

Student Gender Differences, Self-Esteem, and Anxiety in a Private High School in Minahasa Utara

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study explored students' gender difference, self-esteem, and anxiety. Using a questionnaire adapted from Rosenberg's Self-Esteem and Generalized Anxiety Disorder, the researcher gathered data from 130 students in a private high school in Minahasa Utara, Provinsi Sulawesi Utara. With statistical analysis, this study found no significant relationship between gender and self-esteem or anxiety among high school students, suggesting similar levels across genders. These findings contrast with earlier research indicating that males typically have higher self-esteem and females are more prone to anxiety due to social pressures during adolescence. However, the study did reveal a significant negative correlation between self-esteem and anxiety, indicating that lower self-esteem predicts higher anxiety levels regardless of gender. Given these findings, future research should explore additional factors influencing anxiety, such as cultural norms, family background, and psychological aspects. For educators, creating a supportive school environment that fosters self-esteem and addresses anxiety is crucial for enhancing students' overall well-being.

Keywords: Self-Esteem, Anxiety, Gender

INTRODUCTION

High school years are a pivotal time for adolescents, marked by significant psychological, emotional, and social changes. Students face various challenges, including academic pressures, social dynamics, and identity exploration. Issues like self-esteem and anxiety are particularly common and can impact their well-being and academic success. Self-esteem, the way individuals evaluate their worth, is crucial for emotional health and coping mechanisms. It varies among people, influenced by factors like gender, social interactions, and external feedback (Harter, 2012). Anxiety, a feeling of worry or unease about an event or outcome, is common among high school students (Essau, et al., 2014). Low self-esteem often links to higher anxiety levels (Sowislo & Orth, 2013).

Gender plays a significant role in influencing both self-esteem and anxiety. Societal expectations and gender norms can affect how male and female students view themselves and cope with stress, leading to different experiences of self-esteem and anxiety. Studies show that while both genders face these psychological challenges, the nature and intensity of their experiences can vary, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of how gender impacts the relationship between self-esteem and anxiety (McLean & Anderson, 2009).

The relationships between gender, self-esteem, and anxiety have been extensively studied in psychological research, yet significant gaps persist, especially within the adolescent high school population. While much research has examined self-esteem and anxiety independently or in relation to gender, the complex interplay between these variables during adolescence, particularly in the context of the digital age, has not been fully explored (Orth, et al., 2018). The rise of social media has changed how teenagers interact, with constant exposure to curated images and social comparisons potentially worsening self-esteem issues and anxiety, especially among female students (Suldo, et al., 2011). While research on social media's impact on mental health is expanding, more work is needed to understand how these influences interact with gender, self-esteem, and anxiety in high school students (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

Many studies on gender differences in self-esteem and anxiety have focused on Western, industrialized countries, potentially overlooking the experiences of adolescents in diverse cultural settings (Twenge & Campbell, 2017). This can lead to broad generalizations and misunderstandings about how male and female students experience self-esteem and anxiety. Understanding local cultural and societal norms is essential for accurately interpreting these psychological constructs and for developing culturally relevant and effective interventions.

This study explores how gender, self-esteem, and anxiety intersect, especially in the context of social media and local cultural influences. By focusing on high school students, the research highlights a critical stage of development where boosting self-esteem and reducing anxiety can have lasting positive effects. Additionally, it adds to our understanding of how these factors interact in the digital age, emphasizing the importance of considering local contexts in shaping adolescent well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The adolescent years are a critical time for psychological and emotional development. High school students often face social, academic, and personal challenges that impact their mental health. Two key issues are anxiety and self-esteem. Anxiety is common, characterized by excessive worry and fear (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Self-esteem refers to an individual's subjective sense of personal worth (Orth, et al., 2018). Understanding how these constructs interact and are influenced by gender is essential for developing effective interventions to support adolescent well-being (Twenge & Campbell, 2017).

Gender Differences in Anxiety and Self-Esteem

Research shows that high school students experience significant gender differences in anxiety and self-esteem. Female students often face higher anxiety levels than their male peers. Studies, such as those by Priyo, Karim, and Hossain (2024), have found that adolescent girls report higher anxiety levels, especially in later high school years. Similar findings were reported by Essau, et al., (2014). This disparity can be attributed to factors like societal expectations and cognitive styles (Sowislo & Orth, 2013).

Male students generally have higher self-esteem than female students, a pattern observed across cultures and age groups (Bleidorn et al., 2016). Casale, et al., (2020) found that males tend to have higher self-esteem compared to females. The reasons for these differences are complex. Societal norms often value male success and assertiveness, boosting

boys' self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2017). In contrast, girls may face pressure to conform to appearance-based standards, which can lower their self-esteem (Gentile et al., 2009; Davison & McCabe, 2006).

Studies conducted in Indonesia also reflect these gender differences in anxiety. For example, Hendrianto and Istriana (2024) explored the relationship between gender and anxiety in Indonesian high school students, finding that female students reported higher levels of anxiety, particularly in relation to academic pressures and social interactions. Similarly, Maharani (2024) found that female students exhibited higher anxiety levels than males, with social anxiety being a significant factor among female adolescents in Jakarta. Maharani (2024) found that male students in Jakarta exhibited higher self-esteem levels compared to their female peers, which was attributed to the cultural expectations of gender roles in Indonesian society. Additionally, a study by Dewi et al. (2018) highlighted that male high school students in Bali had significantly higher self-esteem than females, particularly in areas related to academic performance and leadership roles.

Relationship Between Anxiety and Self-Esteem

The relationship between anxiety and self-esteem is bidirectional: high anxiety can lead to low self-esteem, and low self-esteem can increase anxiety. This interplay is particularly evident during adolescence, a time of identity and self-worth development (Orth, et al., 2018). Studies have shown a significant negative correlation between anxiety and self-esteem among adolescents, with high anxiety linked to lower self-esteem (Sowislo & Orth, 2013).

Indonesian studies also support this relationship. Maharani (2024) found a negative correlation between anxiety and self-esteem in Indonesian high school students, with higher anxiety associated with lower self-esteem, particularly among female students. Utami, et al., (2022) discovered that Indonesian students with low self-esteem were more likely to experience social anxiety, emphasizing the importance of self-esteem in managing anxiety levels.

Influence of Gender on the Anxiety-Self-Esteem Relationship

Gender plays a critical role in moderating the relationship between anxiety and self-esteem. Research suggests that the negative impact of anxiety on self-esteem may be more pronounced for girls than for boys (Hyde, et al., 2008). This could be due to the fact that girls are generally more socially oriented and place a higher value on interpersonal relationships. As a result, anxiety about social acceptance and peer relationships may have a more substantial effect on their self-esteem (Van Tuijl et al., 2014).

Moreover, societal expectations and gender norms can exacerbate these differences. Girls are often socialized to be more self-critical and sensitive to others' opinions (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001), which can lead to heightened anxiety and lower self-esteem. Boys, on the other hand, may be encouraged to be more assertive and independent, traits associated with higher self-esteem and lower anxiety (Kling et al., 1999). These socialization patterns contribute to the distinct ways boys and girls experience anxiety and self-esteem.

Indonesian cultural norms also influence the anxiety-self-esteem relationship. Maharani (2024) discusses how Indonesian girls are often expected to adhere to traditional gender roles that emphasize modesty and subservience, which can negatively impact their self-

esteem and exacerbate anxiety. In contrast, boys are encouraged to be assertive and ambitious, which can bolster self-esteem and reduce anxiety. These findings underscore the importance of considering cultural context when examining the relationship between gender, anxiety, and self-esteem.

Synthesis

Understanding the relationship between gender, anxiety, and self-esteem is crucial for supporting high school students' mental health. Interventions should be tailored to address the unique needs of both boys and girls. For girls, programs promoting self-acceptance, resilience, and positive self-talk can help counteract societal pressures and boost self-esteem (Cribb, Moulds, & Carter, 2006). For boys, interventions focusing on emotional expression and coping strategies can reduce anxiety levels (Kerr & Schneider, 2008).

Schools in Indonesia can play a vital role by creating a supportive environment that fosters positive self-esteem and reduces anxiety. Educators should be trained to recognize anxiety and low self-esteem in students and provide appropriate support and resources (Suldo, et al., 2011). Peer support programs, counseling services, and workshops on stress management and self-esteem building can effectively promote mental health among high school students.

The relationship between gender, anxiety, and self-esteem is complex, influenced by societal norms, cognitive styles, and individual differences. While female students often experience higher anxiety and lower self-esteem, it's essential to address the specific needs of both genders. By understanding these dynamics, educators, parents, and mental health professionals can develop effective strategies to support adolescents' psychological well-being, fostering a generation of confident and resilient individuals (Orth, et al., 2018).

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design to explore the relationship between gender, self-esteem, and anxiety among high school students. The primary data collection method involved the use of structured questionnaires, which were administered to a representative sample of students in a selected private high school in Minahasa Utara.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The target population for this study comprises private high school students enrolled in the second semester of the 2022/2023 academic year. Using a purposive sampling method, 130 10th grade students were selected as they are considered more representative of the high school population in terms of both grade level and gender distribution. These respondents consist of 34 students from 10th grade A (17 female and 17 male), 32 students from 10th grade B (16 female and 16 male), 32 students from 10th grade C (17 female and 15 male), and 32 students from 10th grade D (18 female and 14 male).

Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a self-administered questionnaire consisting of three sections: Demographic Information: Self-Esteem Measurement, and Anxiety Measurement: Demographic information collected basic demographic data, including gender and grade level. Self-esteem measurement used the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem

Scale (RSES), a widely validated 10-item scale that assesses global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.”

Anxiety Measurement used the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale (GAD-7), which is also validated and widely used in psychological research (Spitzer, et al., 2006). Participants will rate the frequency of anxiety symptoms experienced over the past two weeks on a 5-point scale ranging from “Not at all” to “Nearly every day.”

Data collection took place in the participants’ school during a scheduled class period. After obtaining consent from the school administration, participants were briefed about the study’s purpose and procedures. They were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

The questionnaire was distributed to students in a classroom setting, and they were given 15-20 minutes to complete it on voluntary basis. The researcher and/or a trained research assistant was present to address any questions and ensure that the questionnaires were completed independently.

Data Analysis

After the questionnaires were collected, the responses were coded and entered into a statistical software package for analysis. Descriptive statistics (mean scores) were calculated to summarize the levels of self-esteem and anxiety among the participants. Pimentel (2019) suggested that based on the 5-point Likert scale, the calculated mean score is interpreted as follows: a score range of 1.00-1.79 is interpreted as very low; 1.80-2.59 as low; 2.60-3.39 as moderate; 3.40-4.19 as high; and 4.20-5.00 as very high.

To analyze differences in self-esteem and anxiety levels between male and female students, inferential statistical analyses were conducted. One-way ANOVA was used to compare the groups, while Bivariate Pearson correlation analysis determined the significant influences on the dependent variable. The significance value (p) was set at 0.05, and if $p < 0.05$, the relationship was considered significant (Pallant, 2020). If significant, the correlation coefficient (r) was examined to determine the direction of the correlation (positive or negative). Linear regression analysis further assessed the extent of influence of each independent variable on the dependent variable, using Standardized Coefficient Beta (β) and the coefficient of determination (R^2) (Garson, 2014; Pallant, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tests for Correlation and Regression Analysis

The prerequisites for conducting correlation and regression analysis in this study include the following assumptions: the research data are normally distributed and there is a linear correlation between the dependent and independent variables (Pallant, 2020).

To test the normality of the data distribution, the Liliefors and Kolmogorov-Smirnov methods were used. If the significance value (p) is greater than the significance level of 0.05, the variable is considered to be normally distributed (Priyatno, 2010). The output results indicate that the data from the two tested variables are normally distributed, as all significance

values (p) are greater than 0.05. Therefore, the prerequisite for regression analysis has been met.

To test the linearity between the independent variable (Self-esteem) and the dependent variable (Anxiety), a test for linearity was conducted by analyzing the comparison of the mean values of the independent variable with the dependent variable. The output results show that Self-esteem variable and Anxiety variable have significance values (p) less than the significance level of 0.05. Thus, the independent variable Self-esteem has a linear relationship with the dependent variable, Anxiety (Priyatno, 2010).

Relationship Between Gender and Self-Esteem

To investigate the relationship between gender and self-esteem, descriptive statistics were first used to calculate the mean scores. A one-way ANOVA then assessed the significance of the relationship. The mean self-esteem scores for female respondents ($M = 2.96$) and male respondents ($M = 2.74$) both indicate moderate levels of self-esteem, with females having a slightly higher score. However, a one-way ANOVA revealed that the difference is not statistically significant ($p = .21$), which means that both female and male students are considered to have approximately the same level of anxiety.

Relationship Between Gender and Anxiety

To understand the connection between gender and anxiety, we first looked at the mean anxiety levels using descriptive statistics. Then, a one-way ANOVA was done to see if the differences were significant. The results showed that both female ($M = 3.12$) and male ($M = 3.34$) respondents had moderate anxiety levels, with females having a slightly higher score. A one-way ANOVA was used to check if the difference was statistically significant. The data in Table 2 revealed that the p -value (0.09) was greater than 0.05, indicating that the result was not statistically significant. This means that both female and male students were considered to have similar levels of self-esteem.

Relationship Between Self-esteem and Anxiety

To examine the correlation between the independent variable (Self-esteem) and the dependent variable (Anxiety), a bivariate correlation analysis was conducted. The results indicate that the independent variable is significantly correlated with the dependent variable. This is evidenced by the p -value being below the significance level of 0.05, and even below 0.001. These results suggest a statistically significant relationship between self-esteem and anxiety. The analysis of the correlation coefficient ($r = -.45$) shows that this r value is negative, indicating that a higher score on the independent variable is associated with a lower score on the dependent variable. In other words, the students' self-esteem negatively affects their anxiety: the higher their level of self-esteem, the lower their anxiety.

Additionally, the correlation coefficient value falls between 0.30 and 0.50. This indicates that the strength of the relationship is categorized as moderate according to Cohen (1988) and Mukaka (2012). Although, in Cohen's revised categories by Hemphill, a correlation strength is considered strong or large when the correlation coefficient (r) is greater than 0.30 (as cited in Gignac & Szodorai, 2016).

Relationship Between Gender, Self-esteem, and Anxiety

Finally, a linear regression analysis was conducted to assess the impact of both self-esteem and gender on anxiety levels among the participants. This analysis allows us to explore how variations in self-esteem and gender contribute to changes in anxiety, providing insight into the relative influence of these factors. Examining the regression coefficients, namely standardized coefficient β , will show the direction and strength of the relationship between each independent variable (self-esteem and gender) and the dependent variable (anxiety). The findings from this analysis help to clarify whether higher self-esteem is associated with lower anxiety, and whether gender plays a significant role in moderating this relationship.

The outputs shown in Tables 1 reveal that the significance values is greater than significance level of 0.05 or even 0.001. This result suggests that there is a significant influence of the independent variables on dependent variables.

Table 1
ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.730	2	3.365	22.104	.000 ^b
	Residual	19.335	127	.152		
	Total	26.065	129			

a. Dependent Variable: Anxiety

b. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Self-esteem

Further analysis of significance value of each independent variable shows that only Self-esteem ($p = 0.00$) has significant relationship with Anxiety. Since the value of standardized β is negative (See Table 2), it suggests that the direction of relationship negative, implying that a higher score in Self-esteem is associated with lower score in Anxiety.

Table 2
Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardize	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	d Coefficients		
(Constant)	3.813	.181	Beta	21.108	.000
Self-esteem	-.368	.060	-.470	-6.103	.000
Gender	-.134	.073	-.142	-1.846	.067

a. Dependent Variable: Anxiety

Table 3 shows that coefficient of determination (R^2) value is 0.258, suggesting approximately 25.8% of the variance in the dependent variable, which is anxiety, can be

explained by the independent variables included in the model, namely gender and self-esteem. An R square of 0.258 suggests that while the model does account for a significant portion of the variation in anxiety, the majority of the variation (74.2%) is explained by other factors not included in this model. This could imply that while gender and self-esteem are important predictors, there are other variables that also significantly influence anxiety levels.

Table 3
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.508 ^a	.258	.247	.39018

a. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Self-esteem

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between gender, anxiety, and self-esteem. The statistical analysis shows that there is no significant relationship between gender and self-esteem, implying that both female and male students are considered to have approximately the same level of self-esteem. This finding is not in line with that of Yulianti (2018) who found that female had lower self-esteem because of cultural norm that encourages modesty and self-criticism. Additionally, Rahmawati, et al. (2016) and Kling, et al. (1999) found that male students experienced higher self-esteem than females due to social process during adolescence.

In terms of anxiety and gender, this study found that female and male participants showed no difference in their anxiety. This finding is not in line with those of Utami, et al., (2022), Esau et al (2008), and Mclean and Anderson (2009) who found that females were more likely to experience more anxiety than males due to social pressure during adolescence which is marked by emotional changes.

This study revealed that self-esteem significantly and negatively was associated with anxiety among high school students. Lower self-esteem predicted more anxiety in spite of gender differences. The Indonesian studies of Utami, et al., (2022), Wahyuni and Dewi (2021), Yulianti (2018), and Handayani and Setiawan (2017) also found that higher self-esteem predicted lower anxiety. However, their findings showed that gender was also a significant predictor of anxiety, wherein low self-esteem led to increased anxiety among female participants.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

The findings of this study indicate that there is no significant relationship between gender and self-esteem among high school students, suggesting that both female and male students possess similar levels of self-esteem. This result contrasts with previous research, which reported gender differences in self-esteem, often with males exhibiting higher self-esteem due to social processes during adolescence. Additionally, this study found no significant difference in anxiety levels between female and male participants, which also diverges from

earlier research that suggested females are more prone to anxiety due to social pressures and emotional changes during adolescence.

However, the study revealed a significant negative association between self-esteem and anxiety, indicating that lower self-esteem is predictive of higher anxiety levels among high school students, regardless of gender. This finding aligns with other research, which also observed that higher self-esteem is linked to lower anxiety. However, these studies additionally identified gender as a significant predictor of anxiety, with low self-esteem contributing to increased anxiety particularly among female students.

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. Primarily, the research was conducted with a relatively small sample size, involving participants from only one private high school. This limited scope reduces the diversity of the sample, making it difficult to generalize the findings to a broader population of high school students. Additionally, the study focused solely on three variables—gender, anxiety, and self-esteem—without considering other potentially influential factors such as socio-economic status, academic performance, or family dynamics, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand. The unique characteristics of the private school, such as its specific educational environment, resources, and student demographics, may also influence the levels of anxiety and self-esteem observed, potentially limiting the applicability of the findings to other educational settings. As a result, the findings should be interpreted with caution, and future research should aim to include larger, more diverse samples across various school types and regions, as well as a broader range of variables, to enhance the generalizability of the results.

For educators and administrators, particularly in private high schools, it is important to create an environment that promotes self-esteem while providing support for students dealing with anxiety. Implementing programs that foster positive self-image and emotional well-being, alongside cultivating an inclusive and supportive school culture, could help mitigate anxiety and improve the overall mental health and well-being of students.

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