A STUDY OF SELF ESTEEM AND DEFENSE MECHANISM OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

The present study was carried out to explore the relationship between self-esteem and defense mechanisms used by secondary school students. The aim of the study was to ascertain relationship between self-esteem and five categories of defense mechanisms i. e. turning against object (TAO), projection (PRO), turning against self (TAS), principalisation (PRN) and reversal (REV). The study also aimed at finding differences between the level of self -esteem and defense mechanisms of male and female students. The sample included 77 girls and 73 boys students of secondary level (Total 150) selected randomly from four schools of Amritsar district, Punjab, India. Defense mechanism Inventory by Dr. N. R. Mrinal and Dr. Uma Mrinal was used for data collection of defense mechanism, while Self-Esteem Scale developed by R.N Singh and Ankita Shrivastava was employed to assess the level of self-esteem of students. Data analysis revealed that there is no significant correlation between self-esteem and defense mechanism in female students and overall sample of secondary school students; however a significant correlation was obtained between these two variables in case of male secondary students in TAO, PRO and REV category of defenses. No significant difference in the scores of self-esteem and defense mechanism of male and female students was found.

Keywords: Self Esteem, Defense Mechanism.

1. Introduction

The term Ego defense mechanism finds its roots inpsychoanalytical theory of personality given by Freud. It is defined as the mental mechanisms undergoing in human mind that protects an individual from anxiety, which may arise from internal or external sources of stress and fears. Our mental health and self-esteem largely depends on level of anxiety and stress that we experience. These are unconscious processes; we are not really aware of their existence and functioning in our mind. They distort the reality and give it the form that we want to accept. This acceptable form gives us satisfaction and pleasure thereby maintaining our mental health and self-esteem.

According to the psychoanalytical theory of personality given by Freud (1923) human personality has three sub structures Id, Ego, and Super Ego. Id is the impulsive and childlike part of our mind, which works on the principle of pleasure. It does not understand the logics and rationale of social norms and want immediate gratification of each and every desire regardless of the probable consequences. Ego is that part of human mind which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world. Ego works on the principal of reality. It tries to pacify Id with its desires according to social norms and regulations. Super Ego is third part of human mind which works on higher morals and values acquired from elders. When our behavior falls short of this idealistic behavior, we feel ashamed and guilty, while on fulfillment of the standards of superego, feeling of proud is introduced. This guilt or fear is the basic cause of anxiety. Defense mechanisms operate in the region of ego hence termed as ego defense mechanisms, which tries to gratify the demands of Id but in a way which is acceptable to superego.

1.1 Researches on Defense Mechanisms

The first defense mechanism identified by Freud was 'repression' which he termed as "queen of defenses" after which denial, projection, displacement, and rationalization were identified. Anna Freud, the daughter of Freud further developed his theory. Anna Freud (1936) proposed first intensive study of defense mechanisms in her book "Ego and mechanisms of defense". She identified nine defense mechanisms that were repression, regression, isolation, undoing, reaction formation, projection, turning against the self, reversal and sublimation. Bibring (1950) found twenty four basic first order defenses and fifteen complex or second order defenses. Cameron (1963) reported fifteen defenses and Coleman (1964) described seventeen. Till now hundreds of defense mechanisms have been identified. Many psychologists have done work on the classification of defense mechanisms. George Valliant (1993) developed four different levels of defense mechanisms called pathological, immature, neurotic and mature. Glaser and Ihilevich (1969) grouped defense mechanisms into 5 categories: Turning against object (TAO), projection (PRO), principalization (PRN), turning against self (TAS) and reversal (REV).

Crammer and Brilliant (2001) found that usage of defense mechanism by children depends upon their understanding of defense mechanisms. More the understanding, lesser will be its usage. Gokdag (2015) found that male and females differ in use of various defense

mechanisms. Females use Repression', 'Denial' and 'Displacement' more while males used 'Projection' and 'Sublimation' more. Domino and et al. (2002) described that Defense mechanisms are related with creativity. Students with high creativity were found to be more anxious and they scored high on schizoid fantasy, acting out, dissociation, displacement, reaction formation, intellectualizations, humor, suppression, and sublimation and lower on projection, repression, altruism and passive aggressiveness. Weinstock (1967) found that family environment like father's passivity and rejection of subject gave rise to development of primitive defenses as denial and repression.

1.2 Self esteem

Self-esteem is the overall worth or value that an individual places on himself or herself. It represents self-concept and self-confidence in a summative way. How an individual rates or evaluate himself is explained by the term self-esteem. It is judgmental in nature and exposes our own attitude towards ourself.

History of this term can be traced back to second half of nineteenth century when William James (1892) became the first psychologist and philosopher to high lighten self-esteem as a distinct and specific psychological trait. Horney (1937) explained self-esteem as "an essential element for adequate personal functioning. It is one's favorable opinion about oneself". While Bee (1939) had a view that "during the process of self-description, the evaluative positive or negative statement about oneself is referred to as one's self-esteem; hence it may be positive or negative". Brissett (1972) describes self-esteem in terms of "psychological processes- self-evaluations about self-worth. It makes conscious judgment about social importance and significance along with a sense of personal competence and security."Morrison et al. (1973) view self-esteem as "personality variables expected to influence a person's evaluation of his work". It is something related to our personality and depends on our perception of the level of performance.

1.3 Researches on self esteem

Vaughan and et al. (2014) found aggression to be related significantly with explicit self - esteem, while at lower level of implicit self-esteem this relation did not hold true. Sanstrom and Jorden (2008) found that low level of aggression and high level of affiliative humor were found in subjects with stable high self-esteem. Zeigler.Hill,V. (2011) explored that low self-esteem increases the probability of psychopathology, another model concluded that low self-

esteem is a consequences of psychopathology rather than a cause of it. Mann (2004) and Mulligan Ashlee (2011) in two different studies showed that mental health problems as depression, anxiety are associated with low self-esteem, while mental wellbeing, adjustment, success, academic achievement, happiness and satisfaction are related with higher self-esteem. Cheung and et al. (2013) explained that self-esteem is determined by emotional intelligence, as emotional intelligence forms the basis of social experience and social competence which in turn enhances self-esteem.

2. Research Methodology

The descriptive method has been used in the present research. Following objectives were formulated for carrying out this study.

2.1 Objectives of the study

2.1.1. To find out the relationship between self-esteem and defense Mechanism (TAO, PRO, PRN, TAS and REV) of Secondary School Students. This object includes following sub objectives.

(i) To find out the correlation between self-esteem and turning against object (TAO) for the total sample, male and female students at secondary level.

(ii) To find out the correlation between self-esteem and projection (PRO) for the total sample, male and female students at secondary level.

(iii) To find out the correlation between self-esteem and principalisation (PRN) for the total sample, male and female students at secondary level.

(iv) To find out the correlation between self-esteem and turning against self (TAS) for the total sample, male and female students at secondary level.

(v) To find out the correlation between self-esteem and reversal (REV) for the total sample, male and female students at secondary level.

2.1.2. To compare scores of self-esteem between male and female students at secondary level.

2.1.3. To compare scores of defense mechanisms (TAO, PRO, PRN, TAS and REV) between male and female students at secondary level.

2.2 Hypotheses

Following hypotheses have been postulated by researcher to accomplish above stated objectives.

2.2.1. There is no significant correlation between self-esteem and defense Mechanisms (i.e. TAO, PRO, PRN, TAS, and REV) of secondary school students.

2.2.2. There is no significant difference between scores of self-esteem of male and female students at secondary level.

2.2.3. There is no significant difference between scores of defense mechanism of male and female students at secondary level.

2.3 Sampling and Sample

For the present research, sample of 150 (73 boys and 77 girls) secondary school students, from four schools of Amritsar district, Punjab state (India) were selected. The selection of schools was done by simple random sampling technique, while the cluster sampling technique was utilized for selection of students.

2.4 Data Collection Tools

2.4.1. Self-Esteem Scale:-

This scale was developed by R.N Singh and Ankita Shrivastava (2004). It consists of 20 items out of which nine items are positive and eleven items are negative. This scale assesses the self-esteem of an individual on five alternative response categories i.e., very much, much, average, low, very low. This scale has quite high reliability which was computed through split half and test- retest methods with coefficient of correlation as 0.86 and 0.82 in both methods respectively.

Criterion validity technique was employed to find out the validity of the self-esteem scale .The correlation between the scores obtained in the two sessions was calculated; thereby giving a coefficient of correlation as 0.89 for the English/ Hindi version of the scale.

2.4.2 Defense Mechanism Inventory.

Defense Mechanism Inventory developed by Dr. N.R. Mrinal and Dr. Uma Mrinal was employed to obtain the scores of defense mechanisms. It is in the form of a self-rating questionnaire. The inventory is made up of ten stories. After going through each story, the subject has to respond to four questions related to four types of behavior evoked by the situation created in the story i.e., proposed actual behavior, impulsive behavior, thoughts and feelings etc. The tool concerns with various defense mechanisms which are classified into five clusters i.e. turning against Object (TAO), projection (PRO), prinicipalsation (PRN), turning against self (TAS) and reversal (REV). Each question is followed by five responses.

Each response represents one of the five defense mechanisms mentioned above. Reliability of various defense categories is as given: TAO = 0.86; PRO = 0.80; PRN = O.82; TAS = 0.87 and REV = 0.92.

2.5. Statistical techniques

The relationship between self-esteem and defense mechanism has been found by using Pearson coefficient 'r' while, the 't' test was used to find out differences between the scores of self-esteem and defense mechanism of male and female students at secondary level.

Table 1.1 Correlation between Self-esteem and defense mechanisms.

Sample size	Variables	Defense mechanisms	TAO	PRO	PRN	TAS	REV
150	Self esteem	Whole sample	-0.0756 N.S	-0.0945 N.S	0.1379 N.S	-0.190 N.S	0.137 N.S
73	Self esteem	Male	-0.1623 Significant	-0.2194 Significant	0.1127 N.S	-0.0631 N.S	0.259 Significant
77	Self esteem	Female	-0.0201 N.S	-0.0354 N.S	0.0945 N.S	-0.1542 N.S	0.0825 N.S

Level of significance 0.05

3.1 Relationship between self-esteem and defense mechanisms.

3.1.1. Self-esteem and turning against object (TAO) defense mechanism.

The calculated values of 'r' for the whole sample and for separate samples of boys and girls are found to be -0.0756, -0.1623, and -0.0201 respectively (Table 1.1). The tabulated critical value of 'r' is greater than the calculated value of 'r' for overall sample and female students. Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted in these two cases. It shows that there is no significant correlation between scores of self-esteem and defense mechanisms for total sample size and female sample, however calculated value of r is greater than critical value in case of male students. Hence null hypothesis is rejected in case of boys showing a significant correlation between the scores of self-esteem and TAO defense mechanisms. A negative value of 'r' implies that an increase in self-esteem score will lead to corresponding decrease in the score of TAO i.e. an increase in self-esteem declines the chances of using turning against object (TAO) defense mechanism. Turning against object represents immature defense mechanisms including identification with the aggressor and displacement. These defenses function through attacking a real or presumed external frustrating thing as a

substitute of aggression. Results obtained here clearly show that high self-esteem causes lesser use of TAO defense mechanisms. In boys this inverse relationship is even stronger than girls.

3.1.2 Self-esteem and projection (PRO) defense mechanism

In this case, the obtained value of 'r' for the complete sample is found to be -0.0945, for male students -0.2194 and for female students -0.0354 (Table 1.1). In case of whole sample and girls these values are not greater than the tabulated value of 'r'.Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. It indicates that there is no significant correlation between self-esteem and projection defense mechanism in whole sample and female students. In case of boys a significant correlation has been found between two variables as tabulated value is lesser than the calculated one. Negative value in whole sample, girls and boys indicates as the self-esteem score increases, corresponding PRO score decreases. Projection (PRO) category includes immature and pathological defense mechanisms. These defenses lead to a situation where an individual blames others for his own faults and projects his own weaknesses on them. People with high self-esteem take responsibility of their own actions rather than finding faults with others. Results in this study also confirm this fact. Particularly in case of male students significant negative relationship has been found in self-esteem and PRO defenses. It can be said that students with higher self-esteem, deals with anxiety in a better way and use PRO defense mechanism to a lesser extent.

3.1.3. Self-esteem and principalisation (PRN) defense mechanism.

As far as Self-esteem and principalisation (PRN) defense mechanism are concerned, calculated values of Pearson correlation coefficient "r" for overall sample, male students and female students are found to be 0.1379, 0.1127 and 0.0945 respectively (Table 1.1), which are lesser than critical value. Null hypothesis is accepted here, showing no significant relationship between the self-esteem and PRN defense mechanism of secondary school students. Positive value of correlation coefficient shows a positive relation between the above stated variables. Hence it can be said that high self-esteem supports use of PRN defenses. Defenses such as intellectualization, isolation, and rationalization are categorized in this category. This result can be justified in the sense that defenses like intellectualization and rationalization use those logical and intellectual aspects of mental processes which distance

oneself from stress and anxiety producing situations. People with high self-esteem also use logics and rationale before taking any decision.

3.1.4. Relationship of self-esteem and turning against self (TAS) defense mechanism.

The calculated value of 'r' in this case is found to be -0.190 for the overall sample, -0.0631 for male students and -0.154 for female students (Table 1.1). The tabulated 'r' is less than the calculated 'r' for overall sample but greater than calculated one for boys and girls sample. Thus null hypothesis is rejected for total sample but accepted in both boys and girls seperate sample. Therefore it can be said that there is a significant relationship between the self-esteem score and the TAS score of secondary school students as far as total sample is concerned, however in separate girls and boys sample this relationship is not found to be significant. Turning against self category of defenses deals with those defenses in which an individual handle stress and anxiety by directing aggressive behavior towards him or herself. Masochism and auto sadism are classical examples of this category. In his case, an inverse relationship between self-esteem and turning against self (TAS) defense mechanism is found, showing decrease in usage of TAS defenses with corresponding increase in self-esteem. TAS defenses are immature defenses, which indicate a personality with low self-esteem.

3.1.5. Self-esteem and reversal (REV) defense mechanism.

In order to find out the relationship between self-esteem reversal (REV) defense mechanism, coefficient of correlation was found out. The calculated value of 'r' is 0.137 for complete sample, 0.259 for male students and 0.0825 for female students (Table 1.1). Since the tabulated 'r' is greater than the calculated 'r' for overall sample and girls hence the null hypothesis is accepted in both these cases. Therefore it can be said that there is no significant relationship between the self-esteem and the REV defense mechanism for total sample of students and female students. However in case of boys critical value of r is found lesser than the calculated value, so null hypothesis has been rejected, i.e. a significant correlation has been found between the self-esteem and the REV defense mechanism for male students. This relationship is positive here. High self-esteem leads to more usage of these defense mechanisms. This category of defenses deals with anxiety producing frustrating object by responding in a positive or neutral fashion which may evoke a negative reaction. Defenses such as negation, denial, reaction formation and repression are categorized here. Here the person thinks, and acts in a manner directly opposite to the unconscious impulse. Boys with high self-esteem are found to use REV more as compared to boys with low self-esteem.

3.2. Comparison of self-esteem scores of male and female students

In order to compare self-esteem scores of male and female students, t test has been employed. In the present research, the mean of self-esteem scores is found to be 65.74 for boys and 65.28 for girls, with standard deviation of 6.86 and 12.2 respectively (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2 Comparison of male and female students in the scores of self-esteem and defense mechanism

Variables	Male =73		Female=77		't' value	Level of significance. At 0.05=1.97
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	't' value	At 0.05=1.97
Self-esteem	65.74	6.86	65.28	12.2	0.35	N.S.
TAO	34.23	6.82	36.29	5.81	0.05	N.S
PRO	39.01	5.21	39.31	4.43	0.70	N.S
PRN	42.957	6.18	42.02	5.11	0.31	N.S
TAS	39.084	4.33	40.82	5.19	0.36	N.S
REV	44.422	8.04	44.05	4.96	0.73	N.S

The calculated value of t is not greater than critical value of t therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. It can be generalized that there is no significant difference between the boys and girls as far as level of self-esteem is concerned.

3.3. Comparison of defense mechanism scores of male and female students.

This objective has also been tested through t test. It can be seen through table 1.2 that in each category of defense mechanisms i.e., TAO, PRO, PRN, TAS, REV, calculated t value is not found significant statistically. Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. It can be generalized here that there is no significant difference between the scores of defense mechanisms of boys and girls students at secondary level.

4. Conclusions

Study concluded that there is no gender difference among secondary students in their levels of self-esteem and usage of defense mechanisms. This gives a bright indication of our future as girls are marching ahead along with boys with same level of self-esteem. Findings also revealed no significant correlation between self-esteem and defense mechanisms in case of total sample and for girls' students. In case of boys a significant correlation was found between self-esteem scores and defense mechanisms in TAO, PRO and REV category. Hence it can be generalized that in case of boys self-esteem put impact on usage of defense mechanisms. It becomes the ultimate responsibility of our education system that efforts should be made to develop the self-esteem of students so that their usage of immature defense mechanisms could be reduced. They should be guided to cope with stress and anxiety in a better way.

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