

# Assessment of “Self Concept” among Undergraduate Medical Students of a Medical College in North-West India

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**Abstract Introduction:** The concept of self is unique, dynamic and ever evolving and influences a person’s identity, self-esteem, body image and role in society. **Material and methods:** A cross-sectional study using a structured questionnaire (based on the Revised Janis Field Scale) was conducted among 303 undergraduate students of a medical college in north-west India to assess their self esteem using non-probability (grab) sampling **Results:** The statistically significant difference in mean values for self esteem among the male and female students of 1<sup>st</sup> year MBBS gave way to nonsignificant difference in mean values among both the sexes of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year MBBS students. The mean scores of 4<sup>th</sup> year students of both the sexes showed a marked similarity. **Conclusions:** The findings of the current study highlight the importance of promoting a positive self concept in every aspect of student’s life.

**Keywords** Self concept, North-west, India

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## 1. Introduction

The concept of self refers to an individual’s beliefs and understanding about himself/herself. These are developed from their experiences in the society while interacting with others. Self-concept is unique, dynamic and ever evolving. It influences a person’s identity, self-esteem, body image and role in society. [1] It shapes and defines who we are, the decision we make and the relationships we form. It is perhaps the basis for all motivated behavior. [1]

Thompson defined self-concept as a multi dimensional construct including the dimension of self worth. [2] Self-concept includes an individual’s overall perception of his/her psychological and physiological being, where as self esteem is the judgment of worth an individual assigns to his or herself. [2]

Self-concept may be positive (high) or negative (low). Positive self-concept leads to a sense of self-worth, self-confidence, self respect and positive self evaluation. [3] The negative self concept leads to frustration and may result in self hatred. [4] Individuals with positive self concept are expected to function more effectively; this is evident in interpersonal competence, intellectual efficiency and environmental mastery. In contrast, negative self concept is

correlated with personal and social adjustment. [5] Ybrandt explained that, a positive self concept is the most important factor for adjustment and a safe guard against typical problem behaviors. [6] These findings highlight the importance of promoting a positive self concept in various psycho-social contexts.

The studies conducted during the past indicated that boys had better self-concept when compared to the girls but in contrast Wang et al reported exactly the opposite results. [7-9] However the overall conclusion suggested that the differences in self esteem among boys and girls are slight.

Extensive search of literature on the pubmed revealed that majority of studies conducted on self-concept were among the adolescent age group and a few among women as respondents. Therefore the present study was planned among the medical under graduate students with the aim to assess their self-concept.

What was the gap in conducting this study among the study participants.

## 2. Material and Methods

The current study was conducted among undergraduate medical students of a medical college in north-west India using a non-probability (grab) sampling technique. Students from 1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year and 4<sup>th</sup> year (Pre-final) students of the medical college were invited to participate in the study. The students were explained about the conduct and outcome of the study. Students willing to participate were

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invited to fill a written informed consent. The study was approved by institution ethics committee. Participation in the study was purely voluntary and confidentiality of the information was ensured.

A total of 303 medical students accepted to participate in the study. The distribution of students was; 88 from 1<sup>st</sup> year, 90 from 2<sup>nd</sup> year, 51 from 3<sup>rd</sup> year and 74 were from 4<sup>th</sup> year.

A structured questionnaire was used to gather information from the participants. To gather information on self-esteem, the Revised Janis Field Scale was used. [10]. The scale consists of 36 items covering 5 constructs of self-concept. The constructs included; self regard (Global self esteem), social confidence, School abilities, physical appearance and physical abilities. It is a self administering scale where the statements are to be ticked against seven categories of responses ranging from 1 to 7. [10] The respondents were asked to read each statement carefully and asked to tick the appropriate response applicable to the participants. The data was entered into Microsoft excel software and analysis was conducted. The sum of the items was obtained for all items except for item number 3,14,19 and 26 where reverse scoring was used.

### 3. Results

Out of a total of 450 students, 303 (68%) voluntarily participated in the study. Out of 303 students who agreed to participate, 174 (58.74%) were females. 209 (67.6%) of the respondents belonged to nuclear families. Out of these 209 student, 65 (31.3%) belonged to a single child family. Further 155 (51.1%) had only one sibling while the rest had two or more siblings.

The mean score of first year male students was consistently on higher side in all the constructs of self concept scale in comparison to female students (table 1). Further, the self regard and physical appearance constructs of the scale had higher male scores and were found to be statistically significant. When scores of second year MBBS students were compared, not much difference was found except that “mean self regard score” of females was on the higher side (table 2).

When third year MBBS scores were compared, it was found that males had higher self regard and physical appearance mean scores in comparison to their female counterparts (table 3). The mean scores of fourth year/pre-final MBBS students were almost equally distributed on all the constructs. (table 4). No statistically significant association was found in the second, third and fourth year mean scores among male and female students.

**Table 1.** Self-Concept of 1<sup>st</sup> Year MBBS Students

Components of Self Concept	Male (N=40)		Female (N=48)		‘t’ test	P-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Self Regard	5.62	1.91	4.42	2.07	2.8040	0.0062
Social Confidence	4.24	1.99	3.94	2.26	0.6543	0.5147
School Abilities	4.40	2.03	3.87	2.20	1.1652	0.2472
Physical Appearance	5.40	1.82	4.14	2.07	3.0019	0.0035
Physical Abilities	5.15	1.90	4.56	2.09	1.3738	0.1731

**Table 2.** Self-concept of 2<sup>nd</sup> Year MBBS students

Components of Self Concept	Male (N=24))		Female (N=50)		‘t’ test	P-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Self Regard	4.73	2.13	5.19	1.93	0.9280	0.3565
Social Confidence	4.46	2.18	4.49	2.04	0.0579	0.9540
School Abilities	4.16	2.12	4.28	2.00	0.2370	0.8133
Physical Appearance	4.61	2.16	4.74	1.95	0.2592	0.7962
Physical Abilities	4.74	2.16	4.72	2.05	0.0386	0.9693

**Table 3.** Self-Concept of 3<sup>rd</sup> Year MBBS Students

Components of Self Concept	Male (N=21)		Female (N=30)		‘t’ test	P-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Self Regard	5.59	1.46	4.96	1.98	1.2397	0.2210
Social Confidence	3.93	1.87	3.78	2.15	0.2584	0.7972
School Abilities	4.02	1.71	4.13	1.92	0.2104	0.8342
Physical Appearance	5.05	1.65	4.93	2.03	0.2238	0.8238
Physical Abilities	4.65	1.95	4.60	2.25	0.0824	0.9347

**Table 4.** Self Concept of 4<sup>th</sup> Year/Pre-Final Students

Components of Self Concept	Male (N=24)		Female (N=50)		't' test	P-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Self Regard	5.34	1.87	5.36	1.87	0.0431	0.9658
Social Confidence	4.36	2.06	4.19	2.05	0.3923	0.6960
School Abilities	3.92	2.08	3.84	2.09	0.1544	0.8777
Physical Appearance	5.04	1.76	5.06	2.08	0.0406	0.9677
Physical Abilities	4.76	1.97	4.52	2.32	0.4365	0.6638

## 4. Discussion

The results of the current study need to be seen in the light of some related research evidence. It was found that self regard and physical appearance components of the self concept were higher in 1<sup>st</sup> year male students in comparison to their female counterparts. The results are in agreement with those reported by other studies outside India. [7, 8] Bhattacharya B et al in their study in Kolkata also reported that overall self concept of adolescent boys was significantly higher compared to girls. [9] However Wang et al reported results which were in contrast to the results of the current study. [11]

These findings are in line with a widely accepted cultural belief i.e, boys have higher self concept than girls. Kling et al attributed girls think of themselves as inferior as they internalize the negative cultural message. [12] Harter et al also stated in their study that adolescent girls find it difficult to create a stable self image and therefore find it difficult to develop self concept in adolescence. [13]

The results of the present study have shown a definitive trend. The statistically significant difference in mean values among the male and female students of 1<sup>st</sup> year MBBS gave way to nonsignificant difference in mean values among both the sexes of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year MBBS students while mean scores of 4<sup>th</sup> year students of both the sexes showed a marked similarity. The authors propose two plausible reasons for this trend. Firstly, the students after passing through tumultuous adolescence period which usually ends at 19 years also coincides with the end of 1<sup>st</sup> year MBBS. This maturing in age contributes to their their growing up and maturing as adults progressively from second year onwards. The second probable reason is that since there is transition from school to professional college and once the students acclimatize during 1<sup>st</sup> year MBBS, they get adjusted, assured and more focused subsequently.

## 5. Conclusions

The findings of the current study highlight the importance of promoting a positive self concept in every aspect of student's life. At the same time, parents should be advised to provide quality parenting and should act as facilitators instead of providing mental pressure for better academic

performance. An organized, orderly and supportive environment in the teaching institutions will go a long way in improving academic self concept of the students.

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