Are there links between children’s self-esteem and parent/child interaction in Guatemalan children?

Camilla Lundström
Are there links between children’s self-esteem and parent/child interaction in Guatemalan children?*

Camilla Lundström

This investigation examined the relations between children’s self-esteem and parent/child interaction. It also searched for a link between self-esteem and numbers of siblings, gender and working after school. 47 students from public schools in Guatemala City, Guatemala (age 10-14 years old) participated in this study (14 girls and 33 boys). Participants completed measures of Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and a questionnaire regarding Parent - Child Interactions. The study showed that there was a positive correlation in boys’ population between level of self-esteem and parent - child interaction, but a negative correlation for girls. A positive correlation in girls’ population was shown between self-esteem and number of siblings, a negative correlation was shown between self-esteem and working after school. However in boys’ population there was a positive correlation between self-esteem and working after school, and a negative correlation for siblings. There is also a skewed distribution in boys’ and girls’ answers, and no generalizations can be made because of too few respondents, therefore further studies in this area should be done.

Key words: self-esteem, child, family, parent-child interaction, gender, child labour, siblings

Introduction

Definition of self-esteem

At an everyday level, we have a clear enough idea of what we mean when we talk about self-esteem (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). Self-esteem has long been a focus in personality research. In an early study, Coopersmith (1969), found that high self-esteem was associated with “total or nearly total acceptance of the children by their parents, clearly defined and enforced limits, and the respect and latitude for individual action that exists within those defined limits” (Ho, Tafarodi, & Wild, 2010). Psychologists argue that one of mans’ primary motivations is to try to improve his/her level of self-esteem. Given its central importance for developing a fully functioning personality in a social context, researchers have focused on the determinants of self-esteem (Neiss et al., 2002).

* The author is grateful to all the children who took part in the study and to their parents for their time and participation. The author would also like to thank PhD Yetilú De Baessa from the Universidad Francisco Marroquín for all the help she received with this thesis and field study. This research was supported by Grant MFS “Minor Field Study” from SIDA.
A considerable amount of research has suggested that parenting styles and family plays an important role as determinants of self-esteem and that the transmission of self-esteem within the family is carried out through social and environmental pathways such as parenting, family structure and family pattern relationship (Neiss et al., 2002). According to Bulanda and Majumdar (Gracas et al., 1986) parental involvement conveys to the children information about their self-worth; they argue that a child's self-esteem rises when they experience another's love (Bulanda & Majumdar, 2008).

Self-esteem reflects the extent to which a person dislikes or likes oneself or the extent to which a person thinks negatively or positively about oneself (Neiss, Sedikides, & Stevenson, 2002). Self-esteem is a feeling of self-worth that makes you think you will be accepted rather than rejected by others in one’s environment (Heinonen, Keltikangas-Järvinen, & Rääkkönen, 2005). “Self-perception" and "self-esteem" is often used interchangeably. Self-Perception is often paired with the question "Who am I?" and self-esteem with the question "Am I worthy?"

Self-esteem can either be global, meaning that it reflects an overall assessment of the self, or it can be specific, meaning that it reflects an assessment of a particular domain by itself, such as physical appearance, athletic ability or academic skills (Neis et al., 2002). Self-esteem is measurable in both global and specific terms (Bodfield, Grimsley, Hagan, Phillips, & Woodthorpe, 2008). It has two basic components, one is level; high or low (Neis et al., 2002), where high self-esteem is said to reflect a relatively greater tendency to like yourself, appreciate yourself and accept yourself, and it is believed to provide greater benefits to the psychological functions than low self-esteem (Brody, Brown, & Kernis, 2000). The other is stability; (Neis et al., 2002), there are unconditional elements which are stable and independent of external events and circumstances and a conditional part which is variable (Bailey, Crocq, & Guillou, 2002).

Coopersmith defines the concept of self-esteem as the cognitive and emotional concept of an individual about the degree to which one holds attitudes of acceptance or rejection of oneself, an individual’s opinion of herself or himself. It underlies the subjects’ capacity to believe that he or she will be successful and it also contains his understanding and definition of what kind of a person he or she is, and how much he/she respects him/her-self (Baily et al., 2002). The following study uses Coopersmith’s definition.

The development of self-esteem

Self-esteem is considered to be an important indicator of the effects of child development (Bulanda, Roland, & Majumdar, 2008). The development of self-esteem is a key issue in the personal evolution of every human being (Buysse et al., 2007). It is important that children develop a clear understanding of “who I am”, and “am I worthy”, it is also important for children to internalise desirable values and rules, and to develop a positive self view (Bird, Reese, & Tripp, 2007).

Research says that self-esteem develops as a result of childhood experiences, and it continues to develop throughout life (Baily et al., 2002). Research also says that self-esteem varies with age and gender (Jungmeen, 2009). Developing self-esteem can be viewed as a constructive process, where individuals learn how to define themselves through their own behaviour and the interaction with others (Chmielewski & Maxwell, 2008). Research has shown that self-esteem drops when children enter adolescence as the children move from middle to late childhood and they formulate a more balanced view of “self”, in which both negative and positive self-representation are integrated. In this developmental stage, children increasingly base their self-evaluation upon external feedback and social comparisons and they
form a more accurate appraisal of their competence and abilities (Jungmeen, 2009). This study shows how important the development of self-esteem is to the child’s continuing development towards adulthood.

**The effects of low self-esteem**

Studies that try to identify risk factors for developing low self-esteem have mainly focused on childhood experiences, social isolation or ostracism and parenting. All these risk factors have been shown to be associated with the development of low self-esteem in childhood and the conclusion to be drawn from this is that parental involvement is a major risk factor (Miller, Warner, Weissman, & Wickramaratne, 1997).

Low self-esteem is linked with poor mental and physical health, externalizing problems, such as aggression, higher level of criminal behavior and antisocial behavior. It is also shown that low self-esteem predicts negative real-world consequences during adulthood. In two consecutive studies conducted by the Donnellan et al. (2005) with a sample of children (n = 292) from California and a sample of children from New Zealand, 11 years of age (n = 812) and 13 years of age (n = 736), one finding was that 11-year-olds with low self-esteem tended to increase in aggression by age 13. Studies argue that low self-esteem increases children's risk for behavioral problems (Jordan & Sandström, 2007). In a study of Irish youths (n = 3881), it was found that lower self-esteem was an important factor associated with deliberate self-harm among adolescents (Bird et al., 2007). Children with low self-esteem have often experienced various forms of repeated social and/or interpersonal rejections or exclusions (DeHart, Pelham, & Tennen, 2004). In addition, a lower level of self-esteem is associated with a smaller social network (Dahl, Fugl-Meyer, Jemtå, & Oberg, 2009). It is important to understand that children who develop a sense of low self-esteem will maybe not fully be able to exploit its full potential.

**The effects of high self-esteem**

High self-esteem has been shown to be associated with better mental health, improved coping ability, and a lower incidence of depression in both adolescents and adults (Bird et al., 2007). Research says that high self-esteem reflects a relatively larger tendency to love, value and accept oneself and it is believed, in general, to provide more benefits for mental health problems than low self-esteem (Miller et al., 1997).

Research shows that children who have high self-esteem exhibit the following characteristics: they see higher goals; they are better students and better decision makers; they are less likely that engage in risky behaviors; they take responsibility; they tolerate frustration better; they are proud of their accomplishments; they are more excited to try new things; they feel more accepted (Chmielewski & Maxwell, 2008), and it is also linked to better social relations and higher levels of academic achievement (Baily at al., 2002). Basco and Wolman (1994) showed in their study that social participation contributed to higher self-esteem among children and adolescents. They also found that social support from friends and parents contributed to higher self-esteem (Dahl et al., 2009). It is important for children to develop a high sense of self-esteem to be able to fully exploit their full potential.
The link between parent/child interaction and children’s self-esteem

It is possible that where there are parents who care for and support the children, there is a potential source of guidance for children and adolescents. The fact is that the perception of parental support may contribute to children and young people's self-esteem. Self-esteem is also considered a key indicator of the impact of the development period up to adolescence (Bulanda & Majumdar, 2008). The influence of parent/child interaction has long been the focus in personality research. Research says that children's self-esteem interact with parents, other family members, teachers, other adults and other children (Chmielewski & Maxwell, 2008). Researchers have suggested that the parent/child interaction quality is related to children’s self-esteem. To be more specific, prior studies have confirmed that children who receive affection, communication, and support from their parents show higher levels of self-esteem. To be more specific, prior studies have confirmed that children who receive affection, communication, and support from their parents show higher levels of self-esteem (Bulanda & Majumdar, 2008).

Coopersmith (1967) reported that parents who exhibited substantial warmth and acceptance towards the children and at the same time sets clearly defined limits, affects children’s self-esteem in a good way (Brody et al, 2000). It has been shown that in families where parents support and communicate with their children, these children have greater academic success, more enjoyable relationships with peers, greater social competence and good coping skills (Lehman & Repetti, 2007). Similarly, there are indications that poor parent/child relationship can have negative consequences for children. The lack of parental support can, for example, promote feelings of rejection among the young, thereby reducing their self-esteem (Bulanda & Majumdar, 2008). Children who come from families where parents do not support and communicate with them are proven to have poor relationships with their peers (Lehman & Repetti, 2007). The consequences of a poor relationship between parent and child can be good evidence of how important a factor the parental support is for self-esteem in children and adolescents in relation to other factors (Bulanda & Majumdar, 2008). Children’s perception of what their parents think of them can affect the child’s opinion and feelings and can give clues about how parents of different communication styles can shape children’s self-esteem (Brody et al, 2000). Young people even these coming from supportive families, report less trust and communication with parents than younger children do. It is possible that at a certain age they communicate more with their peers to fulfill the need for support. Parental physical presence may be with the above evidence proving to be an important factor in parenting for children. Although the physical presences of parents do not necessarily have to be of emotional nature, some researchers suggest that the presence during meals and at night is associated with less behavior problems too (Bulanda & Majumdar, 2008).

In this paper a potential link between parent/child interaction in early childhood and self-esteem is investigated. Children’s early interaction with their parents is associated with the degree of their developing self-esteem and therefore it seems reasonable that parental participation in children’s lives should be linked to it (DeHart et al., 2004), and that early familial experiences can have an effect on the development on children’s self-esteem (Brody et al., 2000). Overall, it seems as parents’ involvements in the lives of their children are associated to have an impact on children’s self-esteem (Bulanda & Majumdar, 2008).
Self-esteem and child labour

In recent years there has been increasing international concern over the number of child workers. This global development affects both developed and developing countries. There are an estimated 218 million children aged 5 to 17 years involved in child labour worldwide (Bankart, Carpintero, Matar, Thabet, & Vostanis, 2010).

The highest level of child labour in Central America is in Guatemala (41%), so it constitutes a major social problem for the country to deal with (De Baessa, 2009). Many of these children are at a stage in their psychosocial development where critical aspects of their identity as self-esteem are being formed. Negative and positive influence helps to characterize their development at this critical stage and it affects their perceptions of themselves (Odusote, Omokhodion, & Omokhodion, 2005). Children develop positive self-esteem through feeling needed and competent in what they do. When children see that their efforts are valued and respected it is likely that their self-worth will improve. This may include working as well as appreciation from their parents or friends (Woodhead, 2004). In a study of Guatemalan children it was reported that children who work and go to school have lower self-esteem than children who do not work (De Baessa, 2009). Working children are more vulnerable to work-related illnesses and injuries than adults. They are also less aware of the risks of the profession and the place of work. Approximately one third of children in developing countries have not yet complete four years of education (Bankart et al., 2010). Very little research was found regarding possible correlation between child behaviour and self-esteem.

Self-esteem and gender

The relationship between gender and self-esteem is well studied, and research has generally shown that boys have higher self-esteem than girls in their teens (Byrne, Espnes, Moksnes, & Moljord, 2010). A key component of self-esteem is people’s perception of gender as a whole (Dolan-Pascoe, Gentile, Grabe, Maitino, Twenge, & Wells, 2009). Young girls show a lower opinion and perception of themselves than young boys (Baily et al., 2002). If interactions with others around a particular domain are positive, girls have higher self-esteem in that domain. Theories that negative interactions often occur around females’ physical appearance can be one explanation why females have lower self-esteem. Media promoting extremely high standards with regards to female beauty, physical fitness, appearance etcetera (Dolan-Pascoe et al., 2009).

When children get older there is an increase in their self-knowledge, as well as an increase in sensitivity and awareness to the opinions of others. For girls, the importance of the psychological and emotional investment of interpersonal success has a more significant role than for boys. Girls are also more vulnerable to any negative feedback from peers than boys (Byrne et al., 2010), and research say that the growth in girls’ self-esteem decreases in middle school-age and increases for boys at the same age (Falci, 2011). It is suggested that males will score higher than females in athletic measures of self-esteem, and the gender gap in athletic self-esteem widens during adolescence (Dolan-Pascoe et al., 2009). Studies say that females often perform better academically but this does not always result in girls having higher academic self-esteem. This may occur because teachers give less positive feedback and more negative feedback to girls than to boys (Dolan-Pascoe et al., 2009).

Francis (1998), found that boys have higher scores than girls in Coopersmith Inventory School Form and he also found statistically significant differences between gender in the
responses to 11 items, 10 of which were more likely to be approved by male respondents than by female respondents; he means thereby that this is evidence that the scale may show differences between gender and the level of self-esteem (Francisco, Hills, Leslie, & Ponsoda, 2008). James argues (Dolan-Pascoe et al., 2009), that people will feel high self-esteem when they have performed well and will perform well when they have high self-esteem (Dolan-Pascoe et al., 2009).

**Self-esteem and siblings**

Those with one or more siblings often claim that this relationship is the most enduring one, lasting from childhood to old age (Fortuna, Groh, Haydon, Holland, & Roisman, 2011). The sibling relationship is a unique relationship in an individuals’ life. Sibling relationships are often complex in nature; with elements of competition (for resources and parental attention) and the inevitable conflicts they bring, but also those of nurturing warmth and love.

It has become clear that the sibling relationship is an important resource in children’s social and emotional development. The relationship is emotionally charged, both positively and negatively depending on the quality of the relationship (Buist, 2010). Sibling relationship is usually at its most intense in childhood and often becomes more distant during adolescence, when friends become more interesting, but still young people often think that siblings are the most significant source of companionship, care and intimacy. Sibling relationship is also unique, given the sharing of family background. Research says that parents’ behaviour is the emotional tone of their interaction that is transferred to the sibling system, and plays an important role in sibling relationships during the first early years. In other words: a parent - child relationship that is characterized by physical punishment, control and maternal intrusiveness is associated with aggression and conflict between siblings, while parents with tolerance and sensitivity are associated with friendly sibling relationships (Fortun et al., 2011).

Researchers have found that social comparison processes are often linked to self-improvement motives. Test results show that it is better for the self-esteem to make downward comparisons with individuals, in this case, siblings who are considered inferior to themselves. Researchers believe this mechanism to be an effective tool for raising an individuals’ self-esteem and that it also can be very important in understanding complex within-family relationships and processes (Feinberg, Hetherington, Neiderhiser, Simmens, & Reiss, 2000). Sibling research has shown that the influence of birth order is important for personal development. Older children show greater attention to a given task, greater pleasure in doing well, greater enjoyment of group activities, and greater interest in getting social recognition by assuming leadership roles than their younger siblings. First born children are considered to be more responsible and more intellectually developed than subsequent children. This might be explained by parents have higher expectations of their first-born children than in later-born children. Researches also show that first-born children have a stronger belief in themselves than later-born children, who also show a more self-demeaning behavior (Burton & Parks, 1994).

**Country background/family structures in Guatemala**

It is important to understand the background were the study was conducted in order to be able to see the existing differences with other countries. Guatemala is an underdeveloped country with a multilingual, multicultural population where at least 22 languages are spoken, and with a total population of approximately 12 million. The population is very young; the average age is
18.9 years old. The annual population growth is 2.26 per cent and the life expectancy is 69.8 years (CIA World Fact Book, 2006). Only 69 per cent have finished primary school. 37 per cent of the population lives in poverty, surviving on less than 2US dollar a day (World Bank World Development Indicators, 2004). It is estimated that 55.4 per cent of children under the age of 15 work to contribute to their families (De Baessa, 2009).

Aim and research questions

The country's historical background and its state of chronic poverty, widespread unemployment, broken family structures, social migration and mobility is very likely to put many of its children at risk of developing low self-esteem, which could have a devastating impact on a child's life. There is not one single cause of low self-esteem and it is an extremely difficult task to separate these various elements. Low self-esteem can be a serious impairment with serious consequences for relationships, learning and psychosocial development, anti-social behavior, less support from parents and teachers, poorer problem-solving styles, and lower perceived social identity. Like adults, children can suffer from low self-esteem, but unlike adults, however, they may not be able to articulate what they are feeling and ask for help. It is important to learn about children suffering from low self-esteem to ensure they are given the proper help they need (Cassidy, 2008).

The main aim of this research was to study self-esteem among Guatemala children, to see if there is a link between parent/child interaction and the level of self-esteem among children of age 10-14 years old. This research also examined whether there were links between levels of children’s self-esteem and possible child labor, as well as the numbers of siblings. How much of the variation in self-esteem can be explained by gender, number of siblings, the interaction parent/child and if the child contribute to the family by working as well as going to school?

Method

Participants

The participants for this investigation included 47 children from the age of 10-14 years, ($M = 11.6$, $SD = 1.8$), 33 boys and 14 girls from two urban schools in Guatemala City, Guatemala. The sample consists of children from the same ethnic backgrounds, Latino. All except two participants had siblings, nine of the participants were not living together with their parents, all except three participants were living in a house, almost all of the participants’ parents/the adults which they live with works, seven of the participants were working after school and nine were working occasionally. All children children received an allowance in return for participating in the study (even the two who did not participate).

Measures

Self-esteem was measured by Coopersmith's self-esteem inventory. The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI), is a 58-item self-report instrument to which each subject responds “like me”, or “unlike me”. In the original development of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, good self-esteem was defined by the judgment of five psychologists who sorted a
fifty item inventory of self-descriptive statements into two groups: those indicative of high self-esteem and those indicative of low self-esteem (Francis, 1997).

The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory was developed through research to assess attitude toward oneself in general, and in specific contexts. The CSEI consists of four subscales designed to assess perception of self (General self subscale: 26 items, e.g., “I am pretty sure of myself”), peers, (Social Self-Peer subscale: 8 items, e.g., “I am popular with kids my own age.”), parents, (Home-Parents-subscale: 8 items, e.g., “My parent usually consider my feelings.”) and school, (School-Academic subscale: 8 items, e.g., “I am proud of my school work.”). The total self-score was computed by summing up the four subscale scores, the sum of the four sub-scales, representing the total SEI score, ranked between 0-100 (Cicchetti & Jungmeen, 2009). There are two forms, a School Form for the ages 8-15 and an Adult Form for the ages 16 and older (Cicchetti & Jungmeen, 2009).

The present study was measured with the Spanish translation of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, in its school form. It is a questionnaire that contains a set of 58 items which allows children to estimate their perception of self by evaluating whether the sentences describe them or not (either “like me”, or “unlike me”). These statements describe feelings, opinions, and reactions typical of the various everyday situations experienced by a pupil, 8-14 years old. Each item was rated as “1 = “like me”, or “2 = unlike me”, (Bailey, Crocq, & Guillon, 2002). There are no exact criteria for high, medium and low levels of self-esteem; it varies with the characteristics of the sample, the distribution of scores, and theoretical and clinical considerations, but the guidelines given in this study are meant to be general guidelines and should be used with caution. High scores correspondent to high self-esteem, the upper quartile generally can be considered to indicate levels of high self-esteem, the lower quartile generally indicates low self-esteem and the interquartile range generally indicates medium level of self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1981). Additional items are included that holds a Lie Scale, containing 8 items; “I never worry about anything”, “I always do the right thing”, “I am never happy”, “I always know what to say to people”, these items are scored separately, and is not part of the final score (Bailly et al., 2002).

The Self-esteem Inventory has been widely used in research and clinical practice, with both individuals and in groups. The reliability and validity of this instrument are well established (Baily et al., 2002). Internal consistency measures with Cronach’s alpha were found to be 0.788.

*Parent/child interaction measured by questionnaire.* A questionnaire was developed to acquire background information and to get a clearer picture of each child’s situation, more precise details of the social and economic circumstances, and the ethnicity of the participant. The questionnaire is divided into two parts; the first one containing seven background questions: “your age?”’, “your sex?”’, “are you living with your parents?”’, answered “yes, no or living with someone else”, “how many siblings do you have?”, “do you live in an apartment, a house or other accommodation?”, “the adults who are living at your house, do they work?”, answered “yes, no or sometimes”, and “are you working after school?”, answered “yes, no or sometimes”. The second part contains questions about how the children interact with their parents; “are you dinning together?”, “do the adults that live in your house ask you how your school day was?”, “do the adults who lives in your house ask if you have homework?”, “do the adults that live in your house ask if you need help with your homework?”, “if you have a problem, can you talk to the adults who live in your house?”, “do the adults who live in your house yell at you?”, “do you yell back at them?”, “do the adults who live in your house say that you are a good child?”, “do the adults who live in your house say that you are intelligent?”, “do the adults who live in your house say that you are a bad child?”, “do the adults who live in your
house say that they love you?”, “do you say that you love them?”; “do you feel loved by your family?” The second part questions are answered by “always”, “sometimes”, “rarely”, and “never”. The items were scored with 1 (always) = 4p, 2 (sometimes) = 3p, 3 (rarely) = 2p or 4 (never) = 1 point. All questions were scored in this way, except questions 6, 7 and 10 which were scored with 1 (always) = 1 p, 2 (sometimes) = 2p, 3 (rarely) = 3p and 4 (never) = 4p. The total self-score was computed by summing the points; which is representing the total parent/child interaction questionnaire score, ranked “between” 0 to 52. Mean score for all the participant was 42.81, with a standard deviation of 5.97, while mean score for girls was 43.14 with a standard deviation of 6.66, and for boys were 42.67 with a standard deviation of 5.75.

In this study, the Cronbach’s alpha reached a level of .645 and to get a higher level of reliability, one question was deleted and not used at all (“do the adults who live in your house say that you are a bad child?”), which raised Cronbach’s alpha to .745.

Procedure

Phone calls were made to public schools in urban neighbourhoods to ask if they were willing to be included in this study. Two schools answered: one boy school and one girl school. The research was made by a quantitative approach. There were two questionnaires included in this study; parent/child interaction and CSEI, which is a tool measuring children’s self-esteem. The two questionnaires was stitched together and numbered, this to more easily match a respondents CSEI score to the questionnaire about the interactions with parents. Numbers instead of names prevented the research assistant from seeing any respondent’s answers. The schools that agreed to participate in the study were asked to have the children fill in the questionnaires during a school day. Two visits were made at each school one week apart and lasted approximately 1 hour/ 3 hours. One visit to get to know the children and to distribute consent forms that the children would get the parents to sign to participate in the study and another visit to collect the consent forms and to complete the study.

The children were told that the study of course was anonymous for everyone involved. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and they could choose not to participate and that they could withdraw their participation at any time without explanation. The children were also informed about the ethical research rules (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002), “The information requirement”; the researcher should inform the current research task purpose, “The consent requirement”; Participants in the survey have the right to determine their involvement at any time, “The confidentiality requirement”; details of all persons in an investigation shall be given the utmost confidentiality and personal data should be stored in such a way that unauthorized persons cannot access them. The question of confidentiality is closely connected with the issue of publicity and privacy. Researchers should note that the law governing this area is difficult to interpret and subject to reform and the last requirement “The use requirement”; that data collected on individuals may only be used for research purposes. All children except two boys were given permission to participate in the study.

The questionnaires directions were read aloud and the children followed along on their inventory booklets; this to ensure that it was clearly understood by all the respondents. Once it was certain that all children understood the task, they were allowed to open their booklets and begin. The children were told that since all of the questions were about them, there were no incorrect answers. They were also told that if they were confused or did not know the meaning of a word or a question they could ask the researcher for help. All of the children indicated that they understood the instructions. Verbal feedback is important for young children to help
complete a task (Chmielewski, & Maxwell, 2008), and throughout all the testing period the researcher gave verbal cues about their progress.

**Results**

Mean score for all the participants was 60.4 with a *standard deviation* of 13.93, while mean score for girls was 51.0 with a *standard deviation* of 11.25, and for boys were 64.4 with a *standard deviation* of 13.11.

Results in Table 1 show the mean on the CSEI scale and the mean from the parent/child interaction questionnaire. Boys have a higher mean on the total score on CSEI than girls, but girls have higher mean on the parent/child interaction questionnaire. The result shows that there are differences between boys and girls scoring in the questionnaire about parent/child interaction and scoring in the CSEI.

**Table 1**

*Means and standard deviation of the two questionnaires CSEI and parent/child interaction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CSEI</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>51.00</td>
<td>11.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>64.42</td>
<td>13.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>60.43</td>
<td>13.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent/child</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>43.14</td>
<td>6.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42.67</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42.81</td>
<td>5.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The relationship between level of self-esteem (as measured by the CSEI), parent/child interaction (as measured by a questionnaire), gender, numbers of siblings and whether the children work after school was investigated using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. Table 2 shows the correlations between the variables. Higher score on the CSEI (high level of self-esteem) was associated with high score on the interaction parent/child questionnaire; a significant positive correlation was shown. The correlation between CSEI and gender was shown to be positively correlated too.
Table 2
*Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between CSEI and independent variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. CSEI</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Parent/child Interaction</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Gender</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Siblings</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Work</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P < .05, **P < .001

The results in Table 3 indicates that in the female population almost all the variables were negatively correlated; this means that higher scores on CSEI (higher self-esteem) were followed by lower scores on the independent variables. CSEI and numbers of siblings were positively correlated; meaning that higher score on CSEI were followed by a higher number of siblings, $r = .256, n = 14, p < .05$. In the male population on the other hand there was a positive correlation among all the variables, except between CSEI and number of siblings that were negatively correlated. A statistical significance was found between CSEI and parent/child interaction, $p = .001$.

Table 3
*Comparing Correlation coefficients for gender and CSEI – independent variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>$r$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. CSEI - Parent/child Interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-.107</td>
<td>.358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>.580</td>
<td>.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. CSEI – Work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-.226</td>
<td>.219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>.234</td>
<td>.281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. CSEI - Siblings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.256</td>
<td>.189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>-.144</td>
<td>.219</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**$p < .001$**

A multiple regression model showed an adjusted $R^2$ square value of .269 which means that 26.9% of the variance in the dependent variable CSEI could be explained by independent
variables; gender, work or not, parent/child interaction and number of siblings. The statistical significance of the result was made by ANOVA and presented $p < .005$. The results of a multiple regression analysis are presented in Table 4 and show that gender and parent/child interaction contributes to predict the dependent variable CSEI and are the only variable which was significantly associated with CSEI. Gender was the variable that could explain the largest variance in the dependent variable CSEI; it was shown that boys had higher level of self-esteem than girls. The variable parent/child interaction could also explain some variance in the dependent variable, followed by if they work or not. Numbers of siblings could not explain anything in this model.

Table 4  
*Multiple regression analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>$b^*$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>.468</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>-.020</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>.879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>.304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/child interaction</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>.335</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>.011*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$  

**Discussion**

The results in this investigation show that there is a positive correlation between boys self-esteem and parent/child interaction. Boys also shows a positive correlation between the level of self-esteem and work or not but they show a negative correlation between the level of self-esteem and siblings. In the girls' population on the other hand were a negative correlation between the level of self-esteem and the interaction parent/child. They also show a negative correlation between the level of self-esteem and if they work or not, but the result shows a positive correlation between the level of self-esteem and siblings.

The study also examined how much of the variation in self-esteem that can be explained by gender, number of siblings, the interaction parent/child and if the child contribute to the family by working as well as going to school. The result shows that level of self-esteem – gender and parent/child interaction explains an additional 32% of the variance in CSEI. 19.9% of the variance in the CSEI can be explained by gender and 11.2% by parent/child interaction. The variance if they work or not could only be explained by 1.7% and siblings could not explain anything in this this model.

**Parent/child interaction and the level of self-esteem**

This study shows that the level of Guatemalan children’s self-esteem was related to parent/child interactions, in the boys’ population but not in the girls’ population. It show that boy participants who recalled having had more nurturing and caring interactions with their parents also reported higher level of self-esteem, but this could not be shown in girl participants. In addition, the relation between the levels of self-esteem and parent/child interaction was significant among boys. Based on previous research data, where children
reported higher level of self-esteem having parents engaged in more caring behaviors (DeHart et al., 2004), this study could only show this in the boys’ population. Those findings are not consistent with earlier studies such as Bulanda and Majumdar (2008), because it shows different results whether you are a boy or a girl. Earlier research shows that there is little or no differences in gender and closeness to family, but boys get more positive feedback than girls and that there overall seems to be a very small difference in gender self-esteem and family closeness (Dolan-Pascoe et al., 2009). But in this study it was shown that girls scored higher on the parent/child interaction form than boys and still they had lower self-esteem than boys in the CSEI. Boys on the other hand scored higher than girls on the SCEI.

Social approval, friendships and peer relationships are important for self-esteem and people with high self-esteem often have closer personal relationships. Research indicates that girls usually have a closer relationship with their peers but girls’ social relationships can also be problematic. Girls react to social rejection by retaliating and boys do not in general. This creates an element of fragility in female friendships, and studies show that girls had more previous friendship that had ended and shorter friendships than boys (Dolan-Pascoe et al., 2009). Previous studies did not take in consideration these earlier findings and these findings may have a big impact on why the girls in this study had lower levels of self-esteem than boys. Reese et al., (2007) say that parents must be aware if the social environment they create for their children is a positive or negative one. Reese et al., (2007) also thinks, that the environment is important for the family network, that it is there you can analyze the various family problems you have and that it is there you will find solutions to them. Although this study cannot prove that a poor parent/child interaction affects the level of self-esteem it has in previous studies been shown an association between these subjects (Bulanda & Majumdar, 2008). The quality of parent/child interaction that lasts, start early in life and can be correlated with children's self-esteem, this can in no way be explained away, especially for the younger children (DeHart et. al., 2004).

Gender and the level of self-esteem
This study confirm earlier results on the subject: boys often seem to have higher levels of self-esteem than girls (Byrne et al., 2010). The results are thought to provide further evidence for the presence of gender differences in the levels of self-esteem in children, and it is also the strongest finding in this study. At the age of 6-9, children are beginning to make comparisons between themselves and others and they are at a critical stage in the development of the “self”. Children around 9 years of age, is an excellent age-group for examining the relationship between self-esteem and the environment as this is a particularly critical period for potentially increasing self-esteem (Chmielewski, & Maxwell, 2008). Researchers argue that girls are more vulnerable to negativity in general and therefore have lower self-esteem than boys. This becomes apparent when considering the effects of the overwhelmingly one-sided physical ideals children are being bombarded with through media and television; where physical perfection is all-important (Dolan-Pascoe, et al., 2009). The recognized gender differences in self-esteem in this study may be an indicator that association of self-esteem and parental involvement may differ between genders.

Child labor and the level of self-esteem
This study examined the possibility of a link between levels of children’s self-esteem and possible child labor. Previous research show different results in terms of the level of the child’s self-esteem and if they work after school or not. Some research indicates that children who work and receive credit for it can develop high self-esteem (Woodhead, 2004), while other research indicates the exact opposite (De Baessa, 2009). In the girls’ population there was a
negative correlation between the level of self-esteem and if they work or not after school, which means that the higher they scored on CSEI, the more they were working. In the boys’ population there was a positive correlation between the level of self-esteem and if they work or not, meaning that the higher they score on the CSEI, the less they are working.

**Numbers of siblings and the level of self-esteem**

This study also examined the level of self-esteem and as well as the numbers of siblings. Result show a negative correlation between numbers of siblings and the level of self-esteem in the boys’ population, which means that the higher score they had on the CSEI, the more siblings they had. The result show that in the girls’ population there was a positive correlation between numbers of siblings and the level of self-esteem, meaning the higher score on the CSEI, the fewer siblings they had. No previous research was found in this subject and further studies have to be done to see if numbers of siblings have any effect on the level of self-esteem. It is known from previous studies that the birth order of the children may have an impact on self-esteem. First born children are expected to be responsible and intelligent, high performing, with greater belief in themselves than children born later (Burton & Parks, 1994). Even if earlier studies show that sibling relationship is important for the child’s social and emotional development (Buist, 2010), it may also depend on the order in which they are born and in this study we do not know in which order the child was born.

**To be considered**

The findings of this study answer several important questions about the potential origins of self-esteem; it also raises new ideas for further research, such as, could a long term research determine the precise causal relation between parent/child interactions in Guatemalan children. The small sample size in this study should be acknowledged as it limits the ability to generalize the findings. The parent/child interaction questionnaire was developed by the researcher and also graded by the same. Cultural issues may be relevant for the grading of the questionnaire even if the environment in which the survey was conducted was taken in consideration. In Sweden for example, we value individuality and children are encouraged to develop a strong sense of “self”. In other cultures, the value of being a part of the society or group has a greater importance and individuality may be less valuable (Chmielewski, & Maxwell, 2008). Mruk (Jindal-Snape, & Miller, 2008), argues that there are difficulties in arriving at a fundamental structure of self-esteem. He also points out the fact that the subject is studied from both sociological and psychological perspectives and therefore includes a wide variety of acceptable research methods, and involves some special measurement difficulties related to validity, but the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventories, in its various forms provides some of the most commonly used measurements of self-esteem in studies conducted schoolchildren (Brody et al., 2000). The CSEI are well established and have been used in many investigations before and is therefore considered as a reliable and valid instrument (Baily et al., 2002).

**Further research**

Any further research will require a larger sample to be able to generalize how the level of self-esteem is affected by the interaction parent/child. It would also be interesting to have a larger sample of females to examine if the answers on CSEI and the parent/child interaction questionnaire show the same results. For purposes of statistical reliability it would be perhaps sensible to measure the same set of subjects with other kinds of self-esteem inventories to see if the results turn out to be the same and, if possible, re-testing the same set of subjects after a couple of years to assess the stability or change in self-esteem over time.
Despite much research, scientists have only begun to scratch the surface of what influences children’s level of self-esteem (DeHart et al., 2004). A great deal of additional work will be necessary before researchers know exactly which variables the phenomenon of self-esteem most are affected by. A long-term study would be to gather as much information as possible about the causes of children’s level of self-esteem in Guatemala, in an attempt to find out which specific factors influence the symptom and to do a comparative study of the same relational circumstances from a Swedish view-point. Cultural differences can have a significant impact on how children see themselves (Chmielewski, & Maxwell, 2008).

The results of this investigation show that there are a significant correlation between the strength of the interactions between parent and child, and the level of self-esteem in boys, but not in girls. It is also shown in previous findings that boys have stronger self-esteem than girls. Regarding the relationship between children’s self-esteem and whether or not he/she works after school or not, and the number of siblings, no statistical significance can be found. However, there are indications in the material of this study of a causal relationship between stress and emotional states in adolescents: The relationship between children’s self-esteem and moral self: Links to parent–child conversations regarding emotion. Social Development, 16, 460-478.

References


