

Research Article

Low Self-Esteem and its Impact on Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

Mental wellbeing is the most neglected part of the health because of the stigma associated with it. There are several criteria for diagnosis of mental illness, one of them is self-esteem. Self-esteem is one of the bases in Maslow's hierarchy model to reach to a state called "self-actualization" which is a state of proper functioning. The causes of low self-esteem are not only related to physical aspect, but also person's psycho social aspect. On the contrary, inflated self-esteem is also not good for a person's well-being. Therefore, self-esteem should be considered as an area to dig into because it can also cause mental illnesses. However, there is also a model which says that low self-esteem is one of the consequences of the mental illness.

Keywords: *Proper functioning, Self-actualization, Self-esteem, Stigma.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Self-esteem is a clear cut indication of one's perception or feeling of his own worth. While self-esteem is the most neglected part in today's world, it requires a great attention as low self-esteem can leads to many mental illnesses.

1.1 Literature Review

The conditions in which a child is raised (being neglected, traumas, not able to fulfill parent's expectation shapes ones self-esteem (Galor, 2012). According to Lacky, Hirsch, Nelson and Nsameng (2014), high self-esteem is very important to fulfill psychological needs. It has been seen in the past few years that low self-esteem affect the normal functioning of a person because low self-esteem tends to sprang negative thoughts towards self. It is important to note that low self-esteem is not a mental illness in itself, but rather it has some connections with the overall emotional and mental wellbeing

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of a person (Gold, 2016). According to Byrne (2000), low self-esteem has a temporal relation with eating disorders, depression, anxiety, school dropout, and high risk behaviors. Cast and Burke (2002) said that the overall functioning of an individual is affected greatly by self-esteem. It is also counted as an outcome which helps individual to cope with the challenges that occur daily.

Murk (2006) stated that low self-esteem is a criterion to diagnose few mental illnesses. He further said that, unpleasant feeling is more common in people with low self-concept than the people with inflated self-esteem. Although, inflated self-esteem is also a problem as it increases the grandiosity within self, we would be talking about low self-esteem and its impact on mental health.

According to Human Relations (n.d.), mentally ill people carries many stigmas over them, but the thing to take into account is; neither the one who apply stigma, nor the one who holds that stigma really know the determinants of the mental illness. Why to know about these determinants? Because it helps them to identify the problem and cope with the stressor.

The purpose of the review is to see the association between low self-esteem and mental health. The objectives of the review are:

1. To find out the trends of low self-esteem and mental illnesses

2. To integrate different theories to evaluate the association between low self-esteem and mental health

3. To suggest measures for improved self-esteem and mental health

1.2 Purpose

The reason for choosing this topic is that, mental health is the most neglected area of health in the developing countries (Banis, 2019). The people are stigmatized because of this, and many people suffers to live their lives. Being in Pakistan, I have seen that people are very less concerned about mental illnesses, and they don't put much focus on this as like any other physical disease. It is important to destigmatize mental illness, so that people take it as serious as they take any other disease.

2. METHODOLOGY

The method used for this is the narrative review. Literature from Google, Google Scholar and PubMed were used in the review. Previous studies were incorporated to find out the increasing prevalence of low self-esteem and mental illnesses. Through the help of different theories, an association between low self-esteem and mental illnesses was justified. After that, recommendations were suggested to tackle people with low self-esteem and mental illnesses.

2.1 Clinical Scenario

On my clinical rotation, I encountered a manic patient diagnosed with Bipolar Affective Disorder. Upon interview, he verbalized that before his disease process, he had very low self-esteem. He use to feel hesitant to interact with people, he didn't even maintain eye contact with others. He further highlighted that his mother never appreciated his any work. Whereas in hospital, he had inflated self-esteem.

3. RESULTS

Park, Kim, Park, Suh and Lee (2016) conducted one study in Korea to evaluate the link between self-esteem and the health behaviors in adolescent. They did a cross-sectional study in 692 middle school students out of which 67.4% were males and 31.8% were females in three different schools. The psychological behaviors had a positive association with low self-esteem. Refer table 1 for further details.

Table 1: Summary of the findings			
	n (%)	Self-esteem score mean (SD)	p value
Perceived health status			
Bad	29 (4.4)	16.38 (5.52)	<.0001
Normal	162 (24.5)	17.62 (4.13)	
Good	469 (71.1)	20.42 (4.60)	
Depression			

Yes	86 (13.0)	16.64 (4.64)	<.0001
No	576 (87.0)	19.99 (4.64)	
Suicidal ideation			
Yes	104 (15.6)	16.70 (4.76)	
No	562 (84.4)	20.09 (4.52)	
Suicidal attempt			
Yes	8 (1.2)	16.00 (5.43)	<.0031
No	658 (98.8)	19.61 (4.69)	

One more study was conducted previously in Netherland in adolescent which suggested a close relation of low self-esteem and suicidal tendencies, depression and hopelessness (Mann et. al, 2004).

A study was conducted in the 674 Mexican origin adolescent (10-12 years). The study was to assess if there is a causal relation between low self-esteem and depression, and to rule out the confounders. The results of the study supported the vulnerability model (elaborated in the section of discussion), thus proving a positive association between low self-esteem and depression. Moreover, the study results stated that no confounders affected the association such as social support, stressful life events, and maternal depression (Orth, Robins, Widaman & Conger, 2014).

These studies give us a clear indication that low self-esteem impacts mental wellbeing of a person. Also there is also not a single mental illness which a person gets. Rather, the person might end up into any kind of mental illness such as suicidal ideations, depression and even suicidal attempts (Lahey, Hirsch, Nelson & Nsamenang, 2014). There are also theories which supports this idea. Some of the theories are Maslow hierarchy model, Carl roger's theory of self-actualization, and theory of identity which are further elaborated in the discussion section of the article.

While these theories suggest that low self-esteem leads to mental illnesses, one cannot neglect that psychological changes are a crucial part of life span development theory (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006). There are no enough evidences available which can justify if the changes in self-esteem predicts depression (Steiger, Allemand, Robins & Fend, 2014).

4. DISCUSSION

According to Maslow's Hierarchy model, self-esteem is one of the core components to get self-actualization which is at the top of the hierarchy. One cannot reach to the top, unless each requirement is fulfilled in the hierarchy. Self-actualization is called as the "perfect stage" to function appropriately, and this can't be achieved with poor self-esteem. Having low self-esteem leads to the feeling of unworthiness within oneself, and can end up failing social support. If a person is not enough confident over himself, he cannot make healthy relation with the people surrounding him. Psychosocial aspect is often

neglected whenever we talk about patient's health. John P. grey once suggested that for every mental illness there is a physical cause, thus these patients should be treated as physically ill patients. Having said that, it is not necessary that there should be a physical cause; mentally ill patient's psychosocial aspect is the thing to be focused, and this psychosocial aspect is the reflection of one's self-esteem. Low self-esteem makes people very negative, with low motivation, often with mood swings (Gecas, 1991). According to Chris William (2018), a professor at University of Glasgow, it is good to avoid tough and challenging situations for short time period to make you feel safer, but when you keep on doing this for a longer period, it reinforces your hidden fears. It teaches you a rule to stay discouraged to cope with the situations. Thus it reflects that, low self-esteem make you to stay away from challenges, and escape from social situations.

Theory of identity raises a very strong point by stating that; individual is a collection of many identities which determines one's position in the society. This brings an individual into a self-verification process, where he relates his identity and his role at a given point. This makes one competent enough, raising his self-esteem.

Carl Roger's theory of Self-actualization is another theory stating that self-actualization is the core element for proper functioning. He suggested that the way we think for our self-starts developing from childhood through the attachment that we make with our parents. He stated two needs of a person: positive regard and self-worth. When a person feels worthy, he accepts the challenges and work for his motives; whereas, low self-esteem interferes with one's coping and ability to face the challenges. In addition to this, low self-esteem increases the capacity to become destructive (McLeod, 2014). In my scenario, the patient stated that he don't trust his mother because he didn't receive any positive regard due to which he had poor self-esteem. In hospital he has inflated self-esteem because of the disease process. In his case, low self-esteem could be one of the determinants that led him to mental illness.

There are also two models available that talks about the relation between low self-esteem and mental health. One model is known as the vulnerability model and the other is called the scar model. Vulnerability model suggests that low self-esteem increases the chances of having psychopathology. According to this model, low self-esteem and stress interacts with one another to develop the psychopathology, whereas high self-esteem buffers the impact of stress on one's mental health (Hill, 2011). On the other hand, Scar model suggests that low self-esteem is caused by the psychopathology, and thus is a consequence rather than a cause of mental health. According to this model, a mental disorder leads to deficit in the resources (mental), and thus leaves a "scar" which in turn affect how one feels about himself (Orth et al., 2008).

4.1 Recommendations

Low self-esteem makes person unable to cater his daily problems and makes him unable to maximize his potentials. This in turn causes a drastic decline in his physical and mental well-being. Deterioration in mental well-being leads to internalizing problem behavior like anxiety, eating and depressive disorders (Health Education Research, 2004). There are many ways that a healthcare professional can use to deal the clients with low self-concept. First could be the use of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) which tends to be helpful for the patients with hopelessness because it helps patient to modify their beliefs, and empower them with realistic and positive attitude (Day et al). Second could be doing exercise. According to Park, Han & Kang (2014), exercise helps in relieving depression, but one has to be compliant with it for at least 3 months. There is no doubt that many people don't approach to professionals because of the society's stigmatization. Therefore, on a community level, we can promote and give awareness on mental health and erase the stigma (Subramaniam et al. 2016). On institutional level, job-related burnouts can be solved by creating awareness because this also leads to mental illness like depression (Ahola et al, 2005).

4.2 Implications

1. Low self-esteem is one of the cause of mental disorders. However, Scar model also suggests that it could be a consequence of the mental suffering.
2. Self-esteem is important for a person's optimal level of functioning.
3. Low self-esteem could increase one's capacity to become destructive or depressed.

4.3 Significance

It is important to know that how self-esteem affects the mental health of an individual because it opens new areas of prognosis of the disease. If one identifies the root cause of the mental disorders like suicidal thoughts and attempts, depression and anxiety, we can better improve the mental health outcome of the patient. Note that mental illness is the most neglected part of the health, and it leads to drastic outcomes.

5. CONCLUSION

Mental health is often neglected because of the stigma associated with it, and therefore affects one's functionality badly. One of the determinants of mental health is self-esteem. Self-esteem is the one's perception about his worth. Self-concept is important to function healthy in the society and build social support. People with depression are more vulnerable to have low self-esteem; therefore, measures should be taken to help person reach to that perfect stage of self-actualization. Stigma should also be taken into account so that the people can seek help from healthcare professionals. Also, if the future researches fills the gap if psychological changes with growing age predicts depression, we will have a

better understanding about this and may improve new world of treatment modalities.

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