

## **Self-Esteem and Theism- A study of the impact of theist beliefs on college students' self-esteem**

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between college students' self-esteem, gender, and theist beliefs. The sample of the study consisted of 204 students studying in college. All participants were Indian residents; however some students are studying in colleges abroad, while some are studying in India. The data was collected through the *Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale*, and a questionnaire created for the study by the researcher. The sample was chosen randomly, and various different religions are represented in the sample.

Theism was assessed in a spectrum ranging from 0 to 3. 0 indicated no belief in God, while 3 indicated a very strong belief in God.

The results showed that self-esteem of Indian males were much higher than females.

Theism also showed associations with self-esteem. Students with the strongest belief in God had a much higher mean self-esteem than all other groups of students. Following this group was the group of students who believed firmly in the inexistence of god; these two groups of students had a markedly higher mean self-esteem than the students who had low or moderate beliefs in the existence of God.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Theism is regularly advocated in India. As a result, the idea of God is regularly reinforced in adolescents- by their families, and by society. In the sample studied, 63.9 % stated that the reason they pray is that their families make them do it. This percentage is the highest recorded among the other options, which included 'Belief in God', among even more options. Therefore, as adults, the Indian youth are very familiar with the concept of theism, and are aware of their religious and godly beliefs.

In this study, the sample is formed by college students of 18-22 years of age. The sample is representative of a large portion of the Indian population. As per India's Census 2011, Youth (15-24 years) in India constitutes one-fifth (19.1%) of India's total population.

Self-esteem is a huge asset to an individual. High self-esteem tends to lead to confidence, optimism and self-acceptance. Low self-esteem, consecutively, has been linked with a lack of confidence, pessimism, and dissatisfaction with oneself (Carl Rogers, 1951). Low self-esteem means making low-worth judgments about oneself, however, people with low self-esteem are not merely negative about themselves; they express a negative attitude in general, to their surroundings, relationships and circumstances (Wills 1981). Floccinaucinihilipilificationis also often linked with low self-esteem.

Moreover, it is asserted that there is a correlation between life satisfaction and self-esteem (Baumeister, 2003; Ntoumanis, 2009). Correlation between self-esteem and performance has also been investigated in previous studies, (eg. Baumeister, R. F, Campbell, J. D) yielding varying results. Although performance is not necessarily enhanced by self-esteem, self-esteem does have other effects that bolster performance. Studies have shown that people with high self-esteem are better equipped to deal with failure, and be persistent with their work. They were also found to be more adaptive, thus being able to shift to different techniques and strategies upon facing failure (Blascovich, 1984; Perez, 1973).

The study of self-esteem provides an insight into the attitude, and personality of an individual. Therefore, it becomes mandatory to understand self-esteem, in order to understand the human condition.

This study investigates the link between theism, and individual self-esteem.

## II. METHOD

### Sample

College students from the age group 18-22 have been chosen to form the sample.

Out of the 204 students surveyed, 103 were female and 101 male.

8 religions were represented in the sample.

It must be noted that all the persons in the sample were literate, and are pursuing education at the university level.

The sample was chosen randomly, and all of the participants responded voluntarily.

### Variables

The relation of self-esteem with multiple variables was investigated.

These are: gender, theism, and frequency of praying.

### Measures

The self-esteem of the participants was tested using the *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale*. It is a ten-item scale with items answered on a four-point scale—from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The answers are then converted into numbers, from 0 to 3, and the test is scored out of 30.

A questionnaire was created to assess the level of theism of the subjects, and to collect demographic information about them.

The theism of the subjects was determined through the questionnaire, and was later categorized into a spectrum ranging from 0 to 3. 0 indicated no belief in God, while 3 indicated a strong belief in God. 2 and 3 indicated low and moderate beliefs in God, respectively.

To determine the frequency of praying, the subjects were asked to identify themselves in a spectrum ranging from 0 to 3, where 0 denoted no praying, while 3 denoted significant frequency in praying (at least everyday).

All participants were consenting adults, and submitted the information voluntarily.

## III. RESULTS

The study showed that self-esteem had relations with the variables tested, namely gender, theism, and frequency of praying.

The mean self-esteem of the sample was 17.710

### 1. Gender

Differences in mean self-esteem between males and females was observed.

Females were found to have a much lower self-esteem than males.

The mean self-esteem of the 101 males studied was 19.009, and the mean self-esteem of the 104 females studied was 16.592.

A score of 15 in this test denotes a problematically low self-esteem. In fact, 64 of the 204 students studied had a score of 15 or less, and out of this number 42 were females.

**Table 1.0** Mean self-esteem of males and females

Gender	n	Mean S.E
<i>Male</i>	101	19.0099
<i>Female</i>	103	16.5922
Total	204	17.710

### 2.0Theism

The assessment of theism and self-esteem revealed that subjects at either end of the theism spectrum (0,3) had a markedly higher self-esteem than those in between (1,2). This means that people with a firm conviction about the existence of God had a higher mean self-esteem than those with moderate convictions. The people with highest mean self-esteem were those whose theism was 3, i.e. who believed strongly in the existence of god.

The mean self-esteem of people who were ranked at 1 or 2 in the spectrum did not differ by a big margin.

Though it would be incorrect to assume any explanations for the findings, it is clear that those with firm convictions about the existence of god –believing strongly in either the existence, or inexistence of God– have a higher mean self-esteem.

Furthermore, the individuals who strongly believe in the existence of God have a markedly higher mean self-esteem than all the other groups of individuals.

**Table 2.0**Theism and mean self-esteem

Theism	n	Mean S.E
0	26	18.153
1	63	16.793
2	62	17.387
3	52	19.307

Table 2.0 shows the mean self-esteem of people and their theist beliefs.

Highest mean self-esteem, 19.307, was found in those with the strongest belief in God.

The second highest group was those who firmly believed in the inexistence of God; their mean self-esteem was 18.153.

The persons lying in the middle of this spectrum (at 1 or 2) had the lowest mean self-esteem. The difference in mean self-esteem (range) of this group was 0.594, and ranged from 16.793 to 17.387.

(Note:One individual did not provide information for this column, and thus, the sample for this section of the study is 203.)

### 2.1 Theism within gender

Similar trends were observed when males and females were studied separately.

However, the magnitude of the range, and mean self-esteem differed between the two groups.

The following tables show the data pertaining to each gender-

**Table 2.1.1**Theism and mean self-esteem- Males

Theism	n	Mean S.E
0	15	19.267
1	32	17.75
2	26	18.576
3	28	20.714

**Table 2.1.2**Theism and mean self-esteem- Females

Theism	n	Mean S.E
0	11	16.636
1	31	15.806
2	36	16.527
3	24	17.667

### 3.0Frequency of prayers

The link between frequency of praying, and self-esteem was also investigated.

The results show that those individuals who prayed most frequently had the highest mean self-esteem. This group scored a mean self-esteem of 19.785, much higher than the other groups.

The other three groups had an irregular trend of mean self-esteem.

Individuals ranked at 2 had the lowest mean self-esteem- 16.667, followed by those at 1- 17.554. The last group, 0, had a mean self-esteem of 17.927.

Although a pattern is observable, the gradual decrease in mean self-esteem with an increase in the frequency of praying, this cannot be ascribed to praying itself. The pattern is not consistent when the frequency of worship is 3 where instead of decreasing, the mean self-esteem increases, hugely.

Withstanding other assumptions, it would be safe to conclude that the highest frequency of worship yielded the highest mean self-esteem.

Frequency of worship	n	Mean S.E
0	41	17.927
1	101	17.554
2	33	16.667
3	28	19.785

#### IV. LIMITATIONS

The study was limited since relations of self-esteem with only gender and theism were explored. There are a vast number of other factors that affect self-esteem, such as socio-economic status, and academic and extra-curricular performance, among even more.

Secondly, the entire sample consisted of educated adults. Differences in results could be observed if the sample were more diversified to include uneducated, and illiterate adults. Furthermore, the age group chosen for this study was 18-22 years. Self-esteem of individuals might vary with their age, thus yielding different results.

Thirdly, the society and environment also shapes individual self-esteem. In previous studies, differences in self-esteem were observed between adolescents belonging to rural, and urban backgrounds (AlAdawi 2019). Many studies have also indicated that concept of SE is related to whether one belongs to an individualist or a collectivist society (Diener & Marissa Diener, 2009) Therefore, the results may vary with the sample belonging to different societies and backgrounds.

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