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The role of self-esteem in predicting psychological well-being among senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra state: A gender perspective

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CITATION

Enwere CA, Iloakasia AJ. (2024). The role of self-esteem in predicting psychological well-being among senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra state: A gender perspective. *Applied Psychology Research*. 3(2): 1555. <https://doi.org/10.59400/apr1555>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 24 July 2024

Accepted: 16 August 2024

Available online: 28 November 2024

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to establish self-esteem as the predictor of psychological well-being of senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria, with reference to gender distinctions. The type of research used was correlational research design. The state was chosen because of relatively high level of adolescent maladaptive behaviors, the state comprises 21 local government areas and 6 educational zones, with 262 number of public secondary schools. A sample of 763 senior secondary two students, 396 male and 367 female were used in the study and was arrived at after a population of 20,889 senior secondary two students had been sampled through multistage and strata random sampling. Information was gathered through questionnaire, specifically the Self Esteem Evaluating Rating Scale (SEERS) and the Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWS). Both the instruments showed high reliability, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the pre-test questionnaire in this study was 0.81 and 0.86, respectively. The researcher with the help of five assistants obtained 749 completed questionnaires thus having a high response rate. Multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the data and determine the predictors' strength and to conduct hypothesis testing at 0.05 significance level. The study concluded that self-esteem has a significant relationship with adolescents' psychological well-being in senior secondary school in Anambra State. Specifically, self-esteem explained 31.7% of the totality of the variance psychological well-being, 7% is caused by internet usage. In the same regard, self-esteem was mutually having a moderately positive though significant correlation with Masculinity for males: ($R = 0.517$) which represented 26% of variance in Masculinity for males. 7% of the variance. Females' association was modest ($R = 0.484$) accounting for 23 percent. The potential influence of anxiety in males should be additionally investigated. 4% of the variance. The results suggest that, although self-esteem is obviously an important factor for both male subjects and female ones, self-esteem plays a more significant role in males. Therefore, the study calls for interventions that may help improve self-esteem, and other areas of psychological well-being for the sexes while considering the specific gender-related difficulties they face.

Keywords: self-esteem; psychological well-being; adolescents; gender differences; secondary school

1. Introduction

Self-esteem has tendency to affect the level of psychological functioning in senior secondary school adolescents in different ways and it is also important in assessing their psychological health. Self-esteem is psychological concept that describing the concepts, beliefs, and judgments that people have about their self-worth (Widiani, 2024). It includes attitudes or emotions about the self, for example regarding the capability, beauty, or worth. Self-esteem is an essential aspect of individuals which emerged from specific experiences, environments, and interactions.

Roscoe et al. (2023) mentioned that high self-esteem is related to a positive self-image and belief in one's ability and value, which results to increased ability in coping when faced with adversities, enhanced interpersonal relationships and optimal mental health as observed by Muris and Otgaar (2023) and Supervía et al. (2023). On the other hand, self-deprecation is the opposite of self-appreciation and entails negative self-evaluations, self-belittling, and self-depreciation, which may cause anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions. Self-esteem occurs in stages which starts right from childhood to adulthood with the help of feedback received from important people in one's life, successes and failure experienced in one's life (Orth and Robins, 2022). Self-esteem needs to be boosted for psychological health as it determines how people approach stress and cope, their interpersonal relationships, and the way they will strive towards the achievement of their goals.

Psychological health is defined as the objective state of a person, more specifically it can be described as positive psychological functioning and subjective well-being. This is made of things like personal acceptance, continued development of self, search for purpose-personal and environmental control, and positive relationship with others (Ani et al., 2015; García-Álvarez et al., 2021; Viejo et al., 2018). Psychological health is not just the state free from mental disorders but the state enriched with positive aspects of personality rendering life worth living. Resilience is defined as the capacity to cope with stress, self-organization in the context of change, meaningful purpose, besides the flexible sociability (Yang et al., 2022). People with high psychological well-being are usually those who are more satisfied with life, reporting more positive emotions, and who are also more resistant to stress. The state of psychological well-being refers to the pursuit of and progress towards the optimal level of mental health by focusing on personal growth and stability (Bersia et al., 2022; Guerra-Bustamante et al., 2019).

Self-esteem affects how the person perceives himself and the environment, prevents or promotes stress, and defines the nature of human relations and the achievement of personal goals (Albarracín et al., 2024). There are several benefits of having high self-esteem; such good self-evaluation helps in developing better coping strategies, reduced rates of stress, and enhanced level of happiness (Orth and Robins, 2022). On the other hand, self-esteem can lead to several adverse effects, including the client's heightened susceptibility to anxiety, depression, and other mental disorders (Orth and Robins, 2013). It is against this backdrop that the study traces the origins of various components of psychological well-being and the role that self-esteem plays in the development of the elements with the aim of understanding their interrelation among adolescents.

On this premise, many researchers have examined the relationship between self-esteem and psychological health. Self-esteem is taken to be a social advantage, and has a positive effect such as increased psychological well-being, enhanced ability to cope with stress, and enhanced social interactions (Sarkova et al., 2014). Thus, male and female adolescents with higher self-esteem levels indicated more positive affect, better life satisfaction, less anxiety and depressive symptoms (Singhal and Prakash, 2021). This can be explained by the fact that self-esteem contributes to self-identity and a positive self-image hence meaning self-esteem is fundamental in enhancing a

person's psychological state. According to Bélanger et al. (2014), people with high self-esteem proved to be great with stress and other difficulties in their lives. These individuals are also more likely to display preventive behaviors that will improve on their health and wellbeing, the efforts include seeking social support and carry out pleasant activities. Also, self-esteem increases the feeling of competence/efficacy, which is important in any path of achievement and personal satisfaction (Akoul et al., 2020; Rama and Sarada, 2017).

On the other hand, low self-esteem is associated with several detrimental effects that relate to the subject's health and well-being such as depression and anxiety disorders (Angermann and Ertl, 2018). Low self-esteem is characterized by feelings of incompetence and doubt; it also limits one's chances to establish constructive interpersonal relationships and professional achievements. Therefore, the negative self-image gets created and begets negative mental health and low self-esteem, and for this reason, the self-esteem must be tackled to improve mental health (Saint-Georges and Vaillancourt, 2020). Literature review has established that self-esteem can predict adolescents' psychological functioning in a study. For example, Ogba and Nwankwo (2023) noted that self-esteem brings out a significant correlation to the psychological well-being of secondary school students. This finding supports research done by Singhal and Prakash (2021) where they perceived an impact of health status on self-esteem and self-esteem in return has a positive effect on the psychological health of the students regardless of gender. Thus, it can be concluded that the hypothesis stating that there is a positive correlation between self-esteem and psychological well-being is valid; therefore, increasing self-esteem can become a key approach to promoting adolescents' mental health.

Longitudinal data in a study done by Arsandaux et al. (2021) established that the higher level of self-esteem in adolescent age was a sign of a better psychological state in adulthood. This paper also highlighted the fact that self-esteem, apart from affecting the current status of a person, determines the further course of their mental health. In light of the cluster analysis, the researchers stated that those programs designed to increase self-esteem during adolescence could be beneficial for psychological well-being in the future. However, let it be noted that the processes by which self-esteem affects psychological well-being are well understood. Self-esteem increases an individual's self-concept that is effective in handling stress and coping up with pressures (Coffey and Warren, 2020). It also fosters the aspects of social contact and connection, which are very essential in the process of emotional and psychological wellbeing (Harris and Orth, 2020). Also, high self-esteem entails high life satisfaction and happiness due to the positive self-view of the latter that encourages him to practice the conduct favorable for his well-being (Assor et al., 2021).

Gender differences also seem to exist in the correlation between self-esteem and psychological well-being. Research shows that males and females manage and perceive self-esteem in different ways affecting their psychological health. Lyyra et al. (2021) also revealed that self-esteem bore a moderate, but positive relation to the psychological well-being of adolescents and that males presented a higher correlation to this than females. Such difference might be due to gender roles in the society where male is favored, and many opportunities are provided to foster for

positive self-image (Singhal and Prakash, 2021). According to Bleidorn et al. (2016) the study showed that gender differences in self-esteem start manifesting themselves right from adolescence and the general trend was that males scored higher in self-esteem than their female counterparts. Such differences may be attributed to many causes and include; social beliefs, cultural practices, and differential management of the male and female child. For instance, boys may be encouraged to be more macho and to go after what they want, such encouragement may benefit their independent psychological health.

On the other hand, the girl child undergoes social pressure which puts emphasis on issues such as dressing code and appearance thus enhancing the belief of girl child having low self-esteem (Field et al., 2024). Such pressures cause treatments geared towards altering one's body image and objective, which can negatively affect one's psychological well-being. It is important to discern these differences mainly because interventions regarding gender disparities should be directed only at male or female adolescents depending on their needs. This paper emphasizes the importance of the gender approach in self-esteem and mental health for adolescents (De-Coen et al., 2024).

In this respect, it is important to consider the culture which lays a significant background to one's self-esteem, affecting psychological well-being. Having adopted the best features of the African culture in their traditional practices, many African societies including the Nigerian one do dictate teenagers' self-perceptions and well-being. Literature by past researchers in Nigeria shows evidence that self-esteem predicts psychological health among adolescents (Liu et al., 2023; Madu et al., 2023). Culture in the form of collectivity, living in groups, and providing a shelter to several generations may weigh on the creation of self-estimations and the psychological state of an individual. Collectivist culture, people get their self-esteem from their connection with other people and position that they occupy in a particular society (Chukwudum et al., 2023). This is in contrast to individualistic cultures that under most occasions, self-esteem is earned through accomplishment and personal characteristics.

More specifically in the Nigerian context, orientation as to communality as well as the desirability of social cohesion may influence self-esteem in adolescents. The concept of self-worth could be boosted by positive encouragement from the family and members of the society; on the other hand, it could be eroded through negative feedback or social isolation (Popoola et al., 2018). Such cultural implications present valuable insights which need to be understood to craft proper interventions that would enhance self-esteem and psychological wellbeing in adolescents in Nigeria. Furthermore, sex itself is a cultural construction that defines the overall ways in which self-esteem is enacted and felt among males and females. Gender roles, expectations and perception differ from country to country and region to region, this has an implication on youth opportunities and influencing factors. In Nigeria specifically, traditional gender roles privilege males by offering early opportunities to develop, express oneself, and succeed, which in turn increases his self-esteem (Lee and Durksen, 2018). Solving the given cultural and gender-related factors is instrumental to ensuring proper mental health and functioning amongst adolescents.

Several processes describe how self-esteem affects 'mental health' Several pathways through which self-esteem impacts 'mental health' have been described. It is therefore important that people develop a positive self-image, since self-esteem helps alleviate stress reactions and saves one from mental ailments. Hearing and understanding also help in creating both immediate and long-term positive social interactions and interpersonal relationships, which are an essential source for social emotional support and human psychological wellbeing (Ngai et al., 2021). In addition, self-esteem enhances positive considerations of the self, including one's identity that are crucial to adolescents' growth and well-being, as well as their perception of happiness (Povedano-Diaz et al., 2020). Coping mechanisms provide a crucial mediating factor when examining the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being. Those with adaptive self-esteem are more inclined to use constructive coping methods like solving problems and engaging support while the opposites are inclined to employ none constructive ways like avoiding or neglecting an issue (Alsaker and Kroger, 2020). These environmental changes enable people to cope up with stress in a better manner, further decreasing the chances of developing stress related illnesses and improving on general mental health.

Positive social interactions and relationships are also important on this relation. Self-esteem enhances social adjustment because it enables people to foster proper interpersonal relationships (Akanaeme et al., 2022). These relationships offer companionship, which is very essential in ensuring psychological health. Prosocial peer relations and parental acceptance can also predict young people's self-esteem; it is believed that adolescents with high self-esteem are likely to have positive mental health in terms of friendship and family relations (Sapin et al., 2016). Besides, it is well connected with self-image and self-identity in persons. The evidence gathered indicates that self-esteem makes youth to be clearer in their identities and hence the direction they are heading in life, which is purpose in life according to Erikson (1968). This positive self-concept is very beneficial for development and accepting the self which is very much related to the psychological health. This knowledge raised the realization of the value of self-esteem boost in the improvement of adolescents' mental health and well-being hence the study.

2. Problem statement

Adolescence is one of the most important developmental stages in an individual's life characterized by psychological and social development, of which self-esteem has considerable importance in predicting psychological health. Nonetheless, it is imperative to note that research on the association between self-esteem and psychological well-being of senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria still lacks a clear elaboration of how self-esteem uniquely contributes to these adolescents' psychological well-being. Most of these socio-cultural barriers to youth self-esteem and psychology may affect the youths that are in the Anambra State, which is in the South-East region of the Nigeria. Some of these issues are cultism and substance abuse that if not addressed mean a negative impact to the life of the students, there is therefore need to look at factors that have positive impacts on the mental health of these students.

Prior studies were carried out using different groups of adolescents or specific culture other than Anambra State without addressing the distinctive aspects of self-esteem influencing senior adolescents' psychological wellbeing in this region. Scholarship has suggested that self-esteem varies across cultures and could be mediated by conditions within learners and their families, schools, and friendship circles (Cuc and Claudia-Cuc, 2019; Makelele, 2024). Therefore, an awareness of these local factors provides importance and a platform for the formulation and implementation of specific interventions for the improvement of positive youth mental health in Anambra State. Also, though the studies have shown that self-esteem and psychological well-being are mating variables, there lacks sufficient research done for the Nigerian educational system and more specifically for the senior secondary school students. This research study seeks to address this gap by analyzing how changes in self-esteem level of Males and female adolescents in Anambra State affect their psychological wellbeing.

Because of the minimal localized research, the effectiveness of interventions developed to increase self-esteem and psychological well-being can only be applied internationally or in other regions. Therefore, the findings of this study will help to determine the general and particular socio-cultural factors as well as educational difficulties in Anambra State affecting self-esteems and psychological well-being. Such insight is helpful particularly in determining educational policies or psychological therapies for the youth in this part of the world.

2.1. Objectives

- 1) Ascertain whether self-esteem predicts psychological well-being of senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State
- 2) Determine if self-esteem predicts psychological well-being of male and female secondary school adolescents in Anambra State.

2.2. Research questions

The study was guided by following research questions:

- 1) How does self-esteem predict psychological well-being of senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State?
- 2) How does self-esteem predict psychological well-being of male and female senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State?

2.3. Hypotheses

The following five null hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance.

- 1) Self-esteem is not a significant predictor of psychological well-being of senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State.
- 2) Self-esteem is not significant predictor of psychological well-being of male and female senior secondary adolescents in Anambra State.

2.4. Theoretical framework

The study is grounded in Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Theory posits that self-esteem is a fundamental component of an individual's self-concept and is crucial for psychological well-being. It suggests that a positive self-view enhances one's ability to cope with challenges and fosters better mental health. According to this theory, self-esteem influences how individuals perceive themselves and their interactions with others, impacting their overall psychological state. Rosenberg Self Esteem theory is related and applicable to the study because adolescent's positive and negative self evaluation of him or herself is a very important key factor in improving his or her psychological wellbeing in the school (Rosenberg, 1960). Consequently, senior school adolescent in comparing himself with others pushes him to make a positive or negative evaluation of himself depending on the environment evaluates him. The third assumption of Rosenberg self-esteem theory which emphasizes that self-esteem which connotes with high self-esteem equates to healthy, happy individual while low self-esteem equates to the unsatisfied, disconnected individual. Thus, school adolescent with high self-esteem are physical happy health and mentally balanced individual with a good psychological well being while school adolescents with low self-esteem are unsatisfied, depressed, frustrated consequently leading to poor psychological wellbeing.

Complementing this, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a framework for understanding how self-esteem fits into broader psychological and developmental contexts. Maslow argues that self-esteem is a higher-order need that becomes prominent once basic physiological and safety needs are satisfied. This theory emphasizes that individuals seek self-esteem and self-actualization as part of their quest for psychological well-being and personal fulfillment (Maslow, 2000). Together, these theories guide the study by linking self-esteem with psychological health, suggesting that higher self-esteem leads to improved psychological well-being. This theoretical framework underpins the research focus on the relationship between self-esteem and psychological health among adolescents, providing a foundation for exploring how gender differences might affect this relationship in Anambra State.

3. Method

The research method used in this study adopted the correlational design, which enabled examination of the associations between self-esteem, and psychological well-being among senior school adolescents. According to Nworgu (2015), this type of research enables one to establish the level of relationship between variables as well as the direction and hence appropriate for evaluating how self-esteem and locus of control influence psychological well-being. The study was conducted in Anambra State, which is in the South Eastern part of Nigeria located in the South Eastern geopolitical zone and occupies a total land area of 4416 square kilometers. Located in the south-eastern region of Nigeria, it borders Kogi, Delta, Enugu, and Imo states and is made up of three senatorial zones and 21 local governments. Some of its inhabitants are artists, merchants, entrepreneurs, farmers, and government employees.

The state, with six educational zones—Aguata, Awka, Nnewi, Ogidi, Onitsha, and Otuocha—hosts 262 public secondary schools managed by the State Post Primary Service Commission in Awka. This setting was chosen due to high rates of maladaptive behaviors among adolescents, such as cultism and drug use.

The study population consisted of 20,889 senior secondary two (SS2) students from these public schools. A sample of 763 students (396 males and 367 females) was selected using a multistage sampling process. Proportionate random sampling identified 20% of schools from each educational zone, resulting in 52 schools. Stratified random sampling, considering gender, was used to select 20% of students from these schools, yielding specific numbers from each zone. For data collection, two instruments were used: The instruments used in this study were the Self Esteem Evaluating Rating Scale (SEERS) and the Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWS). A self-esteem measure, the Self-Esteem Evaluation and Relaxation Scale-SEERS by Swainathan (2016) and modified by the researcher, consists of 30 items with responses measured on a five-point scale. The PWS with the source from Ryff's model (1989) aimed to assess six facets of well being and also followed the 5-point Likert type scale. To get face validity of the instruments, the following instruments were validated by three experts from Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University based on the content coverage and clarity of the items. Reliability testing was done on twenty (20) students drawn from Enugu State to ensure that the results obtained can easily be generalized on Anambra State since both areas are from the same eastern region of Nigeria, possess a relatively similar cultural and educational background. Using Cronbach's alpha, the reliability coefficients were 0.81 for SEERS and 0.86 for PWS, indicating high reliability.

Data collection was managed by the researcher and five trained assistants. Questionnaires were distributed to the students, and follow-up visits ensured a high response rate, with 749 out of 763 questionnaires properly completed and returned. This high response rate facilitated robust data analysis. Regression analysis was employed to evaluate the data, with specific thresholds for interpreting results. Regression coefficients helped assess predictor strength: 0–0.1 indicated weak predictors, 0.1–0.3 modest, 0.3–0.5 moderate, and above 0.5 strong predictors. Negative coefficients indicated negative relationships. Hypotheses were tested against a significance level of 0.05, with p-values determining whether to accept or reject the null hypotheses.

4. Results

Research Question 1: How does self-esteem predict psychological well-being of senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State?

In **Table 1**, the regression analysis shows a significant relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being among secondary school adolescents. The coefficient of determination (*R* Square) is 0.317, indicating that approximately 31.7% of the variance in psychological well-being can be explained by self-esteem. The standard error of the estimate is 2.826, suggesting the model's accuracy in predicting psychological well-being scores. With an adjusted *R* Square of 0.316, accounting for the number of predictors, the model remains robust. The correlation coefficient (*R*)

of 0.563 signifies a strong positive correlation between self-esteem and psychological well-being in this demographic.

Table 1. Regression coefficient r on self-esteem and psychological well-being of secondary school adolescents.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Remarks
1	0.563	0.317	0.316	2.826	Strong

Research Question 2: How does self-esteem predict psychological well-being of male and female senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State?

Table 2 presents regression results examining the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being across genders among secondary school adolescents. For males, the correlation coefficient (R) is 0.517, indicating a moderately strong positive relationship with psychological well-being (R Square = 0.267). The model’s predictive accuracy is reflected in the standard error of the estimate at 3.107. Conversely, females show a slightly weaker correlation ($R = 0.484$) and a lower explained variance (R Square = 0.234), suggesting a moderate positive relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being. The standard error of the estimate for females is 2.719. Adjusted R Square values account for predictors, indicating both models retain their robustness. These findings suggest that while both genders show positive associations, males exhibit a stronger correlation between self-esteem and psychological well-being compared to females in this context.

Table 2. Regression coefficient r on self-esteem and psychological well-being of male and female secondary school adolescents.

Gender	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Remarks
Male	0.517	0.267	0.265	3.107	Strong
Female	0.484	0.234	0.232	2.719	Moderate

Hypothesis One: Self-esteem is not a significant predictor of psychological well-being of senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State.

As shown on **Table 3**, the simple regression coefficient (R) is 0.563 while the R^2 is 0.317 showing that self-esteem makes 31.7% contribution to the variance in secondary school adolescents’ psychological well-being. The $F(1/749) = 346.610$ and the p -value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. Therefore, since the p -value is less than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, self-esteem is a significant predictor of psychological well-being of senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State.

Table 3. Test of significance of simple regression analysis with self-esteem as predictor of psychological well-being of secondary school adolescents.

Predictor	R	R^2	F	P -value	Remark
Self Esteem	0.563	0.317	346.610	0.000	*S

*Significant

Hypothesis Two: Self-esteem is not a significant predictor of Male and Female psychological well-being of senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State.

Result on **Table 4**, showed that the simple regression coefficient (R) of male students is 0.517 while the R^2 is 0.267 showing that 26.7% change in male secondary school adolescents' psychological well-being is explained by self-esteem, while the simple regression coefficient (R) of female students is 0.484 while the R^2 is 0.234 showing that 23.4% change in female secondary school adolescents' psychological well-being is explained by self-esteem. The $F(1/389) = 141.163$ and $F(1/360) = 109.434$ for male and female secondary school adolescents' respectively and the p -value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. Therefore, since the p -value is less than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, self-esteem is a significant predictor of psychological well-being of male and female senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State.

Table 4. Test of significance of simple regression analysis with self-esteem as predictor of psychological well-being of male and female secondary school adolescents.

Gender	Predictor	R	R^2	F	P -value	Remark
Male	Self Esteem	0.517	0.267	141.163	0.000	*S
Female	Self Esteem	0.484	0.234	109.434	0.000	*S

*Significant

5. Discussion

The finding of the study showed that self-esteem is significantly predictive of the psychological health of senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State. This supports the finding of Dogan, Totan and Sapmaz (2013) who found that, there was a significant positive correlation between psychological well-being and self-esteem. The possible explanation for this finding is that self-esteem helps in developing positive identity and assertiveness in adolescents which contribute to the psychological well-being. Self-esteem is found as a strong predictor of psychological well-being due to the fact that it creates positive socialization and good peer relationships which reduce depression and other physical health issues (Madu et al., 2023). Self-esteem is the feeling that adolescents hold of every day experiences in employing life activities. Another thing that was discovered was that self-esteem is a major determinant of the psychological health of senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State. This is in consonance with the study of Amalu (2017) who concluded that there was a significant positive relationship between self-esteem and students' psychological adjustment. This is also in concord with the study conducted by Sarkova (2010) who found that there was a strong correlation between self-esteem and adolescents psychological well-being. The cross sectional match of the two studies can be explained as follows: self-esteem puts in place self-confidence and disposition to undertake daily challenges that enhance happiness as well as psychological well-being (Field et al., 2024).

The study's finding that self-esteem significantly predicts psychological health among senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State aligns with similar

research but highlights important cultural nuances. For instance, studies in Japanese contexts, such as those by Nawa and Yamagishi (2024), consistently show a positive correlation between self-esteem and psychological well-being. However, in collectivist societies like Nigeria, where community and family dynamics heavily influence adolescent development, the role of self-esteem may be uniquely moderated by these social factors. Comparing these results with research from other cultural settings reveals both similarities and differences. For instance, studies conducted in China by Gao et al. (2019) and Liu et al. (2023) also observed strong links between self-esteem and psychological adjustment, suggesting that self-esteem universally supports psychological well-being. However, cultural contexts can shape how self-esteem impacts psychological health (Merino et al., 2024). In Anambra State, cultural values emphasizing communal support and collective identity might enhance or diminish the impact of self-esteem on psychological outcomes compared to individualistic societies. This variation underscores the importance of considering cultural factors when applying psychological findings across different regions.

The findings of the research revealed that self-esteem $r = 0.667$ and is highly significant for the psychological well-being of male senior secondary school adolescents, whereas $r = 0.505$ is moderately significant for the psychological well-being of female senior secondary school adolescents. This coheres with the study by Shamsul (2018) that established that self-esteem has positive influence and correlation with psychological health among both male and female student. An explanation for this finding is that it is certainly plausible that societal gender roles give more privileges to males compared to the females. Male students have confidence in their abilities and have freedom to perform some certain roles whereas female students due to societal belief system and cultural limitation seek confirmation for some of their actions which lower their self-esteem (Makelele, 2024; Povedano-Diaz et al., 2020). Roles assigned to male students by the society or the belief system imposed on them may foster the general positive feeling of self-worth and self-acceptance, therefore affecting the psychological well-being of male students than the female ones. Female and male senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State also rated self-esteem an important predictor of their psychological well-being. This helped in supplementing the assertion made by Shamsul (2018) who noted that there was a positive correlation between self-esteem and psychological well being of male/female students. Both male and female students have good self value and worth orientation which has a direct implication on the psychological well-being of the students.

This implication may be influenced by varying cultural and societal expectations. In some cultural contexts such as in India, traditional gender roles can grant males greater freedom and opportunities for self-assertion, potentially enhancing their self-esteem and psychological well-being (Chadda, 2022; Košir and Lakshminarayanan, 2023). Conversely, females in Malaysia might face additional societal constraints that impact their self-perception and confidence, resulting in a less pronounced correlation between self-esteem and psychological well-being (Manaf et al., 2021; Tan et al., 2023). Comparing these results with studies from other cultural settings can shed light on these differences. For instance, in more

egalitarian societies, gender differences in the self-esteem-psychological well-being relationship may be less pronounced.

Specifically, the findings from Anambra State, indicating that self-esteem significantly predicts psychological well-being among senior secondary school adolescents, align with international studies that highlight the critical role of self-esteem in mental health. For example, research in Western contexts, such as those by Sahakian (2024) and Schwager et al. (2020), has consistently shown that higher self-esteem is associated with better psychological well-being, including lower levels of anxiety and depression. The study's findings, particularly the stronger correlation between self-esteem and psychological well-being in males, also resonate with studies in individualistic cultures, where self-esteem is closely linked to personal achievement and social status (Dekeyser et al., 2024). However, the Anambra findings also contrast with some international studies. In collectivist cultures, such as those in East Asia, self-esteem is often derived from social harmony and group belonging, leading to a different interplay between self-esteem and psychological well-being (Suzuki, 2024). The modest correlation found in females may reflect cultural norms in Anambra that emphasize communal values over individual self-worth, differing from the individualistic focus seen in Western studies. Thus, while the Anambra findings support the general importance of self-esteem in adolescent mental health, they also underscore the influence of cultural context on this relationship.

6. Implications of the findings for policy and educational practices in Anambra State

The findings that self-esteem significantly influences the psychological well-being of senior secondary school adolescents, with gender differences, can have profound implications for policy-making and educational practices in Anambra State and similar regions. For policy-making, there is a clear need to design and implement gender-sensitive mental health initiatives. Policies should address the unique challenges faced by female students, such as societal constraints and cultural beliefs that may undermine their self-esteem. Creating support systems, such as counseling services and mentorship programs specifically tailored for female adolescents, could help bridge this gap. Additionally, promoting gender equality in educational settings by challenging traditional roles and encouraging equal opportunities can help bolster self-esteem for both genders.

In educational practices, schools can incorporate self-esteem enhancement programs into the curriculum. Training educators to recognize and address the different ways in which self-esteem impacts male and female students can lead to more effective support strategies. Programs focusing on building self-confidence, resilience, and positive self-worth should be integrated, with attention to the specific needs of each gender. Overall, these measures can foster a more supportive learning environment that enhances psychological well-being and academic performance, ultimately contributing to the holistic development of adolescents in Anambra State and similar regions.

The study's findings are directly informed by Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Rosenberg's theory posits that self-esteem is integral to self-concept and psychological well-being, suggesting that higher self-esteem fosters better mental health and resilience against stressors. The study's finding that self-esteem predicts psychological well-being supports this theory, as it shows that adolescents with higher self-esteem exhibit better mental health outcomes. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs complements this by positioning self-esteem as a higher-order need, becoming salient after basic physiological and safety needs are met. The study's results align with Maslow's theory, as it highlights the importance of self-esteem in achieving psychological well-being, particularly in a context where basic needs are largely addressed.

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs are reflected in the empirical results of the study. The significant correlation between self-esteem and psychological well-being supports Rosenberg's assertion that high self-esteem is crucial for mental health. Additionally, the emphasis on self-esteem as a predictor aligns with Maslow's view of self-esteem as a higher-order need influencing overall well-being. This theoretical alignment underscores the study's finding that enhancing self-esteem can improve adolescents' psychological health, consistent with both theories.

Policy and Practical Implications

Based on the study's findings, several educational and policy interventions can be recommended to enhance self-esteem and psychological well-being among senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State.

Educational Interventions:

- 1) **Self-Esteem Building Programs:** Schools should implement programs focused on enhancing self-esteem through workshops and counseling. These programs can include activities that promote positive self-image, peer support groups, and mentorship initiatives. Such interventions can help students build confidence and resilience, tailored to the local context by incorporating culturally relevant practices and success stories.
- 2) **Incorporation of Self-Esteem in Curriculum:** The integration of self-esteem education into the curriculum can be achieved through subjects like Personal Development, Life Skills, and Social Studies. This integration should emphasize cultural values and societal contributions, leveraging local traditions and narratives to strengthen students' self-perception.
- 3) **Teacher Training:** Educators need training on recognizing and fostering self-esteem in students. This training should include strategies for providing constructive feedback and creating a supportive classroom environment that acknowledges and celebrates individual strengths, aligning with local cultural values of communal support and respect.

Policy Interventions:

- 1) **Mental Health Policies:** Developing and implementing policies that prioritize mental health in schools is crucial. Policies should mandate regular psychological assessments and provide resources for mental health support, including counseling services. Local government authorities can collaborate with educational institutions to ensure these policies are effectively integrated.

- 2) **Community Engagement:** Policies should promote community involvement in supporting adolescents' mental health. This can include community-based workshops and partnerships with local cultural leaders to address self-esteem and psychological well-being. Engaging families and local organizations in these initiatives ensures they resonate with cultural norms and practices.
- 3) **Anti-Cultism and Substance Abuse Programs:** Addressing maladaptive behaviors such as cultism and substance abuse through school-based and community interventions is essential. Policies should support comprehensive programs that offer alternative activities and support systems for adolescents, incorporating local cultural practices to foster a positive environment.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, insights from this study underscore the importance of self-esteem in determining the psychological health of senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State while producing gender-specific analysis. The results also therefore establish that self-esteem has significant influence of adolescent psychological wellbeing for both male and female although with varying degrees of influence. In males, self-esteem appears as a variable that stands out as most significant predictor, leading to a significant impact on psychological welfare. Conversely, females exhibit a moderate relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being, suggesting differential impacts shaped by societal expectations and gender roles. These results align with broader literature highlighting self-esteem's pivotal role in shaping adolescents' positive identity, assertiveness, and social interactions, thereby influencing their overall psychological health. Practical implications include targeted interventions aimed at bolstering adolescents' self-esteem to enhance their psychological well-being, tailored to address gender-specific challenges and cultural contexts within Anambra State.

Author contributions: Conceptualization, CAE and AJI; methodology, CAE; software, AJI; validation, CAE and AJI; formal analysis, CAE; investigation, AJI; resources, CAE; data curation, AJI; writing—original draft preparation, AJI; writing—review and editing, AJI; visualization, AJI; supervision, CAE; project administration, AJI; funding acquisition, CAE. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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