

NAVIGATING IDENTITY- EXPLORING SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE LOW SELF-ESTEEM AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN SELECTED SCHOOLS, ACCRA, GHANA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: The study aimed at examining the influence of sociocultural factors on the self-esteem of adolescents aged between 12 and 15 years.

Statement of the Problem: Adolescents in low-income environments frequently experience low self-esteem due to multiple sociocultural challenges, including weak family support, peer pressure, and exposure to bullying. Despite increasing attention to adolescent mental health, few studies have systematically evaluated how these sociocultural factors collectively shape self-esteem outcomes among young adolescents in such settings.

Research Methodology: The study used a quantitative design, collecting data from 416 adolescents aged 12–15 years through the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and a sociocultural questionnaire. A sample of 124 was analyzed using SPSS with descriptive and inferential statistics to examine relationships between variables.

Findings: The study established that 37.8% of adolescents exhibited low self-esteem. Peer pressure (62.1%), inadequate family support (54.0%), and family-related challenges (51.6%) were the leading contributing factors, while media influence was relatively low (25.8%), reflecting limited access in low-income contexts. Academic performance was the strongest predictor, where higher academic self-ratings were linked with better self-esteem ($p < 0.023$). Moderate support from church leaders ($p < 0.043$) and recognizing bullying as a key influence ($p < 0.011$) were also associated with improved self-esteem.

Conclusion: The study concludes that family support, peer relations, and academic encouragement play a significant role in shaping adolescent self-esteem..

Recommendation: It is recommended that collaborative interventions involving schools, families, and religious institutions be implemented to build resilience, reduce bullying, and promote positive self-esteem among adolescents.

Keywords: *Adolescents, sociocultural factors, low self-esteem, self-concept*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Adolescence is a significant developmental stage marked by heightened susceptibility to changes in self-esteem, influenced by various environmental and social factors that shape self-perception (Pfeifer, et al., 2018). Self-esteem, the evaluative aspect of self-concept, plays a crucial role in the psychological development of adolescents, influencing their well-being, academic engagement, and social interactions (Dunnigan, 2019). During adolescence, a period marked by rapid psychosocial changes, self-esteem is particularly susceptible to external influences (Birkeland et al., 2012). Developing a robust sense of self is essential not only for individual mental health but also for favorable societal results, including a lower risk of depression and increased life satisfaction (Cribb et al., 2016; Ahulu, Gyasi-Gyamrah, & Anum, 2020).

Worldwide, low self-esteem in adolescents has been linked to a higher risk of depression, disengagement from academics, and social isolation (Bahar, et al., 2024). Research conducted in the United States highlights the protective benefits of extracurricular activities, associating involvement in clubs and sports with improved self-worth, reduced dropout rates, and enhanced social integration (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021). On the other hand, widespread socio-cultural pressures—such as the pervasive impact of media, bullying, peer conformity, and academic stress have consistently been shown to undermine adolescents' self-image and self-esteem (Dunnigan, 2019; Xian & Ruxim, 2023).

Regionally, research conducted in sub-Saharan Africa highlights the significant influence of socio-cultural and environmental factors on the mental health of adolescents. In Nigeria, adolescents with limited social support exhibited markedly lower self-esteem, irrespective of their family's financial status, suggesting that emotional and community support may be more crucial than material wealth in protecting self-esteem (Edet, et al., 2023). In Nairobi, Kenya, qualitative studies have indicated that students' low self-esteem is frequently associated with adverse intra- and interpersonal relationships, including bullying, academic stress, and a lack of psychosocial support, suggesting the prevalence of these stressors in urban schools across Africa (Kibuthu & Muasa, 2023).

Explicitly focusing on Ghana, recent studies indicate the crucial impact of socio-cultural factors on the development of adolescent self-esteem. Quarcoo (2013) identified essential factors influencing self-worth among Ghanaians namely character, identity, attractiveness, achievement, belongingness, and autonomy that arise within collectivist cultural contexts. These dimensions of self-evaluation are influenced not only by individual assessment but also

by social comparison and communal standards (Asah-Ayeh, 2017). Asah Ayeh's research conducted in Accra has highlighted body dissatisfaction, familial pressure, and social comparison, particularly through selfies and media, as significant elements contributing to reduced body-esteem and increased psychological distress (Asah-Ayeh, 2017). Moreover, self-esteem has been associated with life satisfaction and positive attitudes towards school among Ghanaian girls, underscoring its role as a protective factor in educational involvement (Bahar, et al., 2023).

Other studies conducted in Ghana have highlighted the significant influence of parenting and family dynamics on the development of self-esteem in adolescents. Kugbey et al., (2015) found, in their research within the Volta Region, that parenting style has a significant impact on both self-esteem and academic performance. Specifically, authoritative parenting was associated with elevated self-esteem levels among adolescents. Similarly, Segbefia (2013), in a study assessing the effects of parental status at a senior high school in Ghana, discovered that adolescents from intact-parent families reported notably higher self-esteem and lower levels of depression when compared to their counterparts from single-parent households. While these prior studies in Ghana have largely examined individual and family-related predictors of adolescent self-esteem, little attention has been given to the broader sociocultural environment. Factors such as peer pressure, church involvement, school-related stressors, cultural expectations, social media influences, and varying levels of social support intersect to shape adolescents' self-concept. In particular, studies targeting low self-esteem in adolescents in Ghana and its relation to social factors are scarce in the existing literature.

This study addresses the critical gap by systematically evaluating the multidimensional socio-cultural determinants of low self-esteem among Ghanaian adolescents, to inform targeted interventions that mitigate its impact. The socio-cultural factors will be operationalized through the direct collection of adolescents' opinions on peer pressure, school-related stressors, cultural expectations, church engagement, and social media influence, among others. The objectives of this study are threefold: (i) to assess the prevalence of low self-esteem among adolescents in Krowor Municipality, Accra (ii) .examines the socio-cultural factors that contribute to low self-esteem, particularly among adolescents using determinants, including peer dynamics, family support, church involvement, and academic performance on self-esteem outcomes, and (iii) to identify which factors exert the strongest predictive power on low self-esteem levels through statistical analysis.

Based on prior evidence, we hypothesize that high peer pressure and negative social media experiences will be associated with lower self-esteem, while moderate levels of church engagement and strong cultural identity will be positively associated with self-esteem. The following research questions guide the analysis: How do socio-cultural factors shape adolescent self-esteem in Krowor Municipality? Which sociocultural aspects amplify or mitigate these effects? The focus on Krowor Municipality provides a policy-salient context: as a peri-urban setting, it combines characteristics of both resource-limited communities and expanding urban schools, thereby exposing adolescents to diverse socio-cultural pressures within constrained institutional support structures. Insights from this setting can therefore inform targeted interventions applicable to similar Ghanaian and sub-Saharan contexts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative research design grounded in the positivist paradigm. The positivist philosophical orientation, as outlined by Cohen et al. (2017), informed the formulation of the research objective, the development of data collection instruments, and the application of inferential statistical analyses.

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire comprising three main sections: (i) researcher-developed socio-demographic information, (ii) researcher-developed socio-cultural section and (iii) an assessment of self-esteem utilizing the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). The RSES is a widely validated 10-item Likert-type scale designed to measure global self-worth. The 10-items on the scale have five articulated positively and five negatively. Participants express their level of agreement with each statement using a four-point Likert scale, which ranges from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The overall score is derived by aggregating the responses, where higher scores signify elevated self-esteem. For the positively framed statements (1, 2, 4, 6, and 7), the scoring system is as - Strongly Agree = 4 points; Agree = 3 points; Disagree = 2 point; Strongly Disagree = 1 point. Conversely, for the negatively framed statements (3, 5, 8, 9, and 10), the scoring is inverted- Strongly Agree = 1 point; Agree = 2 point; Disagree = 3 points; Strongly Disagree = 4 points. A tally was then done resulting in a total score ranging from 0 to 40. A higher score is indicative of a greater level of self-esteem, thus 10 to 25 points: Low self-esteem; 26 to 30 points: Normal self-esteem; and 31 to 40 points: High self-esteem. Higher scores on the scale indicate higher levels of self-esteem, while lower scores denote lower levels (Wood et al., 2021). It demonstrates

strong psychometric properties, including internal consistency coefficients ranging from 0.77 to 0.88 and test-retest reliability coefficients between 0.82 and 0.93 (Chukwu, 2023).

The research was conducted in selected schools within the Krowor Municipality in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana, under the auspices of the Ghana Education Service Municipal Directorate. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select the schools, ensuring alignment with criteria central to the study's objective. Specifically, two schools were purposively chosen based on their comparable socio-economic profiles, peri-urban locations, ethnically and culturally diverse student populations, and demonstrated administrative support for mental health-related initiatives.

The target population consisted of students aged 12 to 15 years who were transitioning across grade levels in Junior High School, specifically from grade 6 to 7, grade 7 to 8, and grade 8 to 9. Upon receiving official permission to access the schools, eligible participants were identified in collaboration with designated school personnel, who assisted in screening for inclusion criteria. Only students who had returned signed parental consent forms and provided their own assent were included in the administration of the research instruments.

RESULTS

The distribution of adolescents across the various schools participating in the test is presented in Table 1. A total of 416 adolescents participated in both schools, with 169 males (40.6%) and 247 females (approximately 59.4%). The overall self-esteem levels of the candidates, along with the distribution of these levels by gender, are presented in Figure 1.

It can be inferred that among the adolescents who participated, most had low self-esteem, representing 37.8% (157 students) of all participants. Approximately one-third (33.3%) of the students exhibited normal levels of self-esteem (Figure 1a). High self-esteem was less prevalent among adolescents, which was about 28.9% as observed in Figure 1a. In boys, normal self-esteem achieved the highest prevalence, at 38.5%, as observed in Figure 1b. The prevalence of low self-esteem among adolescent boys was 27.8%, the lowest among the three levels. In contrast to the boys, girls with low self-esteem had the highest prevalence, with 110 girls exhibiting low self-esteem, which accounted for 44.7% (Figure 1c). It can therefore be established that adolescent girls have a negative self-worth compared to boys. Only 25.6% of the girls exhibited high levels of self-esteem.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants by School and Gender

School	Grade	Number of Students	
		Male	Female
Presby School	Grade 7	21	28
	Grade 8	29	60
	Grade 9	34	48
	Total	84	136
Quaye Nungua	Grade 7	33	39
	Grade 8	36	38
	Grade 9	16	34
	Total	85	111
Overall Total	416	169	247

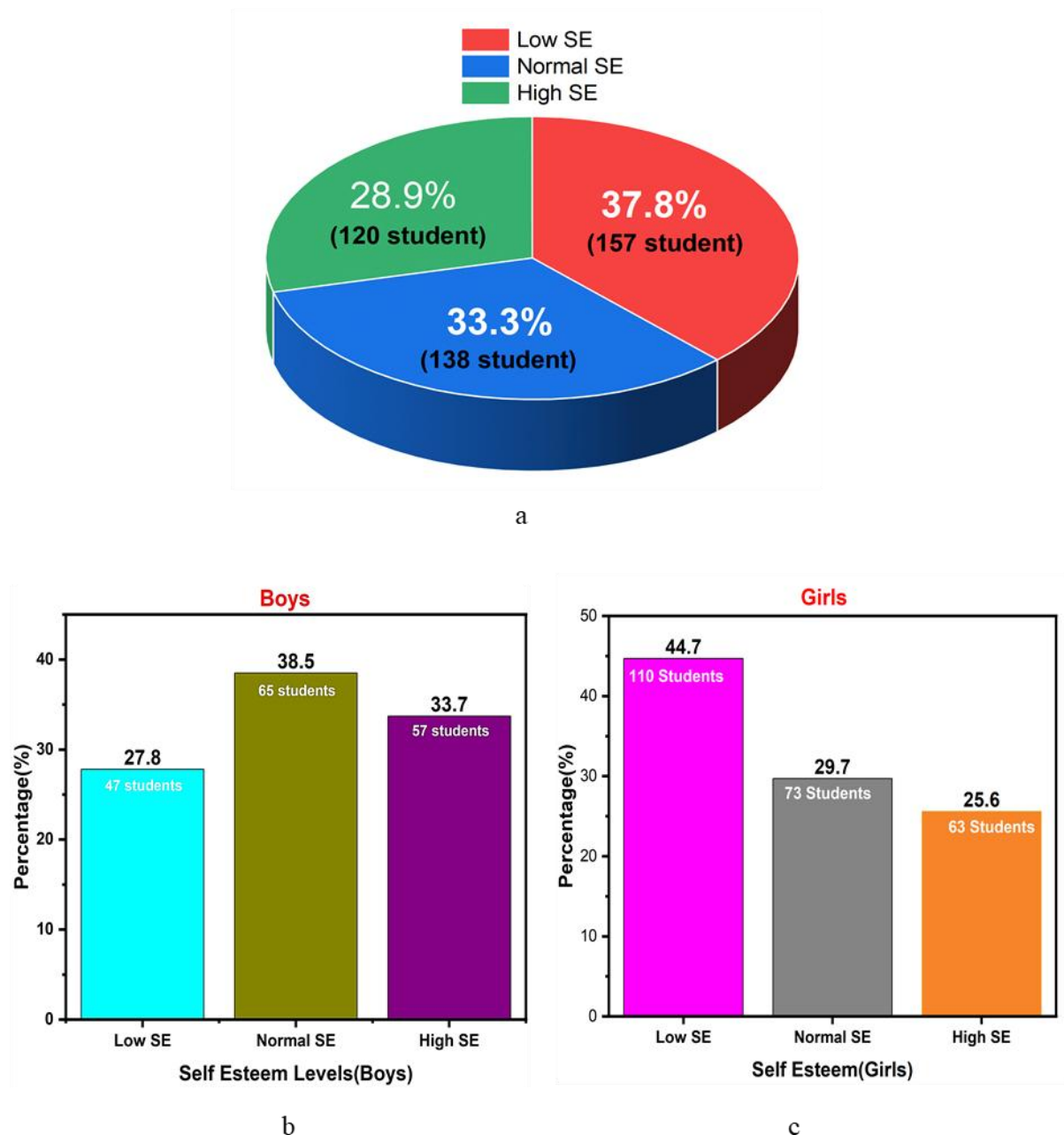


Figure 1: Distribution of Self-Esteem Levels for the Participants (a) Overall Distribution (b) Distribution for Boys (c) Distribution for Girls

The high prevalence of low self-esteem (37.8%), as shown in Figure 1a, among the adolescents necessitated the need to explore the factors contributing to such adverse conditions among the participants. The self-esteem levels of the participants in the various schools, categorized by their specific grade and school, are also presented in Table 2. A high number of participants from the Presby exhibited low self-esteem, representing approximately 42.5% (93 participants) of the entire participant group from that school. For the participants from Quaye Nungua, approximately one-third (32.9%) exhibited signs of low self-esteem. An investigation into the contributing factors to the high prevalence of low self-esteem among adolescents is essential

for providing mitigation measures that will enhance the self-worth of participants and improve their overall development. Therefore, further investigation was explicitly conducted among participants who exhibited low self-esteem in various schools to determine how socio-cultural factors contributed to their low self-esteem. The inclusion criteria for the study were adolescents aged 12-15 years who exhibited low self-esteem and consented to the intervention. Exclusion criteria include a diagnosis of psychopathology, involvement in other psychological interventions, non-consent, or non-commitment to therapy. Using Fisher's formula (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003), with adjustment made for population <10,000, provided 104, and with 20% attrition consideration, brought it to 124. A sample size of 124 was recruited from the target population of 416 participants screened at baseline, with an equal distribution of 62 participants from each of the two schools, who were chosen for subsequent analysis.

Table 2: Self-Esteem by School and Grade

School	SE Level	Grade	Frequency	Percent
Presby School	Low self-esteem	Grade 7	28	30.1
		Grade 8	33	35.5
		Grade 9	32	34.4
		Total	93(42.5%)	100.0
	Normal self-esteem	Grade 7	14	16.3
		Grade 8	38	44.2
		Grade 9	34	39.5
		Total	86(39.3%)	100.0
	High self-esteem	Grade 7	6	15.0
		Grade 8	18	45.0
		Grade 9	16	40.0
		Total	40(18.3%)	100.0
Quaye Nungua	Low self-esteem	Grade 7	11	17.2
		Grade 8	38	59.4
		Grade 9	15	23.4
		Total	64(32.7%)	100.0
	Normal self-esteem	Grade 7	19	36.5
		Grade 8	18	34.6
		Grade 9	15	28.8
		Total	52(26.5%)	100.0

High self-esteem	Grade 7	42	52.5
	Grade 8	18	22.5
	Grade 9	20	25.0
	Total	80(40.8%)	100.0

Note: SE = Self-esteem

Socio-cultural factors that influence low self-esteem

The participants' opinions on how socio-cultural factors contribute to low self-esteem levels are presented in Table 3. Out of the 124 participants, 62.1% (77 participants) indicated that peer pressure is the most significant factor that contributes to low self-esteem levels. This can either be through comparisons of their physical body make-up, behavioral patterns, perceived attractive backgrounds and even academic performance with their peers or through bullying and other forms of abuse by their peers. Among the other socio-cultural factors, peer pressure was identified as the highest factor contributing to low self-esteem, according to the opinions of the participants. These high numbers indicate where parents and other stakeholders should focus their attention on addressing low self-esteem among adolescents. Regarding how family issues contribute to low self-esteem, 64 participants, representing 51.6%, indicated that issues within the family setup were a significant factor contributing to low self-esteem levels.

According to the respondents, the influence of the media, including the content they watch on social media platforms, television, and radio, as well as their interactions on these platforms, has a minimal impact on the self-esteem of adolescents. The majority of respondents, at 74.2%, did not view social media as a contributing factor to their low self-esteem. Similarly, the respondents did not consider bullying either by neighbours, siblings or peers as a significant contributing factor to their low self-esteem. Additionally, school changes, academic pressure, cultural expectations, and poor body image were not identified as critical factors contributing to low self-esteem, as shown in Table 3. On the other hand, 67 of the total participants, representing 54%, indicated that a lack of support was a significant factor associated with low self-esteem.

The three top factors that were associated with low self-esteem in adolescents were peer pressure, family issues and lack of support. None of the participants in the study provided other reasons that they considered would be one of the top three reasons for self-esteem.

Table 3: Opinions on Reasons for Low Self-Esteem among Participants (N = 124)

Variable	Site	Yes	No
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Opinion on				
Peer pressure as top reasons for low SE	PS	n	42(67.7%)	20(32.3%)
	QN	n	35(56.5%)	27(43.5%)
	TS		77(62.1%)	47(37.9%)
Family issues as top reasons for low SE	PS	n	27(43.5%)	35(56.5%)
	QN	n	37(59.7%)	25(40.3%)
	TS		64(51.6%)	60(48.4%)
Media influence as top reasons for low SE	PS	n	13(21.0%)	49(79.0%)
	QN	n	19(30.6%)	43(69.4%)
	TS		32(25.8%)	92(74.2%)
Bullying as top reasons for low SE	PS	n	3(4.8%)	59(95.2%)
	QN	n	14(22.6%)	48(77.4%)
	TS		17(13.7%)	107(86.3%)
Change of school as top reasons for low SE	PS	n	15(24.2%)	47(75.8%)
	QN	n	6(9.7%)	56(90.3%)
	TS		21(16.9%)	103(83.1%)
Academic pressure as top reasons for low SE	PS	n	13(21.0%)	49(79.0%)
	QN	n	15(24.2%)	47(75.8%)
	TS		28(22.6%)	96(77.4%)
Cultural expectations as top reasons for low SE	PS	n	3(4.8%)	59(95.2%)
	QN	n	5(8.10%)	57(91.9%)
	TS		8(6.5%)	116(93.5%)
Poor body image as top reasons for low SE	PS	n	19(30.6%)	43(69.4%)
	QN	n	18(29.0%)	44(71.0%)
	TS		37(29.8%)	87(70.2%)
Lack of support as top reasons for low SE	PS	n	30(48.8%)	32(51.6%)
	QN	n	37(59.7%)	25(40.3%)
	TS		67(54.0)	57(46.0%)
Other reasons for low SE	PS	n	0(0.0%)	62(100%)
	QN	n	0(0.0%)	62(100%)
	TS		0(0.0%)	124(100%)

Note: percentage on study site, PS= Presby school, QN = Quaye Nungua TS=Total for both schools, Dummy coding (“yes” =1, “No” = 0)

To further explore the influence of socio-cultural practices on the participants' low self-esteem, additional determinants were examined. The findings from the investigation revealed that most participants (approximately 36.3%) with low self-esteem engaged in many extracurricular activities, whereas 23.4% participated to some extent. Overall, 59.7% of the total respondents participated in extracurricular activities routinely, whereas 46.8% had limited participation. This suggests that participation in extracurricular activities did not have a significant effect on the self-esteem of adolescents. Furthermore, the majority of respondents received some support from family, school, and church/spiritual leaders, representing 70.2%, 73.4%, and 62.1% of the total participants, respectively. In contrast, 29.8%, 26.6%, and 37.9% of the respondents reported less support from home, school, and church/spiritual leaders, respectively. Since the participants who received support from these institutions were significantly higher than those with less support, it can be inferred that the support received by these adolescents from their home, school, and church does not directly translate into improved self-esteem levels. However, this finding was inconsistent with the initial assessment in which the majority of the participants attributed their low self-esteem to a lack of support. Consistent with the influence of media on low self-esteem, approximately 60.5% of the respondents reported that social media has little impact on their self-perception.

Furthermore, about 62.9% of respondents indicated that societal expectations have a strong influence on their self-worth and self-esteem levels, while 67.7% of respondents were satisfied with their physical appearance. This suggests that the low self-esteem of most respondents was not directly related to their dissatisfaction with their physical appearance. To determine if the low self-esteem of the students was caused by academic performance, most of the adolescents with low self-esteem (57.2% of the respondents) reported high to very high academic performance, while 31.5% and 11.3% of respondents reported average and low academic performance, respectively. It can therefore be inferred that low self-esteem is not directly correlated with academic performance.

A high number of adolescents with low self-esteem, representing 75% and 67.8%, believed that improving their self-view was crucial in making healthy decisions and achieving academic and social success, respectively.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Socio-cultural Factors Contributing to Low Self-Esteem

Variable	Group	Very much	To some extent	Not much	Not at all
Extent of participation in extracurricular activity	PS	26(41.9%)	15(24.2%)	17(27.4%)	4(6.5%)
	QN	19(30.6%)	14(22.6%)	22(35.5%)	7(11.3%)
	TS	45(36.3%)	29(23.4%)	31.5(39%)	11(8.9%)
Perceived extent of support received from home	PS	30(48.4%)	17(27.4%)	14(22.6%)	1(1.6%)
	QN	30(48.4%)	10(16.1%)	19(30.6%)	3(4.8%)
	TS	60(48.4%)	27(21.8%)	33(26.6%)	4(3.2%)
Perceived extent of support received from school	PS	22(35.5%)	22(35.5%)	14(22.6%)	4(6.5%)
	QN	27(43.5%)	20(32.3%)	15(24.2%)	0(0.0%)
	TS	49(39.5%)	42(33.9%)	29(23.4%)	4(3.2%)
Perceived extent of support received from church/spiritual leaders	PS	22(35.5%)	12(19.4%)	18(29.0%)	10(16.1%)
	QN	31(50.0%)	12(19.4%)	15(24.2%)	4(6.5%)
	TS	53(42.7%)	24(19.4%)	33(26.6%)	14(11.3%)
Social media influence on view of self	PS	6(9.7%)	16(25.8%)	20(32.3%)	20(32.3%)
	QN	8(12.9%)	19(30.6%)	25(40.3%)	10(16.1%)
	TS	14(11.3%)	35(28.2%)	45(36.3%)	30(24.2%)
Satisfaction with physical appearance	PS	19(30.6%)	20(32.3%)	21(33.9%)	2(3.2%)
	QN	28(45.2%)	17(27.4%)	15(24.2%)	2(3.2%)
	TS	47(37.9%)	37(29.8%)	36(29.0%)	4(3.2%)
Societal expectations influencing feelings about self	PS	23(37.1%)	17(27.4%)	19(30.6%)	3(4.8%)
	QN	20(32.3%)	18(29.0%)	21(33.9%)	3(4.8%)
	TS	43(34.7%)	35(28.2%)	40(32.3%)	6(4.8%)
		A lot	Somewhat	Not much	Not at all
Extent of improving view self on making healthier decisions	PS	34(54.8%)	18(29.0%)	9(14.5%)	1(1.6%)
	QN	25(40.3%)	16(25.8%)	17(27.4%)	4(6.5%)
	TS	59(47.6%)	34(27.4%)	26(21.0%)	5(4.0%)
Extent of improving view self on academic and social performance	PS	27(43.5%)	14(22.6%)	18(29.0%)	3(4.8%)
	QN	32(51.6%)	11(17.7%)	16(25.8%)	3(4.8%)
	TS	59(47.6%)	25(20.2%)	34(27.4%)	6(4.8%)

		Very high	High	Average	Low	Very low
Level of academic achievement	PS	12(19.4%)	26(41.9%)	20(32.3%)	2(3.2%)	2(3.2%)
	QN	5(8.1%)	28(45.2%)	19(30.6%)	10(16.1%)	0(0.0%)
	TS	17(13.7%)	54(43.5%)	39(31.5%)	12(9.7%)	2(1.6%)

Note: PS= Presby school, QN = Quaye Nungua TS=Total for both schools

Chi-square goodness of fit tests (exact) were conducted to test whether the observed distributions of 19 socio-cultural factors differed from expected distributions at baseline, as shown in Table 5. The majority of the variables (17 out of 19) showed significant deviations from expected frequencies ($p < .05$), indicating that observed distributions differed from the expected distributions. Only two variables [Opinion on family issues being among the top three reasons of low SE] ($\chi^2 = .129$, $p = .788$) and [Opinion on lack of support being among the top three reasons of low SE] ($\chi^2 = .806$, $p = .419$) did not differ significantly from expected frequencies.

Table 5: Chi-Square Test for Goodness of Fit

Variable	χ^2	df	p-value
Extent of participation in extracurricular activity	21.419	3	.000
Level of academic achievement	72.532	4	.000
Extent of support received from home	51.290	3	.000
Extent of support received from school	38.000	3	.000
Extent of support received from church/spiritual leaders	26.645	3	.000
Opinion on media influences on view of self	16.194	3	.001
Opinion on peer pressure being among top three reasons of low SE	70.661	2	.000
Opinion on family issues being among top three reasons of low SE	.129	1	.788
Opinion on media influence being among top three reasons of low SE	29.032	1	.000
Opinion on bullying being among top three reasons of low SE	65.323	1	.000
Opinion on change of schools being among top three reasons of low SE	54.226	1	.000
Opinion on academic pressure being among top three reasons of low SE	37.290	1	.000
Opinion on cultural expectations being among top three reasons of low SE	94.065	1	.000
Opinion on poor body image being among top three reasons of low SE	20.161	1	.000
Opinion on lack of support being among top three reasons of low SE	.806	1	.419
Satisfaction with physical appearance	33.742	3	.000
Societal expectations on how one feels about self	27.935	3	.000
Extent of improving self on making healthier decisions	48.194	3	.000

Extent of improving self on improving academic and social performance	46.903	3	.000
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Note: minimum expected cell count 24.8-62, SE = self-esteem

A multiple linear regression was performed to determine whether socio-cultural factors predicted self-esteem as depicted in Table 6. The overall model showed a moderate relationship, $R = .62$, with predictors explaining 38.7% of variance in self-esteem, $R^2 = .39$. However, Adjusted R^2 was .10, indicating that only 10% of the variance was reliably explained after accounting for model complexity. The standard error of the estimate was .30, suggesting that predicted self-esteem scores deviated from observed scores by approximately .30 units on average. The analysis of variance for the regression model predicting self-esteem is also shown in Table 7.

Table 6: Model Summary for Regression Predicting Self-Esteem

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	SE Estimate
1	.622	.387	.100	.29539

Note: R = multiple correlation, R^2 = proportion of variance explained, SE = standard error of the estimate

Table 7: ANOVA for Regression Predicting Self-Esteem

Model		SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.582	39	.117	1.35	.129
	Residual	7.242	83	.087		
	Total	11.824	122			

Note: The regression model was not statistically significant ($p > .05$). SS = sum of squares, MS = mean square

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to identify the socio-cultural factors that contribute to low self-esteem. Linear regression was appropriate since the self-esteem scores were the dependent variable and a continuous variable. Although the scale allows for categorical interpretations, at baseline, all participants had low self-esteem, which precluded the use of logistic or multinomial regression. The predictors included both categorical variables and dummy-coded variables (“Very much” =1 “To some extent” =2 “Not much” =3 “Not at all” =4), (“Very high” =1 “High” =2 “Average” =3 “Low” =4 “Very low” =5), (“Yes” =1, “No” =0)) for analysis. The method allowed for the assessment of unique contributions of each socio-cultural factor while controlling for others, providing insight into

both the strength and direction of their associations with self-esteem. During preliminary regression checks, the predictor variable “Extent of support from home -Yes, very much” was perfectly collinear with other predictors and was not included in the regression model. The overall model was not statistically significant, $F(39, 83) = 1.35, p = .129$, and explained 38.7% of the variance in self-esteem (Adjusted $R^2 = .10$). However, when examining individual predictors, after controlling for other socio-cultural factors, seven variables were found to significantly predict self-esteem as shown in Table 8. A very high level of academic achievement was significantly associated with self-esteem, such that a one-unit increase corresponded to a 0.64-point increase in self-esteem ($B = .641, \beta = .71, t(39, 83) = 2.32, p = .023, 95\% \text{ CI } [.10, 1.19]$). High level of academic achievement was significantly associated with self-esteem, such that a one-unit increase corresponded to a 0.68-point increase in self-esteem ($B = .684, \beta = 1.10, t(39, 83) = 2.51, p = .014, 95\% \text{ CI } [.14, 1.23]$). Average level of academic achievement was significantly associated with self-esteem, such that a one-unit increase corresponded to a 0.59-point increase in self-esteem ($B = .591, \beta = .88, t(39, 83) = 2.16, p = .034, 95\% \text{ CI } [.05, 1.14]$). Low level of academic achievement was significantly associated with self-esteem, such that a one-unit increase corresponded to a 0.68-point increase in self-esteem ($B = .684, \beta = .66, t(39, 83) = 2.42, p = .018, 95\% \text{ CI } [.12, 1.25]$) were found to predict self-esteem significantly. The predictors had significant positive effects. Relative to participants reporting very low on academic achievement, those reporting higher academic achievement had higher self-esteem scores.

Perceived support by church or spiritual leaders to some extent was significantly associated with self-esteem, such that a one-unit increase corresponded to a 0.26-point increase in self-esteem ($B = .268, \beta = .34, t(39, 83) = 2.06, p = .043, 95\% \text{ CI } [.01, .53]$). Not so much perceived support by church or spiritual leaders was significantly associated with self-esteem, such that a one-unit increase corresponded to a 0.29-point increase in self-esteem ($B = .294, \beta = .42, t(39, 83) = 2.24, p = .028, 95\% \text{ CI } [.03, .56]$). The predictors had moderate positive effects. Relative to participants reporting that they did not receive support from church/spiritual leaders, those reporting that they received not much support, and to some extent, had higher self-esteem scores. Receiving support “very much” did not significantly predict high self-esteem scores ($p = .499$). As observed in Table 4, 42.7% of participants with low self-esteem reported receiving very much support from church/spiritual leaders. This observation can be attributed to the potential differential quality of support, in which the support received from the church may not be adequate enough to influence their perspective of self-work.

Furthermore, a mismatch between the needs of the adolescents and what is actually provided by the church or spiritual leaders may also contribute to this. While adolescents may need emotional or psychological support, the church may focus only on spiritual needs or moral behaviour. Additionally, judgmental support and over-involvement by the church and spiritual in the adolescent's moral and lifestyle could lead to guilt and stigma affecting their self-worth. Finally, having the opinion that bullying is one of the top three reasons for low self-esteem among adolescents in Accra, Ghana was found to significantly predict self-esteem such that a one-unit increase corresponded to a 0.28-point increase in self-esteem ($B = .28$, $\beta = .30$, $t(39, 83) = -2.59$, $p = .011$, 95%CI [-.49, -.07]). Having the opinion that bullying was one of the top three reasons for low self-esteem among adolescents had moderate positive effects.

Table 8: Regression Coefficient for Predicting Self-Esteem at Baseline

	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI for B	
						LB	UB
Academic achievement level very high	.641	.276	.713	2.322	.023	.092	1.190
Academic achievement level high	.684	.272	1.095	2.513	.014	.143	1.226
Academic achievement level average	.591	.274	.880	2.160	.034	.047	1.135
Academic achievement level low	.684	.283	.655	2.419	.018	.122	1.247
Church /spiritual leaders support to some extent	.268	.130	.336	2.056	.043	.009	.526
Church /spiritual leaders support not much	.294	.131	.421	2.238	.028	.033	.556
Bullying reasons for low SE (Yes = 1)	-.280	.108	-.303	-2.588	.011	-.494	-.065

DISCUSSION

Low self-esteem among adolescents can have detrimental effects on their growth, development, and overall well-being, including their indulgence in social vices, drugs, poor academic performance and their ability to reach their full potential. In this study, the effects of socio-cultural factors on the low self-esteem levels of adolescents were evaluated. Among the students who participated in the survey, 37.8 % exhibited low self-esteem. The high prevalence of low self-esteem among adolescents has prompted the need to explore how these socio-cultural factors contribute to this issue, which is essential for improving the self-esteem of adolescents.

The prevalence of low self-esteem in females (44.7%) was higher compared to that of males (27.8%). These findings are consistent with the literature (Van Den Berg et al., 2010; Birndorf et al., 2005). This is often attributed to the negative perception of adolescent girls in relation to their cognitive capabilities, their body makeup, hormonal changes and high societal

expectations of adolescent females compared to their male counterparts. This study's findings showed that body image perception was not a significant ($p < 0.201$) predictor of self-esteem among the population. This is contrary to the findings of Asah-Ayeh (2017), who also investigated the impact of socio-cultural factors on body dissatisfaction, body image, self-esteem, and psychological distress in adolescents residing in Accra, Ghana. The results from Asah-Ayeh's quantitative analysis indicated that body dissatisfaction correlates with heightened psychological distress and diminished body esteem among adolescents and that those who had expressed satisfaction with their bodies employed three coping strategies (namely avoidance, positive-rational, and appearance fixing); in contrast, those who were dissatisfied utilized two strategies (specifically avoidance and appearance fixing).

The results in this study revealed that academic achievement was the primary predictor of self-esteem, as students who viewed their academic performance favorably also reported elevated levels of self-esteem. Notably, bullying emerged as the most frequently cited factor leading to low self-esteem (26.6%), while other concerns such as inadequate peer support (9.7%), family-related difficulties (8.1%), and the influence of media (6.5%) were reported less frequently. Interestingly, support from spiritual or church leaders demonstrated a nuanced effect: moderate levels of support correlated with enhanced self-esteem, whereas excessive support ("very much") appeared to have no beneficial effects. These findings highlight the interplay of academic, social, cultural, and institutional factors in shaping the identity and self-confidence of adolescents.

Most of the respondents (average of 62.1%) in the current study perceived that peer pressure is a top reason for low self-esteem. According to Kibuthu and Muasa, (2023), the low self-esteem resulting from peer pressure may be attributed to the inferior feeling of the adolescents compared to their peers. These negative evaluations of the self may be linked to personal attributes, intelligence, economic background, and physical appearance compared to those of their friends. The pressure from their peers to obtain a particular body shape or stature, which could lead to teasing and other forms of abuse, negatively affects the self-worth of these individuals, contributing to low self-esteem (Ata et al., 2007). In particular, societal norms expect boys to develop a more masculine body makeup, whereas females are more concerned about losing overall weight and conforming to "thin" ideals (Ata et al., 2007; Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001). Furthermore, the desire of adolescents to belong sometimes leads to a compromise of their true identity (self), which could lead to internal conflicts about how they behave and their authentic self, leading to low self-esteem. Pressure from their peer groups to

behave in a certain way (how to dress, speak, behave, eat, etc) could be detrimental to their self-worth, of which refusal to conform to such patterns and standards can lead to isolation and a feeling of rejection. These could have a significant impact on an individual's self-esteem.

Additionally, family issues were reported to have a significant impact on the self-esteem levels of the respondents (average of 51.6%). Family issues such as financial challenges, living conditions, including divorced families and living with single parents, conflicts between siblings, favouritism among siblings, parental neglect and excessive criticisms from the family can have a severe impact on the self-esteem levels of adolescents. The acceptance, nurturing, and support of parents in creating a harmonious living condition at home are critical to the self-esteem levels of adolescents (Verkuyten, 2003). The absence of such conducive environments to support the development and well-being of the adolescents compromises their self-worth. Moreover, the financial issues in the family, which reflect the socio-economic status of the family, may also contribute to the low self-esteem of the respondents, as financial status significantly impacts self-esteem, as highlighted by Veselska et al., (2010). Negative comments on their physical appearance and other characteristics by parents and other close relatives have severe consequences for the self-esteem of adolescents (Dogan et al., 2018).

Lack of support was found to be a key indicator of low self-esteem. Lack of support from the home, schools, religious organizations, among others. A lack of social support, characterized by little or no validation, a feeling of being unloved, and the unavailability of parents or loved ones to support adolescents through their challenges and successes, can be interpreted as rejection, unwanted attention, or a doubt in their abilities, leading to low self-esteem. Level of academic achievement (performance) did not have a direct influence on the low self-esteem of adolescents, which is in line with the findings of Mello et al. (2017). Social media has been found to have a significant influence on the self-esteem of adolescents. Social media transmits graphics and content which appeal to the ideal and desirable physical characteristics of adolescents, in which girls and boys desire to have the appearance of specific models (Ata et al., 2007). This leads to dissatisfaction with their outward physical appearance, which in turn results in low self-esteem. Findings from the literature revealed that adolescents who constantly watched models through media platforms exhibited a high prevalence of low self-esteem compared to their counterparts without such influence (Clay et al., 2006). Furthermore, comments and discussions on social media can influence adolescents' perspectives on their physical and social well-being, influencing their self-esteem levels (Dogan et al., 2018). In contrast, this study revealed little correlation of low self-esteem with social media. The

majority of the respondents did not attribute their low self-esteem to media influence. This significant deviation may be attributed to the social and economic environment of these adolescents. Most adolescents from low-income countries may not have full access to social media platforms, which can impact the role of social media in shaping their self-esteem. Furthermore, societal norms may have caused parents and caregivers to restrict access to such media platforms, limiting their interactions with the media. This is likely to lead to biases in responses, deviating from other research from other regions across the globe. Surprisingly, most adolescents with low self-esteem reported participating in extracurricular activities. This suggests that participation in extracurricular activities does not have a direct influence on self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effect of socio-cultural factors on the low self-esteem of adolescents aged from 12 to 15 years in Ghana. Socio-cultural factors, such as peer pressure, family issues, media influence, academic pressure, participation in extracurricular activities, and lack of support, among others, were evaluated. Out of the 416 adolescent respondents, 157 exhibited low self-esteem, representing 37.8%. The high prevalence of low self-esteem underscores an urgent need to investigate its causes and to develop necessary interventions to promote positive developmental outcomes in adolescents.

The study revealed that peer pressure, family issues, and lack of support from home, schools, and religious organisations are the top reasons for low self-esteem in adolescents. The influence of media had less impact on the low self-esteem of adolescents, which is attributable to social and economic factors prevalent in such low-income regions that restrict the use of media at this age bracket. These findings underscore the vital importance of family, peers, and educational support in the development of self-esteem. It is recommended that collaborative interventions be implemented in schools, homes, and religious institutions to enhance resilience and promote healthier self-concept among adolescents.

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