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Self-Esteem, Personal Characteristics and School Performance

¹Fiossi-Kpadonou E, ¹Foundohou Vk, ¹Anagonou-Lary L, ¹Klikpo E, ¹Adeossi Bfk, ¹Houinou Ebo Bda, ¹Agossou T.

¹University of Abomey-Calavi, Mental Health Département, Cotonou, Benin

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Abstract:

The prevalence of low self-esteem amongst teenage students appears quite high, with female students being much more affected than male students. This notwithstanding, the girls still manage to produce better results in school than boys, a situation which requires greater attention for enhancement and valorization.

Objective: To analyze the influence of some personal characteristics on self-esteem and the impact of the latter on the school performance of teenage.

Method: Prospective and analytical study, carried out in 2015 on 206 students in a denominational secondary school in Cotonou, using Coppersmith's self-esteem inventory.

Results: Self-esteem, which is either positive or negative, is influenced by sex, age and other family and environmental factors which globally the feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with life. 38.3% and 61.7% have a positive and negative self-esteem, respectively. 70.9% of the girls have a negative self-esteem as against 49.4% of the boys. However, despite the higher prevalence of negative self-esteem amongst girls, their academic output is still better than that of the boys. Negative self-esteem is found to regress with age for girls, while in instead increases with age for boys. 61.7% of students had a negative self-esteem while 70.4% were dissatisfied with life, with a significant correlation between self-esteem and global satisfaction with life.

Conclusion: Although the prevalence of low self-esteem amongst teenage is quite high, girls appear to manage the situation better than boys and produce better results in school, which needs to be harnessed and enhanced.

Keywords: self-esteem, age, sex, teenager, school performance.

Introduction:

The basis of self-esteem is found first of all in the look of others, which helps to develop confidence in self and enable a successful undertaking of the activities of life. One of its principal dimensions remains the perceived reflection of the physical aspect; the concerned begin to question whether they are pleasing to others (André, 2005). Self-esteem bears on the global evaluation of the value of

the person and the degree of satisfaction with self, internal wellbeing and tranquility, but also on the worries borne (André, 2006). It makes allusion to the appreciation, positive or negative, which the subjects make of themselves. The objective of this study is to examine the link between self-esteem and the academic performance of teenage students.

Materials and Method of Study:

The study was carried out in a denominational college in which students from several social backgrounds are admitted, and which uses the services of a psychologist. The presence of the latter helped in the accompaniment of the respondents who were found in psychological difficulties.

The study was carried out in June-July 2015, at the end of the school year. The self-esteem of students was evaluated through a direct inquiry, followed by a compilation of academic performances. The characteristics of those suffering from low or negative self-esteem were then analyzed.

The population of the study is made up of 257 students registered in the said college for the academic year 2014-2015. All the students who had been regularly registered in the college since the beginning of the year, who accepted to participate in our study and whose parents gave their consent, were included in our sample.

However, those students whose questionnaires were poorly or only partially filled, and those whose "lie telling score" obtained using the evaluation tool of Coopersmith (1984) was greater than or equal to 5, were eliminated. A total of 51 students were eliminated on these grounds.

206 questionnaires were thus finally retained for the purpose of the study, with several variables

Dépendent Variables :

➤ Academic performance

This variable was assessed on the basis of the global average of marks obtained by the student, the pass mark being 10/20. The performance was divided into two groups:

- Poor performance and failure in school (average < 10 /20) ;
- Satisfactory or good performance or success in school (average $\geq 10/20$).

➤ Self-esteem

Self-esteem was the 2nd dependent variable. We used the self-esteem inventory of Coopersmith (SEI) in its form adapted for school use, which is convenient for schoolchildren and teenagers using French as the main language of instruction. The SEI possesses psychometric characteristics of satisfactory fidelity which enabled its scientific validation as a measuring instrument for self-esteem.

The choice of the SEI questionnaire was motivated by its particularity in considering self-esteem as a multidimensional variable and proposing 4 scales which measure different types of self-esteem. There is the global self-esteem (26 items), social self-esteem (8 items), family self-esteem (8 items) and school self-esteem (8 items), making a total of 50 items.

This specificity enabled to get hold of those areas of the lives of teenagers which were either more affected or more preserved concerning self-esteem, with respect to other areas. The SEI equally attributes a total score for self-esteem which corresponds to the sum of the 4 scales. Also, a score at a level of "lies telling" comprising 8 items is considered as an index of defensive attitude towards the test.

The five scores thus obtained were entered into the response sheet. In order to interpret the results, reference can be made to the calibration provided by the self-esteem inventory.

Tableau I: Classification of self-esteem as a function of the total score (according to Coopersmith)

	Score range
SE* Class= 5	46-50
SE Class = 4	39-45
SE Class= 3	31-38
SE Class= 2	19-30
SE Class= 1	≤ 18

SE* Class = Self-esteem Class

A global score less than or equal to 18 can be considered as representing a very low self-esteem, while a score between 46 and 50 can be said to represent a very high self-esteem.

Self-esteem is positive when the global score is found between 31 and 50 (SE classes 3, 4 and 5); it is negative when the score is ≤ 30 (classes SE 1 and 2).

Techniques and tools used, data collection and processing:

Data was collected with the help of a questionnaire bearing on socio-demographical data, evaluation factors for self-esteem, performance in school and Coopersmith’s self-esteem inventory. An examination of the students’ school files yielded information on the marks they had obtained throughout the year.

Data was collected in two phases. Firstly, the self-esteem was evaluated following the method developed by Coopersmith, then, a questionnaire with half-open questions was administered to each student during an interview. The administration of each questionnaire lasted for 1 hour on average. A second time lapse was used in compiling and assigning the marks of the students.

The data thus acquired was encoded, keyboarded, processed and analyzed with the help of the SPSS version 20 software. Tables and figures were drawn using Microsoft Excel 2013 software.

Ethical Considerations:

This study was carried out with the approval of the ethical committee of ISBA in Cotonou (see annex). The students and their parents or guardians were served with a consent form which they read and signed in order to show their approval before the questionnaires could be administered. The free (oral) consent of the students was also obtained before the administration of the questionnaires.

Results:

Sex: The 206 students who validly responded during the study were made up of 89 boys, giving 43% and 117 girls, giving 57%, with a M/F sex-ratio of 0.76.

Age : The average age of the respondent students was 12.48 ± 1.53 years, with extreme ages being 9 and 17 years; 29.6% were between 9 and 11 years, 59.6% were between 12 and 14 years while 10.2% were between 15 to 17 years.

Type of self-esteem of the 206 respondents, it was found that 79 students had a positive self-esteem (scores ranging from 31 to 50), representing 38.3%, while 127 students had a negative self-esteem, representing 61.7% (score <30).

Sex and self-esteem of the 117 female respondents, 83 had a negative self-esteem (70.9%) as against 44 out of 89 male respondents (49.4%). A cross tabulation of the variables sex and self-esteem yields $p=0.002$, while that between sex and average marks obtained in school gives $p=0.110$.

Age, self-esteem and sex Amongst the students aged 12 to 14 years were found 62.8% of students having a positive self-esteem and 58.3% of those with a negative self-esteem; the cross tabulation between age and self-esteem giving $p=0.601$. The occurrence of negative self-esteem between 9 and 11 years was 75.8% for girls and 24.2% for boys, while it was 64.3% for girls and 35.7% for boys within the 15 to 17 years age range (Figure 1).

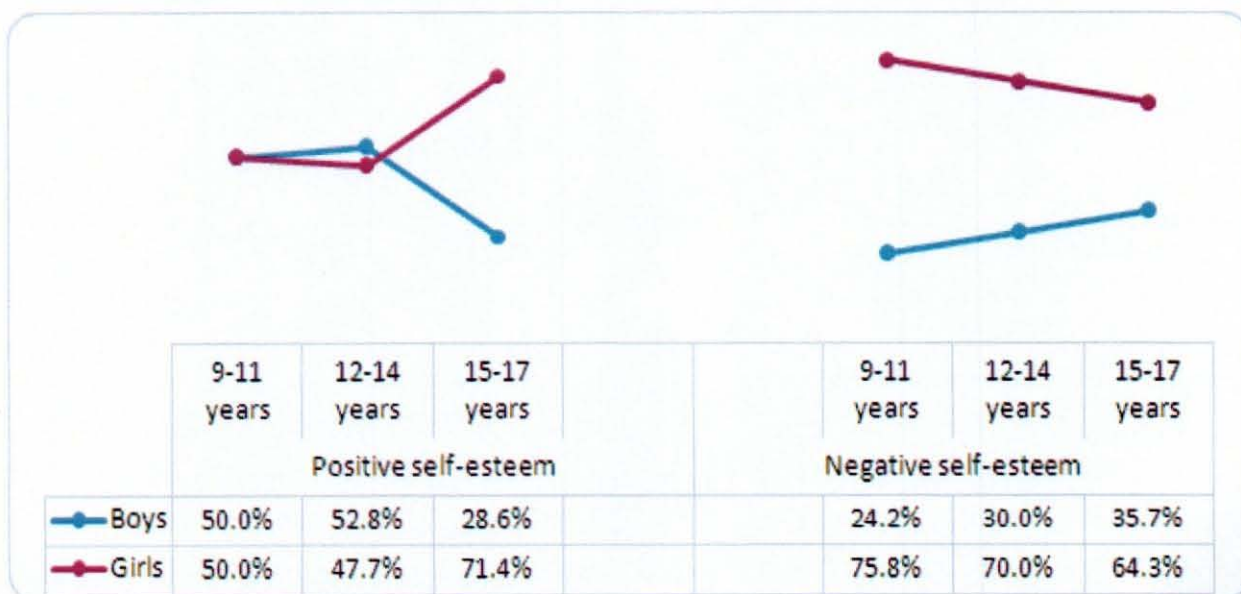


Figure 1 : Distribution of students in function of their self-esteem according to age range and sex

Score, type of self-esteem and performance in school:

The global average self-esteem score for the respondents was 27.21 with extremes of 7 and 46.

The school-related self-esteem was found to vary from 1 to 8, with an average of 4.33.

80.6% of the respondents enjoyed success in school at the time of the study, while 19.4% were in a situation of failure. Figure 2 highlights the observed self-esteem relative to their performance in school.

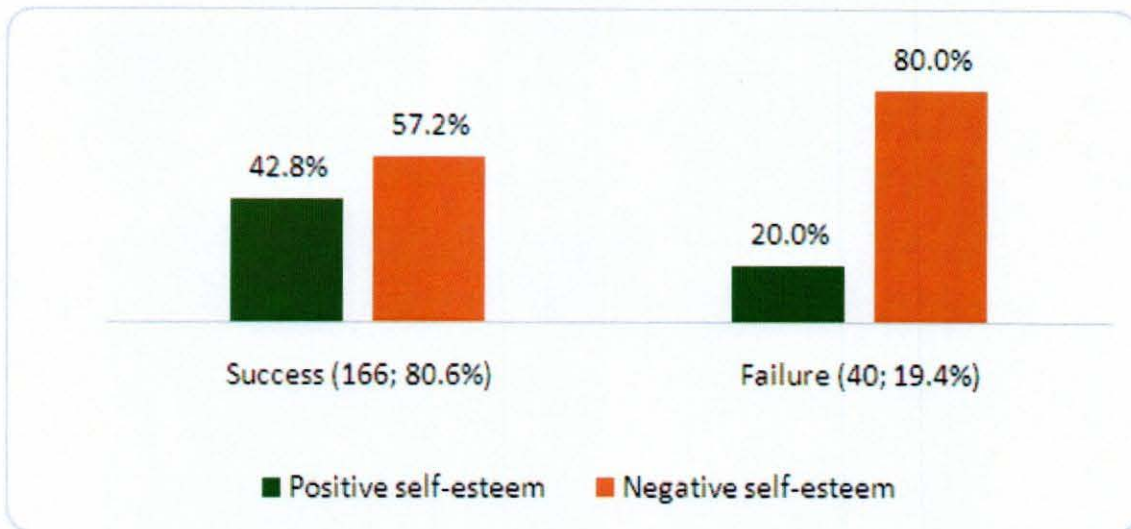


Figure 2 : Distribution of self-esteem as a function of performance in school

At the time of the study, 80% of the 40 students who had failed in school had a negative self-esteem (p=0.008).

166 students were found to have an average $\geq 10/20$. This group is made up of 99 girls (56.6% of successful students and 84.6% of the 117 girls in the sample) and 67 boys (40.4% of successful students and 75.3% of the 89 boys in the sample). Of the 40

students who were in a situation of failure, 18 were female (15.4% of the girls in the sample) while 22 were male (24.7% of the boys considered in the sample).

A cross tabulation of self-esteem with the average marks obtained in school, according to sex (Figure 2) gives p=0.003 for boys and p=0.267 for girls.

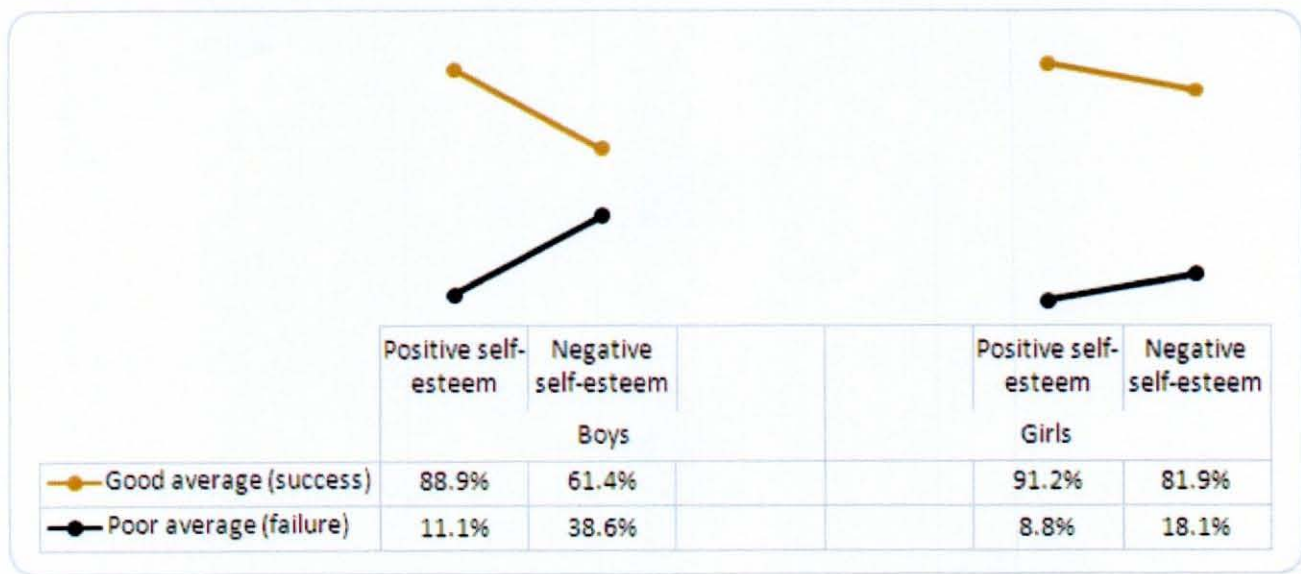


Figure 3 : Self-esteem as a function of the class average and according to sex.

p=0,003 for boys and 0,267 for girls

Negative self-esteem, sex and certain personal characteristics:

Particular characteristics according to sex were investigated in relation to performance in school.

Correlations with a p value of <5% are shown in Figure 4.

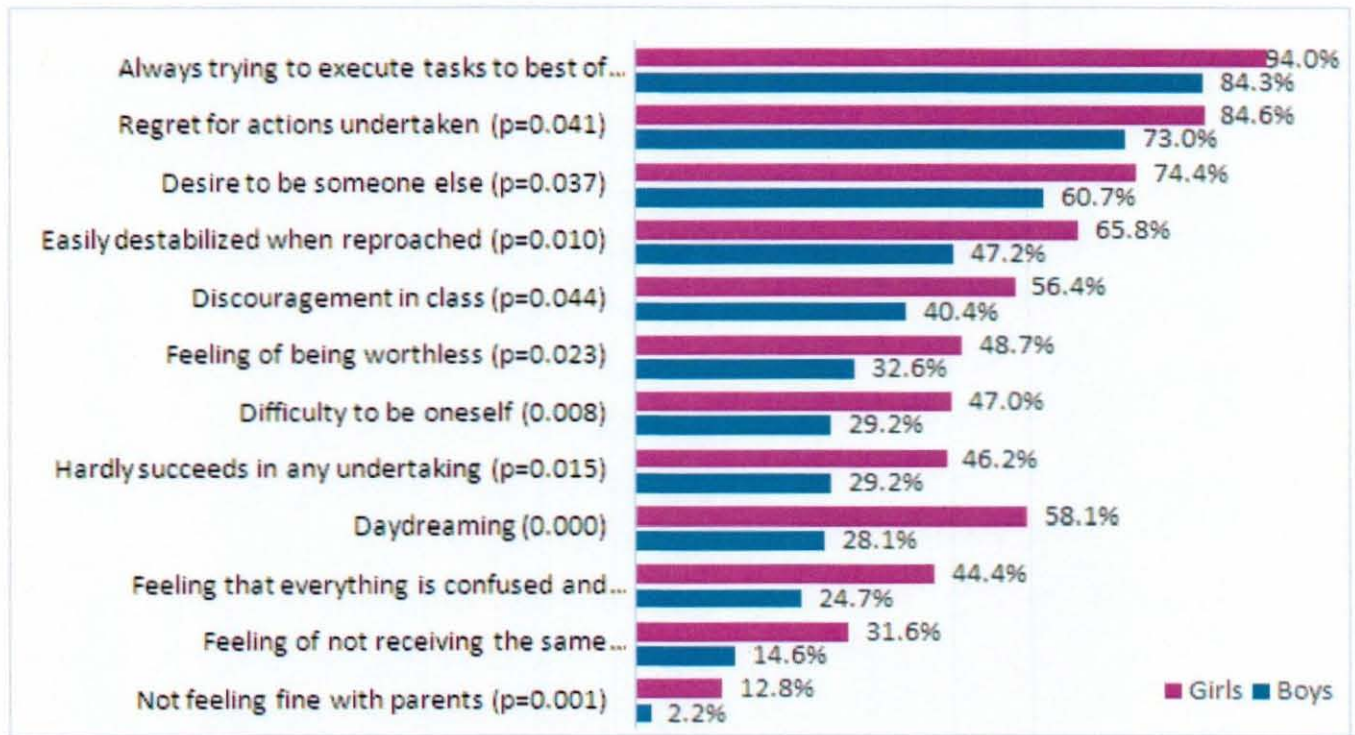


Figure 4 : Correlation between negative self-esteem, sex and certain personal characteristics

Self esteem and satisfaction with life:

As noticed in the study, 70.4% of the respondents were generally satisfied with their lives. The

correlation between self-esteem and satisfaction with life globally yielded p=0.000. According to sex, p=0.006 for boys and 0.001 for girls (Figure 5).

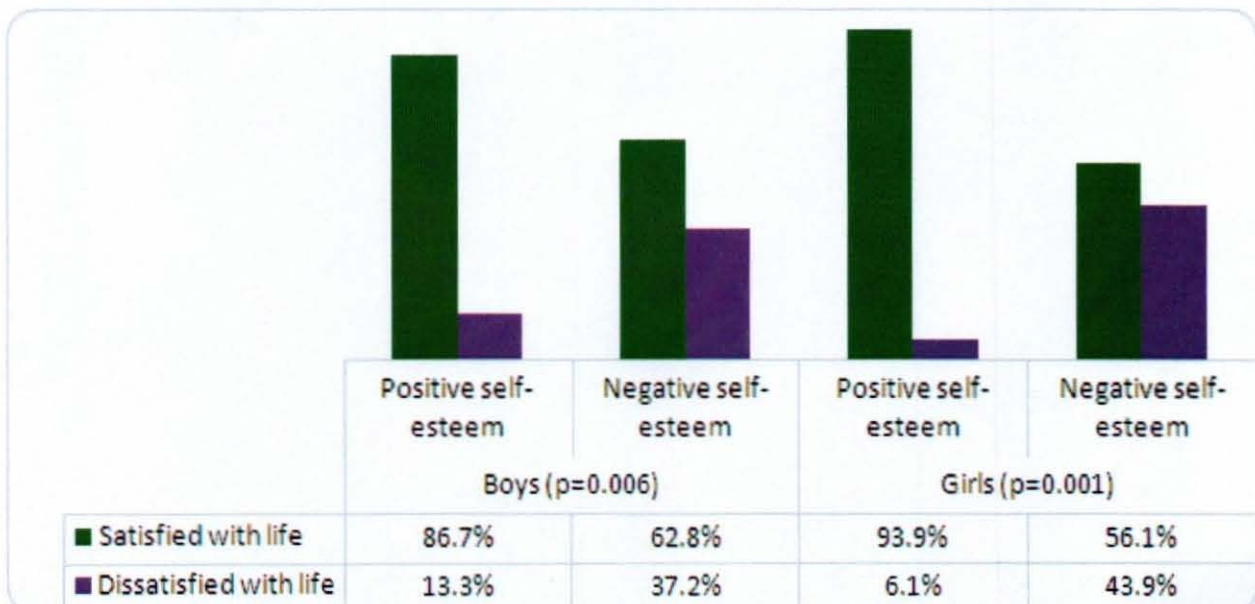


Figure 5 : Self-esteem, sex and satisfaction with life

Discussion:

Self-esteem is anchored on elements which ensure the links of interdependence: self-confidence, self-view and love for self (Cariou-Rognant, 2007). It is influenced by personal and family history, but also by the environment.

Socio-Demographical Aspects Of The Respondents (Age And Sex):

The average age of the respondents in our sample was 12.48 ± 1.53 years, with extremes of 9 and 17 years. However, even these extremes are within the school going age range generally accepted in secondary schools in Benin. These data closely resemble those obtained by Goubet in 2012 in France (12.08 ± 2.54 years, with extremes of 7 and 17 years).

Type Of Self Esteem And Type Of School Attended:

The students in our sample who had a negative self-esteem represented 61.7%. Negative self-esteem in students could be explained by the process of individuation which leads them to compare themselves with their peers without considering the external contingencies such as the socio-economic realities of their families. In this wise, the results of our study are more far-reaching than those of Bawa (2007) in Togo (which he carried out on students in the class of "4^{ème}") and those of Kouamé (2010) in Côte d'Ivoire.

Despite the socio-economic conditions, certain parents, aiming for a better future for their children, have chosen to register them in private schools. The cohabitation of children from different social backgrounds in these private schools could influence the self-image of the teenager coming from a not too comfortable social background. This negative self-view could contribute to a reduction in self-esteem, without allowing the liberty to withdraw from this school.

Negative Self-Esteem, Age and Sex:

Globally, the prevalence of low self-esteem for girls (70.9%) was greater than that of boys (49.4%), with $p=0.002$. This trend of negative self-esteem for girls was found to decrease with age, which is the exact opposite for boys, where it increases with age. The girls however conserved the highest trends of negative self-esteem even if the gap between the two curves shrinks around 15-17 years (Figure 1); nevertheless, the difference is globally not significant ($p=0.601$).

Figure 3 shows that 38.6% of boys with negative self-esteem obtained poor results in school ($p=0.003$), against 18.1% of girls ($p=0.267$), revealing more than twice many more boys in this category than girls.

These results suggest that, no matter their self-esteem, girls always manage to have better results in school than boys. It thus becomes indispensable to find out the other factors which lead to such success for girls.

There were many more girls in the population of study than boys (1.3 times more), but equally, there were many more girls with a negative self-esteem (1.4 times more). The difference between the self-esteem of girls and that of boys is statistically significant ($p=0.002$). There is however no significant difference as concerns the ages.

From Figure 4, we observe that the girls try to please and remain loyal to their parents, even if they do not necessarily feel fine with the latter. The gender difference at this level is statistically significant ($p=0.001$).

In their study, Kostogianni et al (2009) found that self-esteem was strongly correlated to socio-affective adjustments. A low self-esteem is at the same time linked to internal and external troubles.

Our study revealed that girls were capable of going beyond the limits in their loyalty, despite their feeling which is more than that of the boys, that they receive lesser consideration from their parents than the rest of the siblings. This leaves them with a greater desire to be some other person, especially a younger person. The correlation with sex yields a statistical significance of $p=0.037$.

The girls had a greater impression of daydreaming, being more confused and muddled up (Figure 4) than the boys ($p=0.000$ and 0.004 respectively); notwithstanding, they globally scored better results in school than boys.

More than one and a half times as compared to boys, the girls hardly succeeded in their undertakings ($p=0.015$) and found greater difficulties being themselves. Despite this, they still tried to work as best as they could, far better than the boys ($p=0.014$).

Sex is an important determinant in the cross tabulation with the difficulty in being oneself, since the degree of significance ($p=0.008$) is $<5\%$. As such, about half of the girls had the feeling of being worthless, as against one third of the boys having the same feeling, in a significant manner ($p=0.023$).

The teenage students regretted some of the actions

they had undertaken, with a sex-related statistically significant difference ($p=0.041$).

Discouragement in class was found with girls as well as with boys, as well as the loss of personal means (destabilization) when reproached. The difference between the sexes is significant ($p=0.044$ and 0.010 respectively, Figure 4).

We remark that the human identity is sexualized (Vouillot, 2012). In a study on self-esteem and project strategies for secondary school students faced with a forceful academic reorientation, Safont-Mottay et al (1997) found a significant difference in self-esteem as a function of sex. Compared to the boys, the girls gave themselves a lesser self-worth in both emotional and physical matters. According to the authors, research has shown this tendency for teenage girls to devalue themselves more as compared to boys, no matter their level of achievement in school.

Lamke (1982) showed in New York that positive self-esteem was linked to masculinity.

Moreover, the role of parents in the social adaptation of teenagers is not only limited to the simple fact of supporting them in the emotional and affective domains. In their relationship with their children, parents should also aim at promoting and safeguarding social norms and roles. Oftentimes, the teenage males and females find themselves in a situation of inversion of parental roles and feel obliged to take up bigger responsibilities at the family level, be it at the moment or in the future. As such, the desire to progress at any cost with their education, to be autonomous and to take proper care of their own family members in a dignified manner takes precedence, no matter the self-esteem possessed at the given moment. In one way or the other, the way the family functions has an influence on the schooling and performance thereof of the adolescents (Blaya, 2010). Girls get to cling on better than boys, every other thing being equal.

Research work on the feminine and masculine identities is based on the observation that boys and girls share the same tendency of identifying more with masculine than feminine ideals¹¹. It appears important that persons identify themselves either as men or women in order to firmly establish their personal identity, but it seems that as concerns self-esteem, being either a girl/woman or a boy/man does not have the same impact.

In the adja-fon cultural milieu in Benin, the male teenager is referred to with a lot of fervor, force, and an underlying notion of responsibility. In these conditions, it is obligatory for the concerned to

experience some anxiety and frustrations in order to acquire a certain degree of confidence in his capacity to singlehandedly find solutions to his problems.

For the girl, the coining of her appellation attributes to her the roles and tasks connected with the home and marriage. She has to conform to a strictly codified model of behavior. These appellations, which are stereotypes of the role and status of each person in the society based on gender considerations, puts more value on males.

According to Duru-Bellat (1990), the phenomenon of lesser self-esteem for girls comes from the fact that contrary to boys, the former hardly come face-to-face with the loss of approbation from adults.

Self-Esteem and Relationship with Parents:

Bouffard et al (2005) reported that a study carried out on a population of students aged 14 to 17 years had revealed that adolescents who have a very high self-esteem are those who have a feeling of receiving much support from their parents and peers. Young people from families where the parents were always present and offered them their support did claim to have a higher self-esteem (Bouffard and Al, 2005), lesser symptoms of depression and lesser violent and antisocial behavior than their peers who did not enjoy the same privilege.

Relationship between Self-Esteem and Performance in School:

Cross tabulation between self-esteem and average marks obtained in school varies partially with sex, with $p=0.003$ for the boys and 0.267 for the girls.

In an earlier study, Bawa (2007) laid emphasis on the multidimensional character of self-esteem. Indeed, according to Pierrehumbert et al (1988), self-esteem is not a one and indivisible psychological reality. Instead, it would correspond to a multiplicity of impressions and feelings related to different aspects of daily experience in which the teenager could face situations which lead them to make use of their own competences and end up more or less satisfied with themselves. For Jendoubi (2002): "self-esteem is henceforth influenced by the way in which the children, then adolescents, perceive their competences in domains where success is seen as primordial".

Self-esteem depends on a multiplicity of sources, with manifestations which are difficult to clearly situate, while its dimensions are not necessarily distributed in a homogenous manner (André, 2005).

The distinction of the domains in which children evaluate their competences evolves together with cognitive development. The areas in which a teenager can internalize data from the surroundings are the school, the family and peer groups, as according to Lamia (1998): "parents, teachers, friends and mates are all persons who, vis-à-vis the children and during their existence, either display a negative or a positive behavior, leaving the concerned with traces of a self-image which results from different types of behavior. The appreciation of this image is what determines self-esteem", and according to Coopersmith (1967), it is through the interaction with teachers, peers and parents that the children gain consciousness of their value as persons.

Self-Esteem and Satisfaction with Life:

61.7% of students had a negative self-esteem while 70.4% were dissatisfied with life. The correlation is significant: self-esteem and global satisfaction with life are linked (Figure 5), academic output notwithstanding.

Conclusion:

This study on self-esteem and performance in school by teenagers in a denominational school has revealed that the prevalence of negative self-esteem amongst teenage students is very high. Significantly, the girls are much more affected than the boys. However, they still manage to produce better results in school than the boys despite not having a positive self-esteem. This suggests that the girls show proof of a certain degree of resilience which deserves to be reinforced by an adapted and sustained accompaniment for a better blossoming and development of self.

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