



Practicing Social Work Students and Self-Esteem

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v5i2.163>

Abstract

Self-esteem has positive effects on various aspects of people's lives, and it contributes to self-improvement and enhancement of their personal value. The purpose of this study was to explore the levels of social work students' self-esteem the period of their practice placement (internship). Methodologically, in the context of quantitative research, the Greek Self-Esteem Scale was granted. The sample consisted of 106 (N = 106) social work students who were doing their internship. The resulting research data were analyzed with the use of SPSS, and they were then interpreted according to the evaluation criteria of the scale with the Cronbach's Alpha index being of the order of 0.881. According to them, it seemed that the trainee students showed high percentages of total self-esteem 38.54% and particularly very high percentages on the self-esteem measurement scale of external appearance which reached up to 79%. In conclusion, it appears that high levels of self-esteem in students who carry out their internship enhance their skills in the internship setting, make them feel more confident in what they do, take initiative, be hardworking, punctual, and conscientious.

Keywords: *Self-Esteem; Students; Social Work; Internship*

Introduction

Self-esteem is defined as a blend of positive or negative self-evaluation (Rosenberg 1965). It generally captures how people feel about themselves. Self-esteem is found in two basic dimensions of individuals' abilities and values (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). More specifically, competence refers to whether individuals consider themselves effective and value to the extent that they feel they are valuable people. Self-esteem is influenced by our ideas; by how we perceive our own standards of our image. All of this has a significant effect on our emotions and consequently on our choices and the effort we make to succeed. Positive self-control is the basis for maintaining mental and physical health (Meisenhelder, 1985). People with high levels of self-esteem have a favorable perception of themselves and are particularly satisfied with what they are (Bordens & Horowitz, 2008). In general, they tend to have positive and secure feelings and self-confidence (Kernis, 2000). They have good communication skills, they keep-social and more intimate relationships, they can resolve interpersonal conflicts and they emotionally support other people. They are productive and they have a creative imagination. They are open to challenges, they keep their boundaries and they do not resort to defenses; while when this

happens they distance themselves (Buhrmester et al., 1988; Papanis, 2004). On the other hand, when the levels of self-esteem are low, people evaluate themselves negatively, they feel that they do not deserve the attention and care of others and they are afraid of rejection. They are indefinable they may seek the disapproval of others as feelings of helplessness prevail in them (Papanis, 2004). Consciously or unconsciously, low self-esteem leads people to hate and reject themselves directly or indirectly (Stuart & Sundeen, 1987). For the past forty years at least, many researchers have been convinced of the beneficial effects produced by high levels of self-esteem (Leary & MacDonald 2003). Although high self-esteem may not always be beneficial, it does not underestimate its dynamics and positive signs, which guarantee and motivate individuals to prosperity (Sedikides, Gaertner & Vevea 2005). According to James, self-esteem is the ratio between a person's actual achievements and aspirations. According to Stanley Coopersmith's theory of self-esteem, it develops in early childhood because of the love and trust that parents show to the child while setting certain boundaries and rules (Seligman, 1996). According to the theory of self-determination, self-esteem is born out of people's innate motivation to explore and dominate their environment, and as they succeed, they boost their self-esteem (Ryan & Deci, 2004). Finally, according to the management theory, self-esteem functions as a construction within cultural values with the perspective that it can help the individual through personal achievement and prosperity to face fears, difficulties, stress, death, failure etc. (Mikulincer, Florian & Hirschberger, 2003). Combining the above theories, it can be argued that the development of self-esteem starts from the child's relationship with the parents and continues to develop when the child begins to explore his or her environment and helps the individual through difficulties and social problems.

As Kaya & Ogurlu (2015) argued there is a direct relationship between self-esteem and academic performance. Self-esteem motivates students in their pursuit of academic achievement, enabling them to have a more rational relationship in understanding their successes and failures. High self-esteem acts as a driving force for students as they are able to shape future goals and expectations according to their abilities and interests (Tremblay, Inman & Willms, 2000). Various studies have shown that if students receive satisfactory grades, then they can automatically feel better about themselves while increasing their self-esteem (Crocker et al., 2003; Knightley & Whitelock, 2007; Lane, Lane, & Kyprianu, 2004). Other research has shown that students who have faith in what they are as individuals can score better on their performance and continue to strive for even better (Knightly & Whitelock, 2007; Pepi, Faria & Alesi, 2006).

High expectancies from one's self increases one's performance (Van Laar, 2000). Martin' (2005) argued that students who feel confident about themselves perform better in all areas of their studies, while those who show less confidence achieve lower performance. Miraei (2005) argues that students who feel inadequate or shy do not actively participate in learning processes. They often remain hesitant and frustrated, which ultimately decreases their level of self-esteem. Low levels of self-esteem do not allow them to excel in life (Baumeister et al., 2003). Students with low levels of self-esteem not only feel frustrated and easily discouraged but they can also not solve problems encountered in academia (Zeinvand, 2006). High levels of self-esteem make it easier for students to develop individual skills, confidence and feelings of dignity (Ford, 2003). Sadaat's et al. 2012 study revealed a significant difference in self-esteem levels between social and science students (Ghasemzadeh & Soleimani, 2012). Another study by Akinleke (2012) on students studying engineering observed that high levels of stress for academic performance reduce students' self-esteem. A research by Heaven & Ciarrochi et al. (2005) underlined that students with special abilities and qualifications did not appear to have higher levels of self-esteem than others without these special abilities and qualifications. As self-esteem increases so does academic achievement and vice versa (Baumeister et al., 2003). Practices that seek to improve self-esteem may also increase students' achievement (Davies & Brember 1999). As various studies suggest self-esteem improves academic performance (Chu & Choi, 2005; Marsh & Craven, 2005; Valentine & DuBois, 2005; Zuffiano et al. 2013; Bodkin-Andrews et al., 2010; Peixoto, & Almeida, 2010).

Research Methodology

The hereby presented study focuses on investigating the level of self-esteem of social work students during their internship period. The aim was to assess the students' self-esteem and its individual levels: work, family, intrapersonal, social and external and to explore how it relates to the gender, age and marital status of each research subject.

Participants

The research involved 106 Social work students in the Democritus University of Thrace - Greece, doing their internship in Social Services and Local Authorities in the wider region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace.

Most, 95 (89.6%) were women and 11 (10.4%) were men, two of whom were married and 1.9% had children. 90.57% were in the fourth year of study and the remaining 9.43% in the fifth year of study and above. The age of the sample ranged from— between 21 to and 51 years. The majority of students were 34.9% at the age of 21, 41.5% at the age of 22 and 14.2% at the age of 23.

Research Tool

The Greek Self-Esteem Scale was used to measure students' self-esteem. This scale consists of 50 questions scoring on a Likert scale answered by the research participants regarding their perceptions. They had to choose one of the 6 available answers ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, partially disagree, partially agree, agree, to Strongly Agree. To validate the participants' responses 5 false questions were incorporated in the questionnaire. In case a respondent gives "extreme" answers to 3 of them then the answers on the whole scale are considered unreliable and are not taken into account (Papanis, 2011). The sum of the individual scores constitutes the total self-esteem of each subject, while there is a corresponding score for each relevant sub-scale, which concerns individual levels such as work, family, intrapersonal, social and external appearance (Papanis, 2011).

Data Collection Process

Data collection was assisted by the internship supervisors, who were informed about the purposes of the survey and how to administer the relevant self-esteem scale. The scale was administered to each group of students by their supervisor after first giving relevant explanations and answering questions about the aim of this research and how to complete the questionnaire. The basic ethical and moral rules such as confidentiality of responses, respect for the subjects, equal treatment and impartiality were observed throughout the research. In general, there were no problems in the whole process as there was a very good atmosphere of cooperation with both students and supervisors.

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Statistical Analysis

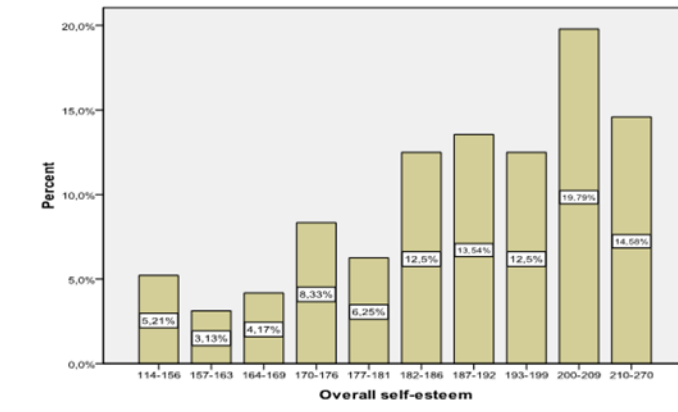
The data were analyzed with the statistical program SPSS. With the help of graphs and calculation of numerical quantities, the demographic characteristics of the participants in the research were presented, for the Cronbach's Alpha index; the reliability check of the factors was performed.

Analysis of results

In the case of total self-esteem, the Cronbach's Alpha index reaches the level of 0.881, which indicates a high degree of reliability of the scale given for the measurement of self-esteem.

In particular, in terms of overall self-esteem, it seems that 19.79% dominates with extremely high levels of self-esteem, followed by 14.58% of the student population with excessively very high levels of self-esteem, which translates into defensive self-esteem. Consequently, it appears that 13.54% of the student population that participated in the survey is in a type of functional self-esteem and close to it with equal values continues at a rate of 12.50% moderate to high self-esteem and the other at the same value 12, 50% high self-esteem. Overall, it appears that 38.54% of the students show very good functional levels of overall self-esteem. In the other case now 6.25% of the sample shows moderate levels of self-esteem, continuing the downward trend of the percentages and reaching 5.21%, which is interpreted as too low self-esteem. Correspondingly, 25.09% of the sample have moderate to low levels of self-esteem.

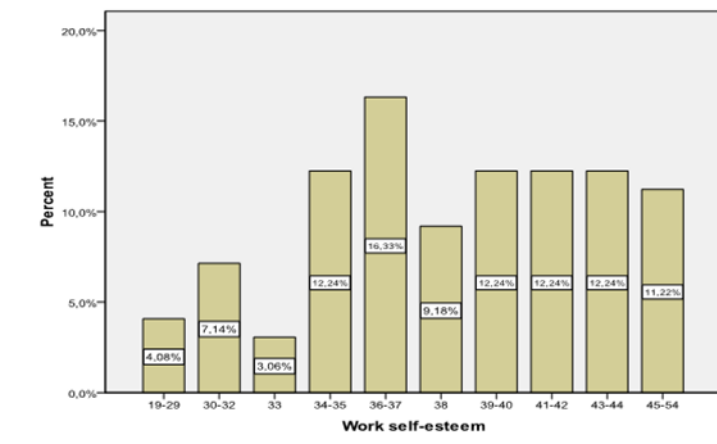
Graph 1.



In the sub-scales the analysis of the results highlights the following:

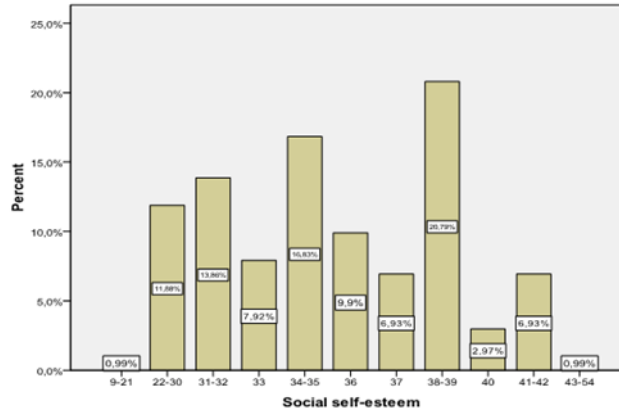
A. In the case of job self-esteem, which measures responsibility in the workplace, resistance to negative peer feedback, ambitions, assertive behavior, etc., 16.33% of the sample shows moderate levels in it, continuing from 9.18% and to the right of the graph the moderate to high self-esteem is reflected, while in three similar percentages at 12.24% the very high to excessively high self-esteem is outlined, ending at 11.22% which represents narcissistic levels of labor self-esteem. . On the other side of the graph from 12.24% and to the left up to 4.08%, the levels of moderate to low to extremely low self-esteem are shown. It is important to note that if we add the percentages from high to extremely high working self-esteem, this reaches 45.90% of the surveyed population as opposed to the sum of the percentages of moderate to low working self-esteem, which reaches percentages of 42, 85% of the sample.

Graph 2.



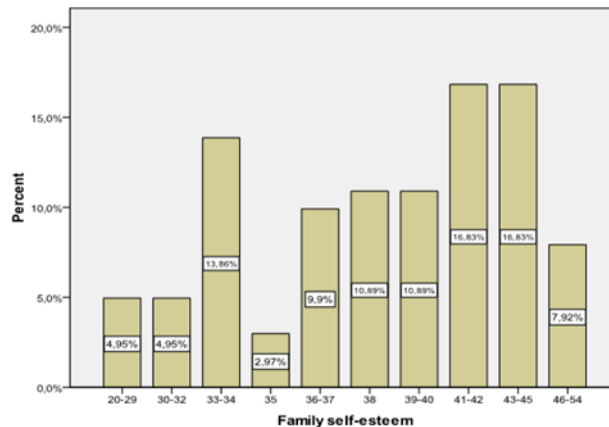
B. Measuring the levels of social self-esteem, which focuses on the feeling of sympathy, respect, interest, acceptance, etc. by others, it seems that a percentage of the sample is quite high, 20.79% show high levels of social self-esteem, while it follows 16.83% of the participants in the research, which shows moderate to low social self-esteem. In general, as shown in the graph, the total percentages of moderate to excessively low social self-esteem are very high and reach a cumulative 60.39% of the sample, while on the other hand the moderate to excessively high social self-esteem in total reaches 37,62% of survey participants.

Graph 3.



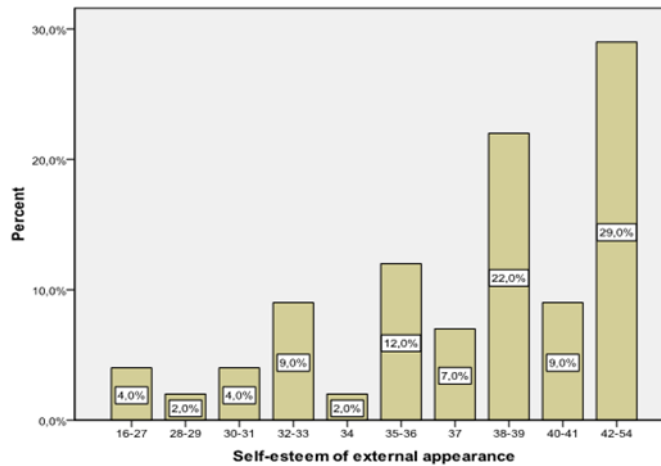
C. Studying the family self-esteem, which concerns the sense of understanding, acceptance, reward, support, etc. within the family, according to the chart below, the participants at a rate of 16.83% and respectively at a rate of 16.83% outline the fact of very high to excessively high family self-esteem. While it seems that the moderate to high family self-esteem is around 10.89% of the surveyed population. Levels of low family self-esteem are found in a percentage of 13.86%. Given the percentages of the chart as a whole, it is reflected that the high to excessively high family self-esteem reaches the rate of 55.44%, while the moderate to extremely low family self-esteem in total reaches the rate of 36.63%.

Graph 4.



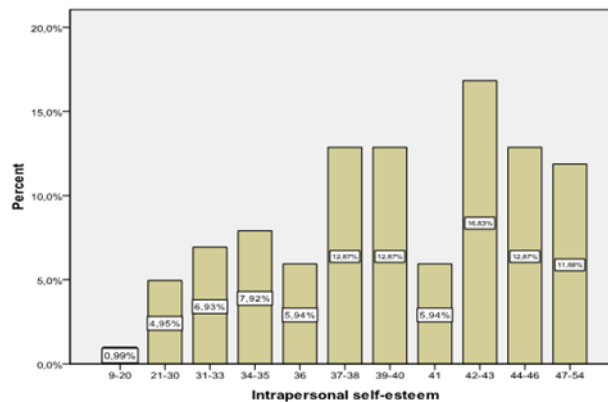
D. The self-esteem of external appearance, which refers to the impression, the opinion, the image, the attractiveness, etc. that the person feels that others have for it, at a rate of 29.00% reflects a high narcissistic self-esteem of external appearance, and in a percentage of 22.00% very high levels, while the levels of high self-esteem of external appearance reach 7.00%. In particular, it is strongly felt that the sample is moving at very high concentration rates from moderate to high to narcissistic levels of self-esteem, and totals to 79.00%, as opposed to moderate rates to a very excessively low self-esteem of appearance, where the percentages additionally reach 21.00%.

Graph 5.



E. Intrapersonal self-esteem is related to self-acceptance, feeling of failure and taking personal responsibility. Graph 6 depicts values that the percentage of high intrapersonal self-esteem reaches 16.83% and very high intrapersonal self-esteem reaches 11.86%. Moderate to low intrapersonal self-esteem starts at 5.94% and ends at a negligible rate of 0.99%, which refers to excessively low intrapersonal self-esteem.

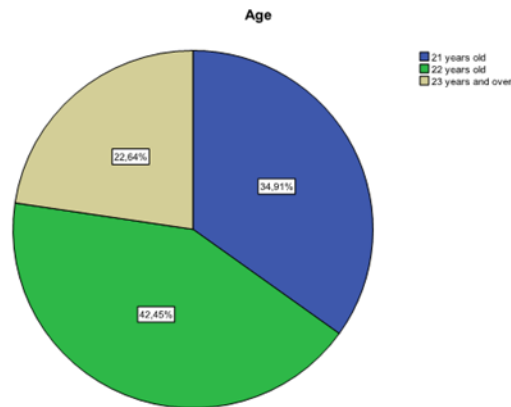
Graph 6.



To investigate the effect of the demographic characteristics of the sample on the variable under study, in terms of gender, the analysis (One-Way ANOVA) shows no significance, at a significance level of 5%, between men and women for Labor self-esteem ($F = 0.063$, sig (F) = 0.802), Social Self-Esteem ($F = 0.000$, sig (F) = 0.986), Family Self-Esteem ($F = 0.134$, sig (F) = 0.715), External Self-Esteem ($F = 1.263$, sig (F) = 0.264), Intrapersonal self-esteem ($F = 0.178$, sig (F) = 0.674), and Total self-esteem ($F = 0.002$, sig (F) = 0.966).

Regarding the age of the sample, the analysis (One-Way ANOVA) does not show significance, at a significance level of 5%, between age and Occupational self-esteem ($F = 1.369$, sig (F) = 0.259), Social self-esteem ($F = 0.542$, sig (F) = 0.584), Family self-esteem ($F = 3.066$, sig (F) = 0.051), External self-esteem ($F = 0.177$, sig (F) = 0.838), Intrapersonal self-esteem ($F = 0.246$, sig (F) = 0.782), and Overall self-esteem ($F = 1.136$, sig (F) = 0.325).

Graph 7.



Discussion

In the present study, an attempt was made to measure self-esteem in a population of social work students during their first internship in their 3rd year of study. The results and analysis showed high levels of overall self-esteem. According to Palermi et al, (2017) many times this is due to the close interpersonal supportive relationships the individual maintains and the positive messages they receive about themselves from them. Also, these relationships have the ability to help the individual to feel more effective and confident about their choices preventing, in this way, the risks and difficulties with which the individual is faced. Significantly, within these high levels of overall self-esteem, the individual anticipates which skills are necessary to develop further to cope in different areas of their life, while at the same time through these choices they can find ways to further develop their self-esteem (Thomaes et al., 2017). According to the aforementioned research, high self-esteem also leads to high academic success (Van Laar, 2000; Maruyama et al., 2008). This is helped by the sense of control and consistency that the person has and that enhance their ability. The low overall self-esteem now, which in total, according to its various quotas, is around 25.09% of the sample, does not mean that individuals are cautious and conservative in their actions but that they adopt a different way of approaching things and success. In some cases, feelings of doubt, fear or insecurity can be created, and even in some extreme forms, the feeling of inferiority can prevail. It is noteworthy that a percentage of the sample, 14.58%, is at the level of narcissistic or defensive self-esteem. This can be interpreted on the one hand by the fact that these individuals are likely to act ostensibly by portraying a strong resilience profile for themselves, while in essence suffering from a feeling of low self-esteem, while on the other hand these percentages may be related to narcissistic personality traits. This type of self-esteem can be called false contradictory or defensive, and the individual presents as individual elements a false confidence and self-confidence (Papanis, 2004).

In the case of work self-esteem, it appears that student interns show fairly high levels of self-esteem. Friedlander et al. (2007) suggest that this may be a result of the resilience that students possess, which enhances their drive and behaviour to cope with the difficulties that arise during their internship. With these levels of work self-esteem, students do not hesitate to fight and assert their rights while actively participating in what happens at the internship institution. In the other case now students with moderate to low levels of job self-esteem are generally more cautious about the initiatives they will take in the internship context, while they are quite hesitant about how they will deal with problems and difficulties; they deal satisfactorily with difficulties and problems (Trzesniewski et al., 2006).

Levels of social self-esteem in general seem to be quite high, which outlines the fact that research subjects feel they have the interest and acceptance of others and a sense of sympathy, which promotes a sense of social acceptance (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). This feeling creates in people resilience and flexibility with others. In general, students with moderate to low levels of social self-esteem may exhibit characteristics such as difficulties in relationships with people, introversion, and difficulties in communicating with other people.

The answers of the research subjects to the questions concerning the family self-esteem seem to have quite high percentages, which means that they maintain quite strong relationships of support and understanding within their families. All this is a contributing factor to their needs and problems, so it can make trainee students more effective in the requirements arising from the internship, because it increases interpersonal value (Anthony et al., 2007). Low levels of family self-esteem are probably related to the fact that research subjects are more in need of acceptance and support in trying to substitute parental role through the search for different family values (Knafo & Schwartz, 2003).

Remarkably high rates in the case of self-esteem are of particular interest, as research subjects seem to capture the fact of strong self-belief, which can promote positive results (Vaughan-Johnston et al., 2020). In some cases, there seem to be narcissistic characteristics about this self-image as a protective means in the sense of an inner vulnerability, which is hidden by the strong image. With these high self-esteem rates of appearance, research subjects seem to feel more attractive and are thought to make a good impression on others (Bushman et al., 2009). In the opposite case as far as trainee students who have low scores on the self-esteem sub-scale of external appearance as concerned, it turns out that there is potential internal insecurity for their image, focusing more on the negative sides with a sense of straightforwardness (Vazire & Funder, 2006).

Intrapersonal self-esteem also seems to maintain high rates in the student population, rates that translate, according to Leary & Baumeister (2000), into acceptance and respect of self, assumption of personal responsibility and delineation of personal needs. Reduced rates are related to the fact that trainee students may feel lonely, fail, not trust themselves, not positively assess their abilities and avoid taking on responsibilities and setting new goals.

Social work students in this study seem to have fairly high self-esteem rates, which promotes commitment to what they do and in this case we are talking about internships. Given these high self-esteem rates, it seems that trainee students can be more effective with enhanced interest and optimism in dealing with unprecedented situations and take social action, focusing more on their strengths than their weaknesses.

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