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The relationship between Southeastern Iran students' self-esteem and interest in Major

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between students' self-esteem and interest in majoring in southeastern Iran. This was a cross-sectional study on 480 medical students living in dormitories selected by the non-probability convenience sampling method. Data were collected using a demographic questionnaire, the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, and satisfaction with the major scale, which were completed through interviews. The Pearson correlation test results showed no relationship between male and female students 'scores of satisfaction with their major and self-esteem. The mean scores of general self-esteem and total self-esteem in females were higher than in males, but the mean score of academic self-esteem was significantly higher in males. In terms of social self-esteem, the highest score was related to people with high social support and people who were well-adapted to their environment. The need for students 'interest in a major cannot create high self-esteem in this group, and to have students with high self-esteem requires family and social support and the ability to adapt to the environment.

Keywords: Educational status; general health; self-esteem; university student

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1. INTRODUCTION

The university period is a great and memorable period for every student. Reduced dependence on family leads to intellectual maturity to take on later responsibilities in adulthood (Afridi & Maqsood, 2019). University students usually encounter a variety of stressful situations and worries. The main causes of stress in students can be the stress of attending university for the first time, academic workload, taking on new academic responsibilities, choosing a master's program, a dilemma over elective majors, and uncertainty about finding a job after graduating from university, inadequate study resources, low motivation, and poor academic performance (Rosli et al., 2012; Saleh et al., 2017; Slavinski et al., 2021).

Various studies introduce academic stress as the main source of stress among adolescents and students, which can negatively affect students' self-confidence and self-esteem (Figen & Avci, 2020; Nikitha et al., 2014). On the contrary, students' interest in the major is a criterion of academic satisfaction and success influencing many aspects of students' lives (Gharehaghaji & Mirahadi, 2014). Students who choose their major willingly are more likely to work in that field after graduation, feel a sense of belonging to that major, and experience lower levels of stress (Figen & Avci, 2020).

One of the factors in creating satisfaction with the major is self-esteem. A study by Asgari et al., (2016) suggested that students interested in their major had higher self-esteem scores (Asgari et al., 2016). Good academic performance has also been reported as a result of high self-esteem leads (Audu et al., 2016; Quan & Sun 2024). Self-esteem is one of the important concepts that affect the general health of people who are socially, physically, and mentally healthy (Atmaca & Ozen, 2019). Self-esteem has four components Social dimension (individual's feelings about oneself as a person in society), Family dimension (individual's feelings about oneself as a member of the family), Educational dimension (considering oneself in line with desirable academic standards), and General dimension (a more general self-assessment that evaluates oneself in all areas) (Budd et al., 2009). A positive attitude towards self and the future can be one of the reasons that elevate self-esteem in people. People who have higher self-esteem feel more empowered and valuable, are more emotionally stable, have more self-confidence, and work better in difficult tasks and situations (Liu et al., 2015; Ogawa, 2024).

On the contrary, people with low self-esteem are timid and pettish in challenging situations, are more prone to peer pressure, and have weaker social relationships (Asagba et al., 2016). Nikitha et al. (2014) stated that self-esteem decreases with increasing academic stress in students (Nikitha et al., 2014). It is of particular importance because both academic achievement and mental health have a positive relationship with self-esteem in adolescence (Saleh et al., 2017; Hamraoui et al., 2023). This period is very sensitive because their performance, test scores, and ranks can affect the entire field of study. All of these factors can cause stress in students, which influences the satisfaction and self-esteem of students (Afridi & Maqsood, 2019). Career success, academic achievement, interpersonal adjustment, and feelings of happiness correlate with self-esteem (Malik & Saida, 2013; Benjamin et al., 2024).

1.1. Purpose of study

The study of interest in a major in any university is one of the basic issues of that university and is an integral part of its activities in the field of organizational behavior and performance. Considering that students are the young and active forces in society and self-esteem can affect their social, educational, family, and general aspects, this study investigated the relationship between students' self-esteem with interest in major in southeastern Iran.

2. METHOD AND MATERIALS

This cross-sectional epidemiological study was conducted in 2019 to assess students' self-esteem and interest in their major.

2.1. Participants

The research setting was Bam University of Medical Sciences, and all eligible male and female students living in dormitories constituted the research population. The sample size was estimated to be 480 according to the findings of a previous study (Edraki et al., 2011) and the opinion of a statistician.

$$n = \frac{(S_1^2 + S_2^2)(z_{1-\frac{\alpha}{2}} + z_{1-\beta})^2}{d^2} = 240 \; d = \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 2.74 \, , \alpha = .05, 1 - \beta = 0.8$$

$$z_{1-\frac{\alpha}{2}} = 1.96, z_{1-\beta} = 0.84, S_1^2 + S_2^2 = 228.16$$

The inclusion criteria were filling out a written consent form, not taking any medicine other than anti-allergies and painkillers for at least 3 months before this study, not having a chronic physical or mental illness that leads to disability, and willingness to participate. The exclusion criteria were incomplete questionnaires and experiencing a stressful event or crisis during the study.

2.2. Procedure

After obtaining permissions from the Research Deputy, coordinating with the Culture and Student Affairs Deputy, gaining a letter of introduction from the security department and presenting it to the authorities of the dormitory, coordinating the time of distribution of the study tools, and checking inclusion and exclusion criteria; the researcher explained objectives and research method to subjects, obtained their informed written consent, and asked them to complete the questionnaires. Eligible students who were present in the dormitory were recruited via a non-probable convenience sampling method. Participants were assured of data confidentiality.

2.3. Data collection tools

The data collection tool consisted of three parts. First, a 28-item researcher-made demographic questionnaire (students' age, gender, level of education, number of children in the family, birth order, parents' level of education, parents' occupation, etc.). Second, the 58-item Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) with 5 scales of doing educational homework, social relationships, family, self, and future; and 4 subscales of general self-esteem, social self-esteem (peers), family self-esteem (parents), and academic self-esteem (educational). SEI has two-choice items (Yes/No) and each person chooses one of the options according to their situation. Items are scores 0 or 1 and 8 items are false questions that are not calculated in the total score. The total score ranges from 0 to 50. Dalbudak & Yasar (2021) reported a reliability coefficient of 0.7 for it (Dalbudak & Yasar, 2021). Khosravi & Ghezelbash, (2020) reported a reliability of 86% for the tool, which indicates that it has high reliability. Third, the 59-item satisfaction with a major questionnaire with 6 factors including satisfaction with education, satisfaction with professors, satisfaction with classmates, satisfaction with academic achievement, satisfaction with the educational evaluation method, and satisfaction with the study environment. Each item has 5 choices. The validity of each dimension of the questionnaire was calculated by the item analysis method, which resulted in a relatively high validity. Cronbach's alpha suggested very high reliability for each dimension of this questionnaire (Torkzadeh & Mohtaram 2014). The scientific validity of the questionnaire was approved by the content validity method. To this end, valid scientific books and articles were read, and intervening variables were fully recognized. In the next step, a questionnaire was prepared and provided to several faculty members for approval.

2.4. Data analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in SPSS-21 software for data analysis.

3. RESULTS

A total of 480 students participated in this study, of whom 68.1% were female. Participants' age range was from 17 to 32 years. Students studied medicine, midwifery, nursing, laboratory sciences, operating room, medical emergencies, healthcare services management, public health, environmental health, and occupational health. The Pearson correlation test results show no significant correlation between self-esteem score or its dimensions and age, the number of children in the family, or birth order (P>0.05).

The results of the Pearson correlation test did not show any significant relationships between male and female students' scores of satisfaction with their major and self-esteem (P>0.05) (Table 1).

Table 1

Study of the correlation between education satisfaction and self-esteem in male and female students

self-esteem	education satisfaction
Female students' self-esteem	0.06=r 0.27=P
Male students' self-esteem	0.07=- r 0/39=P

The mean score of general self-esteem and total self-esteem score in females was higher than in males, but the mean score of academic self-esteem was significantly higher in males (P<0.05) (Table 2).

Table 2

Evaluation and comparison of self-esteem score and its dimensions in individuals according to their gender

Dimensions of self-esteem	gender	Number	Average	Standard deviation	Statistical index(T)	P-value
Public self-esteem	Girl	327	15.18	2.54	3.3	0.001
	Boy	153	14.32	2.99		
Social self-esteem	Girl	327	4.07	1.22	1.84	0.07
	Boy	153	3.85	1.18		
Academic self-esteem	Girl	327	2.99	1.12	3.32	0.001
	Boy	153	3.38	1.42		
Family self-esteem	Girl	327	4.86	1.18	1.77	0.08
	Boy	153	4.65	1.29		
Total self-esteem	Girl	327	27.11	3.37	2.56	0.01
	Boy	153	26.21	4.03		

In terms of social self-esteem, the highest score was significantly related to people with high social support (P<0.05) (Table 3).

Table 3

Evaluation and comparison of self-esteem score and its dimensions in individuals, according to social support

Dimensions of self-esteem	Social support category	Number	Average	Standard deviation	Statistical index) F(	P-value
Public self-esteem	Weak	87	15.40	2.74	1.93	0.15
	Medium	256	14.87	2.74		
	Much	137	14.68	2.66		
Social self-esteem	Weak	87	3.68	1.22	4.86	0.008
	Medium	256	4	1.15		
	Much	137	4.18	1.27		
Academic self-esteem	Weak	87	3.33	1.19	1.67	0.19
	Medium	256	3.07	1.32		
	Much	137	3.06	1.09		
Family self-esteem	Weak	87	4.85	1.29	0.11	0.89
	Medium	256	4.79	1.19		

Total self-esteem	Much	137	4.77	1.24		
	Weak	87	27.26	3.94		
	Medium	256	26.73	3.63	0.79	0.45
	Much	137	26.71	3.35		

The highest scores of social self-esteem was significantly correlated with people who had good adaptation to their environment (P<0.05) (Table 4).

Table 4

Evaluation and comparison of self-esteem score and its dimensions in individuals according to adaptation to their environment

Dimensions of self-esteem	Environmental compatibility Categorize	Number	Average	Standard deviation	Statistical index) F(	P-value
Public self-esteem	Weak	48	15.46	2.81		
	Medium	239	14.69	2.63	1.98	0.14
	Good	193	15.05	2.79		
Social self-esteem	Weak	48	3.45	1.32		
	Medium	239	4.03	1.13	5.62	0.004
	Good	193	4.09	1.24		
Academic self-esteem	Weak	48	3.29	1.20		
	Medium	239	3.14	1.30	0.87	0.42
	Good	193	3.04	1.15		
Family self-esteem	Weak	48	4.75	1.18		
	Medium	239	4.72	1.27	1.17	0.31
	Good	193	4.90	1.16		
Total self-esteem	Weak	48	26.95	3.81		
	Medium	239	26.58	3.45	1.09	0.34
	Good	193	27.09	3.76		

The highest mean scores of social self-esteem and family self-esteem were significantly related to students who had a good ability to communicate with others (P<0.05) (Table 5).

Table 5

Evaluation and comparison of self-esteem score and its dimensions in individuals according to their ability and communication with others

Dimensions of self-esteem	Categorize the ability to communicate	Number	Average	Standard deviation	Statistical index) F(	P-value
Public self-esteem	Weak	32	14.56	4.24		
	Medium	156	15.12	2.61	0.83	0.44
	Good	292	14.84	2.72		
Social self-esteem	Weak	32	3.78	1.29		
	Medium	156	3.82	1.31	3.64	0.03
	Good	292	4.12	1.13		
Academic self-esteem	Weak	32	3.47	1.11		
	Medium	156	3.14	1.13	1.62	0.20
	Good	292	3.06	1.30		
Family self-esteem	Weak	32	4.22	1.39		
	Medium	156	4.69	1.24	5.34	0.004
	Good	292	4.91	1.17		
Total self-esteem	Weak	32	26.03	4.25		
	Medium	156	26.78	3.39	0.91	0.40
	Good	292	26.93	3.65		

The results of one-way ANOVA showed that the highest score of total satisfaction with education is significantly related to people who have great ability in their major (P<0.05) (Table 6).

Table 6

Comparison and evaluation of the total score of academic satisfaction according to their ability in the field of study

Satisfaction score	Ability in the field of study	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	Statistical index (F)	P-value
satisfaction with education	Low	24	182.13	43.63	9.92	p<0.001
	medium	260	190.71	30.21		
	High	196	203.99	39.58		

4. DISCUSSION

The results of the present study showed no correlation between self-esteem in male and female students with satisfaction with their major. There were no studies in the literature examining the correlation of these two variables, so we tried to use similar studies, some of which are consistent with this study, and some contradict it. Baumeister et al., (2003) suggested that excellent performance is not resulted from simply having high self-esteem, but can to some extent lead to good academic performance (Baumeister et al., 2003). Noronha et al., (2018) also stated that academic performance has no significant relationship with self-esteem. These are consistent with the present research. In contrast, Islam (2021) reported that self-esteem is significantly correlated with study habits in students, indicating that when a student builds an appropriate level of self-esteem, it improves study habits and academic achievement. Aryana (2010) showed that high self-esteem is an important and reinforcing factor in predicting academic achievement in students. Nguyen et al., (2019), Liu et al., (2024), and Cao & Liu (2024) found a negative relationship between self-esteem and academic stress, depression, and anxiety, and although we correlated satisfaction with major and self-esteem, academic satisfaction can be considered a basis for good academic performance and this inconsistency can be explained in this way that interest in major alone cannot be the basis of high self-esteem in students, and other important criteria appear to play a role in this regard.

Also, the highest mean scores of social self-esteem and family self-esteem were significantly related to students who had high social support. This was consistent with Sasat et al., (2002), who reported higher mean social self-esteem among dimensions. This also confirms the results of a study by Burnard et al., (2001) that reported high social self-esteem among about half of the students. The similarity of the results of the studies with this study suggests that such results can be due to students' participation in social groups of the university, which are the socialization hub for interaction with others. Self-esteem is a multidimensional component and its high or low level in a person is rooted in many factors including the person's past, their education during childhood and adolescence, living conditions and environment, community, family, peers, hereditary background, etc. Interest in major alone during university years does not cause high self-esteem and the need for high self-esteem is more influenced by community and family support, as only social support and adaptation to a social self-esteem environment have become significant in the findings. This skill should be strengthened from adolescence.

The mean total score of self-esteem in females was higher than in males in this study. Asagba (2016) also reported similar results (Asagba et al., 2016). On the contrary, Mineva et al., (2018) stated that males have more self-esteem than females and attributed it to the higher vulnerability of females and that females tend to have a negative attitude towards themselves. This inconsistency could be because higher self-esteem in females might be due to the independence, they gain at university compared to the past because, in our

society, females have less independence than males during adolescence and are more dependent on the family. This dependence reaches its lowest level when they go to the university.

In this study, higher academic self-esteem score was reported in males than in females. The higher academic self-esteem of male students in our study could also be because males have higher academic self-esteem in the hope of finding a job after university and gaining financial independence, while females, to reach an independent status in society as soon as possible, study more and have higher academic expectations of themselves.

According to the findings of the present study, education satisfaction was related to people who had great ability in their field of study. This is in line with the results of Khammarnia et al. (2017) which was conducted to determine students' attitudes toward their major and future careers at Zahedan Health School. Their result showed students' interest in their major. However, some factors have reduced the students' positive attitudes toward their major and career, which requires the managers of the health system to significantly consider this concern and enhance their satisfaction through various strategies, including guaranteeing a career (Khammarnia et al., 2017). Interest is a powerful motivating force that illuminates educational and career paths and is an essential component of academic success. Promoting interest increases students' desire to learn (Harackiewicz et al., 2016). Renninger & Hidi, (2015) said "Interest is a powerful motivational process that energizes learning and guides academic and career trajectories".

5. CONCLUSION

Given that finding a job related to the major and matching the abilities and interests of people in the field of medical sciences depends to some extent on the chosen major in the university, it is natural that if a person chooses a major with more knowledge and interest, they will be more satisfied with their education, regardless of their birth order or age. Family and community are effective in shaping self-esteem and subsequent success of youth and adolescents. Due to the sensitive age and the boundary between family dependence and complete independence, university students completely cease family dependence and enter the community environment with all its complexities, which requires an effective and organized intervention by families and the university to fully support the self-esteem and success of the students so that a happy and self-respecting workforce enters the future labor market that will lead to the progress of the country.

The large sample size was a strength of this study and one of its limitations was that it was conducted among medical and paramedical students and its results cannot be generalized to other majors. The need for a student's interest in a major cannot create high self-esteem in this group, and to have students with high self-esteem requires family and social support and the ability to adapt to the environment. Therefore, addressing these factors will be useful to improve student performance, which pave the way for the formation of an independent and successful personality to enter the labor market and ultimately lead to national development.

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Ethical Approval: The study adheres to the ethical guidelines for conducting research.

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