/ work like I should	1043 (36.5)	372 (36.8)	671 (36.3)	0.077

Table 2: Respondents who agreed on items related to cognitive inefficiency.

**Significant at 1%.

Lack of Motivation

Table 3 indicates that more than 20 percent of the respondents lacked motivation (23.4%) with female respondents showing a higher average proportion who agreed that they lacked motivation compared to male respondents (Table 3). Significantly higher proportion of female respondents than male agreed that they feel tired most of the time and that they dislike going with friends or meet up with anyone while significantly higher proportion of male than female agreed that they feel they have not done anything.

Statement	Respondents who Agreed			
	Total	Male	Female	Chi-square
I feel lack of energy to do some things	622 (21.8)	211 (20.9)	411 (22.2)	0.698
I feel tired most of the time	1084 (37.9)	348 (34.5)	736 (39.8)	8.003**
I feel I have not done anything	487 (17.0)	193 (19.1)	294 (15.9)	4.730*
I dislike going out with friends or meet up with anyone	476 (16.7)	134 (13.3)	342 (18.5)	12.914**

Table 3: Respondents who agreed on items related to lack of motivation.

*Significant at 5%; **Significant at 1%.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study examined three negative psychological and emotional aspects of adolescent development among schooling adolescence aged 13 to 18 years in the states of Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia. The variables of interest include negative self-evaluation consisting of six items, cognitive inefficiency with five items and lack of motivation with four items.

The results indicate that the average proportion of respondents who agreed on the items related to negative self-evaluation was 29 percent. Female respondents reported significantly higher proportion than male respondents that they felt they are not as good as others, they felt they are not needed, they felt like giving up and that they are confused with their identities. While 40 percent of the total respondents perceived themselves to have poor cognitive efficiency, about 59 percent of female respondents agreed that they take a long time in making any decision compared with 49 percent of male respondents. About 23 percent of the respondents agreed that they lack motivation with significantly higher proportion of female than male admitted that they feel tired most of the time and that they dislike social outing. However, those who feel they have not done anything is found significantly among male than female respondents.

The findings of this study seemed to be consistent with those conducted in other countries including Gomez-Baya, Mendoza and Paino [5], Baran, Baran and Maskan [9], Calvete and Cardenoso [11] and Quatman and Watson [13] which showed that boys attained higher self-esteem scores than girls, that female adolescents showed lower levels of positive thinking and higher scores on negative problem orientation self-focused negative cognitions than male. However, the findings of the present study does not support that of Armum and Chellapan [14] which revealed no significant difference in social and emotional self-efficacy across gender among adolescents in Malaysia. The difference can be explained by the fact that their study was conducted in Peninsular Malaysia and covered a narrower age range of 17 to 19 years involving a much smaller sample size of less than 200 respondents while the present study involved more than 2800 schooling adolescents aged 13 to 18 years in East Malaysia. In addition, there is a wide variation between Peninsular and East Malaysia in terms of geographical location and ethnic composition where the former consists of more than 60 percent urban with only three major ethnic groups while the latter is more than 70 percent rural with more than 10 ethnic groups. In this regard, large scale nationwide studies covering both Peninsular and East Malaysia would be desirable in order to have a better insight and understanding of adolescent psychology and their development.

Given that positive self-concept is an important component influencing positive adolescent development and academic performance, more efforts are needed to detect signs of negative self-concept early enough, at home or school, so that interventions can be carried out at this early stage. Appropriate strategies can be applied to improve adolescent's self-concept such as those suggested by Hadley, Hair and Moore [16] which include praising the adolescent's accomplishment efforts in specific domains and improving the adolescent's skills in the domains most required. In improving adolescent's self-concept, cognitive efficiency and motivation, conscious efforts need to be directed at narrowing the gaps between girls and boys.

Bibliography

1. Sawyer SM., *et al.* "The age of adolescence". *The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health* 2 (2018): 223-228.
2. UNICEF. "Data: Monitoring the situation of children and women" (2018).
3. Kershaw TS., *et al.* "Misperceived risk among female adolescents: Social and psychological factors associated with sexual risk accuracy". *Health Psychology* 22.5 (2003): 523-532.
4. Elliot BA and Larson JT. "Adolescents in mid-sized rural communities: Foregone care, perceived barriers and risk factors". *Journal of Adolescent Health* 35.4 (2003): 303-309.
5. Gomez-Baya D., *et al.* "Emotional basis of gender differences in adolescent self-esteem". *Psicologia* 30.2 (2016): 1-14.

6. Duchesne S and Ratelle CF. "Patterns of anxiety symptoms during adolescence: Gender differences and sociomotivational factors". *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 46 (2016): 41-50.
7. Miers AC., et al. "Negative self-evaluations and the relation to performance level in socially anxious children and adolescents". *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 47.12 (2009): 1043-1049.
8. Alves-Martins M., et al. "Self-esteem and academic achievement among adolescents". *Educational Psychology* 22.1 (2002): 51-62.
9. Baran M., et al. "A study on adolescent students' levels of hopelessness and self-esteem: A sample from Turkey". *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6.2 (2015): 341-349.
10. Frost A., et al. "Daily life with depressive symptoms: Gender differences in adolescents' everyday emotional experiences". *Journal of Adolescence* 43 (2015): 132-141.
11. Calvete E and Cardeñoso OJ. "Gender difference in cognitive vulnerability to depression and behavior problems in adolescents". *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 33.2 (2005): 179-192.
12. Hoffmann MI., et al. "An examination of gender differences in adolescent adjustment: The effect of competence on gender role differences in symptoms of psychopathology". *Sex Roles* 50.11-12 (2004): 795-810.
13. Quatman T and Watson CM. "Gender differences in adolescent self-(1) esteem: An exploration of domain". *Journal of Genetic Psychological Research and Theory on Human Development* 162.1 (2001): 93-117.
14. Armum P and Chellappan K. "Social and emotional self-efficacy of adolescents: measured and analysed interdependencies within and across academic achievement level". *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 21.3 (2016): 279-288.
15. Othman N and Kong BL. "The relationship between self-concept, intrinsic motivation, self-determination and academic achievement among Chinese primary school students". *International Journal of Psychological Studies* 3.1 (2011): 90-99.
16. Hadley AM., et al. "Assessing what kids think about themselves: A guide to adolescent self-concept for out-of-school time program practitioners". *Brief Research-to-Results Trends Child* 32 (2008): 1-4.

Volume 7 Issue 10 October 2018

©All rights reserved by Halimah Awang., et al.