



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE SELF CONCEPT AND LEVEL OF ASPIRATION OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN ERNAKULAM DISTRICT OF KERALA, INDIA

\*Dhanya, N. and Rekha, R.K.

Department of Home Science, St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam, Kerala

ARTICLE INFO

**Article History:**

Received 16<sup>th</sup> September, 2011  
Received in revised form  
29<sup>th</sup> October, 2011  
Accepted 09<sup>th</sup> November, 2011  
Published online 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2011

**Key words:**

Self concept,  
Level of aspiration,  
Adolescents,  
Ernakulam, personality.

ABSTRACT

Early adolescence is a period that is characterized by heightened self consciousness and increased social comparison that compels early adolescents to evaluate their self-identity. Often adolescents set for themselves unattainable goals and this could transform this period into a roller coaster experience. Help from significant others in their lives could assist adolescents to distinguish between their ideal and their real selves. Most theorists believe the quality of parent child relations is closely linked to difference in self-descriptive and self-evaluative behaviour among children and youth. Socio-cultural and parental factors seem to be of paramount importance in determining perceptions of the self in children in the Indian context. Adolescents coming from the families where they were accepted by parents thought of themselves in more favourable terms as compared to the adolescents coming from the families where they were rejected. This study thus was an attempt to compare the Self –concept, Educational and occupational aspirations, general expectation and general performance of adolescents from the community living with their families and those in the orphanages.

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INTRODUCTION

Self-concept is the accumulation of knowledge about the self, such as beliefs regarding personality traits, physical characteristics, abilities, values, goals, and roles. Beginning in infancy, children acquire and organize information about them as a way to enable them to understand the relation between the self and their social world. This developmental process is a direct consequence of children's emerging cognitive skills and their social relationships with both family and peers. During early childhood, children's self-concepts are less differentiated and are centered on concrete characteristics, such as physical attributes, possessions and skills. During middle childhood, the self concept becomes more integrated and differentiated as the child engages in social comparison and more clearly perceives the self as consisting of internal, psychological characteristics. Throughout later childhood and adolescence, the self-concept becomes more abstract, complex and hierarchically organized into cognitive mental representations or self-schemas, which direct the processing of self-relevant information (Burn, 1992). Every culture provides vast opportunities for its members to be and to achieve what they want. Every society places lot of importance on life goals and achievement. Aspirations are recognized as the 'gateway' to fulfill life goals. It is believed that aspirations motivate an individual and energizes him for action. So formation of aspirations becomes an important area of achievement of life goals. Aspiration means a longing for what is above one with advancement as its goal (Hurlock, 2005). It emphasizes the desire to improve or rise above one's present status.

By the time the individual reaches his adolescent years his aspirations are beginning to take form. The way in which he forms his aspirations affects his behaviour and has a profound influence on his personality. If he is unable to revise his aspirations without conceding defeat, the effect on his self-concept can be devastating. Not all inspirations are of equal strength, nor it is possible to predict which of a person's aspiration will be strong and which will be weak. Positive aspirations that centre on the hope of achieving success are usually stronger than negative aspirations, based on the desire to avoid failure. Likewise aspirations for goals that are difficult to achieve are stronger than those for goals that are less difficult (Hurlock, 2005). The discrepancy between the goals a person has already reached and the goal he hopes to reach is the person's 'level of aspiration'. When the gap between the person's achievements and his hope for goal is large, his self-concept will be severely damaged. Thus the aspiration would act as a source of motivation and lead to achievements of which the person and those who are significant to him could be proud. (Marsh, 1993) points out that a child of class XII at the verge of stepping out of the school where he has to choose his own direction should be aware of his capabilities and his aspirations, so that he will not be disappointed in life. Their thinking about their self, beliefs and aspirations determine the success and failures. It was found that adolescent's academic achievement is influenced by behaviours directed to them by their parents (Singh et al., 1991), so that it has been established that parental involvement is important to adolescent's aspirations. The importance of home in the development of an individual is very significant. When both parents are alive and they provide a good environment for the child, the personality of the child grows

well. Healthy home cast healthy impact on the growing body, mind and heart of the child. The attitude of parents towards the children affects their behaviour towards other. Loving parents produce loving children, where as hostile parents produce hostile children. There is a positive relationship between rejection by parents and lack of internal control and aggression in children. Families are believed to be the first, the closest and most influential social group in the child's life. They provide children with the definition of right and wrongs, the patterns of behaviour, the expectation and the evaluation of actions on which children base their own ideas (Hassan, 1996). Aspirations are greatly influenced by personal characteristics such as foresight, frustration, tolerance and ability to delay gratification of wishes, self-esteem, ambition and temperament. The family as a major socialization institution has been generally considered an important social component for the development of children and adolescents (Osborne and LeGette, 1982). It is regarded as a social environment where one's sense of self is formed through the kinds of intimate and intensive interactions that occur among family members. There are over 5, 68,000 children and adolescents being cared for by the government through the orphanage on the daily basis. Institutionalized children are considered as highly deprived class of society. These children are left helpless, abandoned, neglected due to social economic and personal reasons by the parents or caregivers and they are deprived of one or more necessities of life. Early separation from parents, deprivation of parental care, love, affection, warmth, security, acceptance and discipline during childhood disrupts their normal socio-emotional development. These children and adolescents are often removed from home environments that include drug or alcohol abuse, domestic violence, physical abuse or neglect. These factors put them at risk for problematic behaviour and poor adjustments not only in childhood but also in adulthood. Additional experiences related to orphanages further compound the risk of these children. It is well documented by researchers that adolescents in institutional care display more behavioural, academic, and mental health problems than the general population of adolescents (Browne, 1998). In the general population behavioural, academic and mental health problems of adolescents are correlated with low self-concept (Zimmerman, 1998). The self-concept is also correlated with level of aspiration. Comparative information on self-concept and aspiration aspects relating to adolescent girls living with parents and adolescent girls in orphanage is lacking. No information is currently available on the correlation between expectations and performance of adolescent girls. The objectives of the study were to measure the following aspects with regard to adolescent girls

- Self-concept
- Educational aspirations
- Occupational aspirations
- General expectation
- General performance

Compare adolescent girls living with family and adolescent girls living in orphanage with regard to

- Self -concept
- Educational and occupational aspirations
- General expectation
- General performance

Study the relationship between the expectation and performance of adolescent girls

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The area selected for the present study was Kochi city. Kochi city is a highly cosmopolitan city and it consists of people belong a different socio- economic and religious status and also those who are of different educational backgrounds. Several orphanages have been established in Kochi to care for the orphan children and provide them education. Statistics reveal that there were 11 orphanages in Ernakulam district. The sample chosen for the present study consisted of 60 adolescent girls who were in the age range of 13-15 years out of which 30 adolescent girls were from the schools in Kochi coming from their homes and 30 adolescent girls from the orphanages. Two educational institutions in Ernakulam were selected by the investigator namely; St. Teresa's Higher Secondary school and St. Antony's Higher Secondary school. From each of the two schools 3 classes (8-10th std) were selected at random. From each class five students were selected. Totally 30 adolescent girls were selected from school. The investigator selected two orphanages namely St.Teresa's Orphanage for girls and St.Antony's Orphanage for girls. From each of the two orphanages 15 adolescent girls who were in the age group of 13-15 years were randomly selected. A total of 30 adolescent girls were selected from the two orphanages.

A self-designed questionnaire was the first tool selected for collecting the general information of the sample. The questionnaire consisted of 31 questions, which furnished details on age, gender, educational level, and also questions regarding the subjects experience in the home or orphanages. The questions regarding the educational and occupational choice etc were included. The investigator used the Self-concept Scale developed by Rastogi (1987) to measure the self-concept of adolescent girls. The self-concept scale contained 51 items related to 10 constructs namely health and vigour, abilities, self confidence, self acceptance, worthiness, present past and future, beliefs and convictions, feeling of shame and guilt, sociability, emotional maturity. Tool used to measure the general expectation and general performance of adolescent girls was the Level of Aspiration Test based on coding method by Bhargava (1975). There were two typical sequences of events in a level of aspiration situation (a) Expected score (b) Performance score. The test consists of code in English alphabets. The subjects from the schools and the orphanages were asked to fill up the inventory in the presence of the investigator. Sufficient time was given to fill up the inventory. The inventory was collected back after checking whether all the items in the inventory were answered. The Level of Aspiration scales were distributed. The necessary instructions for filling up the scale were given by the investigator. The investigator told them about the total possible score and asked them to expect a score and also asked them to write the expected score on the top of the sheet and then start to fill the sheet according to the codes. The time limit of 3 minutes was given for filling the sheet. After that the sheets were collected back. The expected score and performance score were calculated from that filled sheet. The data collected using self-designed questionnaire was tabulated, consolidated and analyzed using percentage analysis. Self-

concept Scale and Level of Aspiration Test were analyzed using scores. One sample 't' test was used to assess the difference between self-concept of adolescent girls living with family and girls in orphanage. One sample 't' test was also used to assess the difference between the general expectation of the girls from both category and also find out the difference between the general performance of adolescent girls from both category. Correlation coefficient was used to find out the relationship between expectation and performance of adolescent girls.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Self-concept of Adolescent girls

An effort was made to compare the self-concept of adolescent girls living with family and the adolescent girls living in orphanage. Ten different concepts under the self-concept were analyzed. The results are given in the following table. The results presented indicate that there is a significant difference between the self-concept of adolescent girls living with family and adolescent girls living in orphanage with regard to the scores of health and sex appropriateness, self-confidence, present, past and future and sociability. The differences are significant at 0.01 levels. The mean scores obtained by the girls living with family shows that they had high self-concept than adolescent girls from orphanage. Based on the above findings the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference between the self-concept of adolescent girls living with family and adolescent girls living in orphanage is rejected. The surrounding in which one lives affects the self-concept. If the child was brought up in a poor environment without giving proper attention to make him excel in his fields or deprived of doing good activities, development of a the low self-esteem at the adolescent stage is possible.

In the case of adolescent girls from orphanage, they were weightless, had less girth and were shorter than adolescents who are not raised in orphanages. This is in part due to many aspects like early environment, such as poor nutrition, lack of sufficient exercise and shoddy medical care. Another possible cause is psychosocial dwarfism, means that children who were exposed to severe social and emotional neglect become susceptible to when growing up in orphanages. May be this is the reason for the low score of adolescent girls living in orphanage for health and sex appropriateness. A good parent child relationship is essential for building self-confidence in adolescents. Parents who seek assistance from tools like self-confidence by hypnosis and give their proper guidance can be assured that their teens can survive difficult period and someday may into well-balanced adults. Orphan girls they grow up in poor environment where they receive little attention and are deprived of activities they can feel low. It is reflected in their scores of self-confidence. The adolescent girls from orphanage had fear about future. During the late period of adolescence, the children will seriously think about their future. In many cases they will get depressed of their future. Unemployment, insecurity, lack of financial background and many factors make the adolescent girls afraid of facing the world. So the adolescent girls from the orphanage scored less for the concept of past, present, future than the adolescent girls living with family. The parent child

relationship marked by behaviour supportive of the youth and by positive feelings connecting the generations is associated with psychologically and socially healthy developmental outcomes for the adolescents. The family is an important socialization agent for children. So the adolescent girls living with family scored high for the concept of sociability than the adolescent girls living in orphanage. The data also reveals that there is no significant difference between the concept of adolescent girls living with family and the adolescent girls living in the orphanage with regard to the scores of abilities, self acceptance, worthiness, beliefs and convictions, feeling of shame and guilt and emotional maturity. It reveals that the orphan girl's self concept was not too low. They had average self-concept.

### Academic Achievement of Adolescent girls

The following table presents the difference between academic achievements of the adolescents girls living with family and adolescent girls living in the orphanage. It is evident from the above table that more than half of the adolescent girls living with family (55%) achieved 'A' grade in their exam as compared to thirty percent of their orphan counterparts. Forty three percent of adolescent girls living in the orphanage achieved grades between B-C in their exam but only twenty percent of adolescent girls living with family achieved below 'c' grade. The data reveals that the adolescent girls living with family achieved higher than the adolescent girls living in the orphanage. This means that learner with a higher self-concept performed well in academic tasks than a learner whose self-concept is low. This result goes in line with findings of Jordan (1981) who reported that academic achievement is a socially desirable goal in all student lives so that individuals with good global self-concepts will perform successfully in academic areas. Research in Kenya has suggested that there is a strong relationship between academic achievement and self-concept (Mwaniki, 2000). The table also reveals that the majority adolescent girls living with family (83%) got prize in extra curricular activities as compared to 50 percent of their counterparts. The achievement of the subjects goes in accordance with statement given by Sharma (1980) who states that attribution of success and failure in school has multiple antecedents and it also influenced by the self-concept.

### Educational Aspiration of Adolescent Girls

The educational aspiration of adolescent girls living with family and adolescent girls living in the orphanage. The results are given in the table below. The results furnished in the above table indicates that nearly two third of the adolescent girls living with family (63%) aspired to study up to graduation. One third of them (30%) aspired to study up to post graduation level. But only small percentage of adolescent girls living in the orphanage (13%) wanted to study up to graduation and the same percentage of them aspired to study up to post graduation level. The data also shows that nearly one third of the adolescent girls living in the orphanage aspired to study only up to twelvth standard. Twenty four percent of adolescent girls living in the orphanage wanted to study only upto tenth standard. It is alarming to note that one fourth of the adolescent girls living in orphanage did not give any response to these aspects. In the case of adolescent girls living with family negligible percentage (7%) wanted to study upto only twelvth standard. The above data revealed that

**Table 1. Self-concept of Adolescent girls**

Concept	Mean score		S.D.		't' value	Level of significance
	Living with family	Living in orphanage	Living with family	Living in orphanage		
Health and sex appropriateness	20.3	18.4	2.19	1.6	3.95	*
Self confidence	18.3	16.4	3.31	2.5	2.5	*
Present, past and future	17.6	16	2.4	2.6	2.6	*
Sociability	13	10.8	2.9	2.9	2.9	*
Abilities	26.5	25.4	5.31	3.57	0.9	NS
Self acceptance	13.8	13.4	3	2.5	0.57	NS
Worthiness	23.2	23.4	3.8	3.33	0.12	NS
Beliefs and convictions	11.3	11.6	1.8	1	0.7	NS
Feeling of shame and guilt	14	12.4	5.13	4.2	1.4	NS
Emotional maturity	12.1	10.9	3.36	4.23	1.2	NS

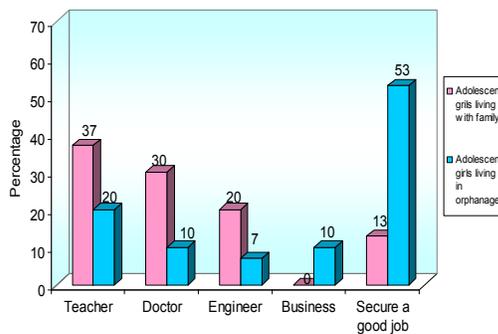
\* Significant at 0.01 % level; NS- not significant

**Table 2. Academic achievement of Adolescent girls**

Aspects	Adolescent Girls	
	Living with family (n=30) %	Living in orphanage (n=30) %
Grade achieved in exam		
'A' grade	55	30
'B' grade	25	43
Below 'C' grade	20	27
Won prizes in extra curricular activities	83	50

**Table 3. Educational aspiration of the adolescent girls**

Aspects	Adolescent Girls	
	Living with family (n=30) %	Living in orphanage (n=30) %
Wish to study up to		
Class X	0	24
Class XII	7	30
Graduation	63	13
Post graduation	30	13
No response	0	20

**Fig. 1. Occupational aspirations of adolescent girls**

adolescent girls living with family had high aspiration towards education than the other category. Family factors have influence on the choice of higher education. This includes the family as resource provider, family members as role models and family as a source of encouragement for higher education. Parent's education and parental expectations have emerged as major factors in the college decision-making process. In the case of orphan girls, low income and inability to arrange finance emerged as inhibiting factors for higher education. One of the finding of this study, consistent with other past studies done by Wilson & Wilson (1992), and Hessler et al (1992) was that parental expectations and involvement have significant impact on student's aspirations. Mother's expectations were also found to be positively associated with

aspirations at each time point. The results go in line with the finding by Zima & Freeman (2000), who pointed out that in family where social relationship ties are strong, students are more likely to adopt their parent's value, norms and expectation and if parents from these families emphasize the importance of education, then their children are likely to have higher aspirations. These results directly support the findings of Hossler, et al (1999) that parental support seems to be the most important factor in the development of educational aspirations.

### Occupational Aspirations of Adolescent girls

The occupational aspirations of adolescent girls living with family and adolescent girls living in orphanages are given in figure 1. The data presented shows that being a teacher is the most preferred vocation of both the categories studied, as this has been indicated by one third of the adolescents living with family (37%) and one fifth of the orphan category (20%). Teaching has been considered basically as a women's job. Hurlock (2005) has pointed out that "girls show a preference for occupations with greater or security and less demand on their time and so they usually stress services to other such as teaching". Teaching offers good remuneration and has the added attraction of combining a less strenuous demanding job with the maximum number of holidays and plenty of leisure. Women find it natural to interact freely with the children and affectively contribute to the building up of moral ethical values in children. It may be because of these reasons that

**Table 4. General expectation of adolescent girls**

Category	Mean score	S. D	't' value	Level of significance
Adolescent girls living with family	74.3	15.14	2.73	0.01
Adolescent girls living in orphanage	65	11.02		

**Table 5. General performance of adolescent girls**

Category	Mean scores	S.D	't' value	Level of Significance
Adolescent girls living with family	67.34	10.5	2.84	0.01
Adolescent girls living in Orphanage	60.36	9.5		

**Table 6. Correlation between expectation and performance of adolescent girls**

Condition	Variable	Number	Method	Co-efficient of correlation
Adolescent girls living with family	Level of expectation and level of performance	30	Product moment correlation	0.75
Adolescent girls living in orphanage	Level of expectation and level of performance	30	Product moment correlation	0.3

adolescent girls cite the job of a teacher as one of the most highly preferred job. The data also shows that thirty percentages of the adolescent girls living with family aspired to become a doctor and one fifth (20%) of them aspired to become an engineer. But only small percentage (10%) of adolescent girls living in orphanage aspired to become a doctor and negligible percentage of them (7%) aspired to become an engineer. Many factors affect the vocational aspiration of adolescent girls. Sewal (1999) showed that occupational choices were related to socio economic status, academic attainment of parents, school and community attitudes and intelligence. Socio economic status had a direct effect on unequal aspirations and expectation. Compared adolescent girls living with family orphan individuals faced more obstacles that limited their career aspiration level. High cost of education was not affordable by that category. Many children from orphanages do not complete higher secondary education some times because of economic necessity and sometimes for other reasons such as lack of encouragement or lack of interest. Lack of proper guidance and supportive environment also affect the occupational aspiration of orphan adolescent girls. (<http://www.bluritt/aspiration/girls.com>). The previous result reveals that the adolescent girls living with family got much financial support from their family. They also got much support and encouragement from their family. So their occupational choice seemed to be better than the orphan girls. These results are in line with the finding of Tripathi, (1988), which pointed out, that higher socio economic status levels have a positive effect on adolescent aspirations, while lower socio economic status level reflect a perceived lack of parent support of adolescent occupational aspirations. The data also shows that more than half of the orphan adolescent girls (53%) and only 13 percent of adolescent girls living with family just aspired to secure a good job. This shows that person at the higher socio economic level tend to derive satisfaction from their work itself, while at lower socio economic level can commentates of work, such as economic rewards and financials security tend to be more highly valued. Among the adolescent girls living with family, reality played greater part in the first choice of an occupation and fantasy in the second choice. Adolescent girls living with the family are more specified in vocation than orphan girls.

#### General Expectation of Adolescent Girls

The difference between the general expectation among adolescent girls living with family and adolescent girls living

in orphanage are given in Table 4. The results presented in the table clearly indicate that there is a significant difference between adolescent girls living with family and their counterparts from the orphanage in their general expectation. The difference is significant at 0.01 percent level. The high mean score obtained by the girls living with family clearly showed that they had high expectations than girls living in orphanage. Based on the above finding the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference between the general expectation of adolescent girls living with family and the girls living in orphanage, is rejected. The above data reveals that the adolescent girls living with family expected more because they get parental support and sound financial support from their family. In the case adolescent girls living in orphanage they lacked the support and encouragement from the institution. They hailed from low socio economic level. Parents, peers, teachers and counselor have been noted as important to setting adolescent's expectation (Sewel and Shah, 1999). In the case of adolescent girls living with family they get support from parents, peers, teachers and counselors but their counter parts were devoid of the same. The results go in line with the findings the Mau & Bikos (2000) who have pointed out that there is a positive association between high school student's expectation and their family's socio economic status, which is frequently, related to parental education levels. This result also supports the study of Singh and Fatmi (1980), which indicated that a low socio economic status resulted in reduced and unrealized expectations. Additionally, socio economic status had a direct effect on unequal aspirations and expectations.

#### General Performance of Adolescent Girls

The difference between the general performance among adolescent girls living with family and adolescent girls living in orphanage are given in the following Table 5. The results presented in the above table indicated that there is a significant difference between adolescent girls living with family and adolescent girls living in orphanage in their general performance. The difference is significant at 0.01 percent level. The high mean score obtained by the girls living with family clearly showed that they performed better than girls living in orphanage. Based on the above finding the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference between the general performance of adolescent girls living with family and the orphan adolescent girls, is rejected. The above table reveals that the performance of adolescent girls

living with family was higher. Morgan (1995) stressed that the treatment a child receives has some relation to his traits and abilities. The physically strong is more likely to win the admiration of his playmates than the weak ones. The intelligent adolescent has greater opportunity of success and praise in school. Relations with family members and peers may therefore influence the adolescent personality trait and this can affect his or her performance. Table-2 (Self-concept of adolescent girls) revealed that the adolescent girls living with family had slightly higher self-concept than the adolescent girls living in orphanage which also influenced the performance. Evidence suggests that positive self-concept represent an ability factor that leads to higher levels of performance. Although some of these factors may represent motivational differences as much as ability differences between individuals with high and low self-concepts, all suggest a significant relation between positive self-concept and performance. (Baumeister, 1997). The results go in line with the finding by Reck (1980) who has reported that pupil with positive self-concept stand a better chance of performing better than pupil with negative self-concept.

#### **Correlation between Expectation and Performance of Adolescent Girls**

The relationship between the expectation and performance of the adolescent girls in both categories are given in Table 6. Table 6 illustrates the relationship between general expectation and performance of the adolescent girls from both categories. The co-efficient values for adolescent girls living with family ( $r=0.75$ ) and adolescent girls from orphanage ( $r=0.3$ ) indicate that there exists a significant relationship between the expectation and performance of the adolescent girls in both populations. There is a positive correlation between the expectation and performance of the adolescent girls. Based on the above findings the null hypothesis, which states that there is no relationship between the general expectation and performance of adolescent girls is rejected. The result also revealed that relation between the general expectation and performance of adolescent girls living with family is higher than the adolescent girls living in orphanage.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Adolescent girls living with family had a secure, warm, supportive environment where they had more care, advice and encouragement from their parents. On the other hand adolescent girls living in orphanage were not blessed with a good living environment, which in turn affected their self-concept, aspirations, general expectation and performance aspects.

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