

## The Role of Self-esteem in Tendency towards Drugs, Theft and Prostitution

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### Abstract

**Background:** Addiction, theft and Prostitution are of the most important problems of contemporary society. On the other hand, self-esteem is one of the most important variables and concepts that might have a meaningful influence on these problems. This study aims to investigate the role of self-esteem in the individuals' tendency to addiction, theft and prostitution in Kerman city, Iran.

**Methods:** The statistical population of this study is those individuals who had a record of addiction, theft and prostitution in Kerman prison, and the ordinary individuals. The research sample consisted of 300 individuals, 200 of whom were those with record of addiction, theft and prostitution in the central prison of Kerman city, and 100 ordinary people. Because some of the research questionnaires were not returned, only 283 questionnaires were analyzed. The instrument for determining the respondents' self-esteem was Eysenck Self-esteem Inventory.

**Findings:** Self-esteem had a meaningful role in the individual's tendency to addiction, theft and prostitution.

**Conclusion:** On the basis of the research results, it can be concluded that those who are involved in addiction, theft and prostitution have a lower self-esteem compared with the ordinary person. Thus, it is necessary to increase an individual's self-esteem in order to decrease their tendency to addiction, theft and prostitution.

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**Keywords:** Self-esteem, Addiction, Theft, Prostitution.

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## Introduction

Self-esteem is the reflection of the understanding of oneself and sense of personal value. Our perceptions toward ourselves (the ego) are developed through the process of acting, and then thinking about our actions as well as how others perceive those actions. Self-esteem refers to our feelings about ourselves or the value we have for ourselves.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it can be said that self-esteem is a general judgment about ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

Most people's thoughts and feelings about themselves are partly based on their daily experiences. The score someone obtains in a test, how his/her friends behave toward him/her, and life's fluctuations or ups and downs can all have a temporary effect on that individual's vision of him/herself. However, it should be noted that self-esteem is something more fundamental than "fluctuations" related to situational changes. For people with basic and high self-esteem, natural fluctuations can lead to a special feeling toward the environment and themselves, but only to a limited extent.

On the contrary, to people with poor self-esteem, these "fluctuations" can mean the whole world (and therefore that individual is highly influenced by them). Often, the feeling of people with low self-esteem toward themselves is determined by their current actions. Such people are constantly in need of external positive experiences in order to overcome negative thoughts and feelings they are constantly influenced by. In such situations, a good feeling (e.g. a good test score and etc.) can only have a temporary effect. However, a healthy person's self-esteem is based on their abilities to know themselves accurately, as well as acceptance of and value for themselves (no feelings of humiliation and contempt). This means that an individual can realistically recognize his/her own strengths and weaknesses (which everyone possesses).<sup>3</sup>

The features of high self-esteem are those in which someone believes he/she is important and the world would even be better because he/she lives in it, believes in himself with confidence, can ask for help, and trust his decisions. However, the features of low self-esteem are those in which the individual does not think he/she is important, expects others to

humiliate him, does not trust others, and thinks nobody likes him/her. Such an individual also feels loneliness and separation from others, and is not interested in himself and others.<sup>3</sup>

Self-esteem is a very certain and specific topic in psychology which is referred to every other psychological concept or domain including personality (e.g. shyness or self-consciousness), behavioral (functioning), cognitive (orientation) and clinical domains (e.g. stress and depression).<sup>4</sup>

External factors such as social prestige (parents), wealth, education level, and job title do not have a meaningful effect (as often imagined) on self-esteem.<sup>5</sup> Attitudes and behaviors of parents, acceptance of children, clear demands and respecting their actions in a certain area are of determinant affairs which cause the feeling of being valuable in children.<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between self-esteem and psychological satisfaction (e.g. depression, social anxiety and loneliness) can be an important factor in understanding the relationship between self-esteem and health. Many researchers have found several relationships between self-esteem, optimism and inadaptability.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the relationship between self-esteem and many socioeconomic, behavioral, and psychosocial features and diseases has been reported.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, the Mental Health and Counseling Center of the university of Texas also reported that low self-esteem can lead to lack of development and/or tendency toward drugs or alcohol consumption.<sup>4</sup>

Environmental stressors are related to the reduction of well-being, prosperity and health which accordingly are also related to smoking and alcohol consumption. Smoking is significantly correlated with alcohol consumption.<sup>9</sup> Self-esteem is correlated with regular exercise which can help in the avoidance of drugs and narcotics. Moreover, consumption of such drugs, narcotics and alcohol is correlated with alcohol and drug abuse among peers and friend groups.<sup>10</sup> Self-esteem is directly correlated with exercise, but has a reverse correlation with drug addiction.<sup>11</sup> Lack of self-esteem can be the cause of many social problems including some crimes and drug abuse; although it may not be the major factor for such cases, it often plays a special role in this regard.<sup>12</sup>

Wheeler reported that the higher the self-esteem, the lower the likelihood of drug abuse in girls. In addition, Wheeler concluded that increased self-esteem and academic performance improvement among young girls can have benefits in decision-making related to sexual intercourse and drugs tendency.<sup>13</sup> There was a significant and negative correlation between self-esteem and cognitive distortions of prostitution, i.e. when self-esteem is high, cognitive distortions of prostitution is low and vice versa.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, addiction often negatively influences family and work relationships and perhaps leads to frequent loss of jobs in an individual.<sup>15</sup>

This study aimed to identify the role of self-esteem in the tendency toward drug abuse, theft and prostitution.

## Methods

This was a causal-comparative study, because this study aimed to identify the role of

self-esteem in the tendency toward drug abuse, theft and prostitution. Thus, to do so, the self-esteem level was measured and compared among the groups of normal and unhealthy people. The samples consisted of 300 people out of whom 200 people have been imprisoned in Kerman Jail (Kerman, Iran) with history of drug abuse, theft and prostitution and the rest were 100 ordinary people without a criminal record. However, due to the return of some uncompleted questionnaires, only 283 healthy and unhealthy people were considered. The data collection tool was a 30-question Eysenck Personality Inventory (self-esteem) that its validity and reliability have already been confirmed.<sup>16</sup> chi-square was used for data analysis.

## Results

The frequency distribution of educational level, field of study and self-esteem are summarized in Tables 1 to 4 in terms of the respondents' status.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of age in terms of respondents' status

Status	Normal	Drug Addiction	Theft	Prostitution	Total
Under 20 years	19 (22.4%)	2 (2.5%)	5 (6.3%)	11 (33.3%)	37 (13.4%)
21-30 years	46 (54.1%)	47 (59.5%)	48 (60.8%)	19 (57.6%)	160 (58%)
31-40 years	14 (16.5%)	25 (31.6%)	23 (29.1%)	2 (6.1%)	64 (23.2%)
Over 40 years	6 (7.1%)	5 (6.3%)	3 (3.8%)	1 (3%)	15 (5.4%)
Total	85 (100%)	79 (100%)	79 (100%)	33 (100%)	276 (100%)

Table 2. Frequency distribution of educational level in terms of respondents' status

Status	Normal	Drug Addiction	Theft	Prostitution	Total
Illiterate	-	-	5 (7.7%)	1 (3.2%)	6 (2.4%)
Elementary	-	20 (26%)	18 (27.7%)	8 (25.8%)	46 (18.4%)
Guidance	2 (2.6%)	33 (42.9%)	19 (29.2%)	18 (58.1%)	72 (28.8%)
High school graduate	38 (49.4%)	19 (24.7%)	17 (26.2%)	3 (9.7%)	77 (30.8%)
Associate degree	13 (16.9%)	5 (6.5%)	5 (7.7%)	-	23 (9.2%)
Bachelor degree	22 (28.6%)	-	1 (1.5%)	1 (3.2%)	24 (9.6%)
Master degree & higher	2 (2.6%)	-	-	-	2 (8%)
Total	77 (100%)	77 (100%)	65 (100%)	31 (100%)	250 (100%)

Table 3. Frequency distribution of major (field of study) in terms of respondents' status

Status	Normal	Drug Addiction	Theft	Prostitution	Total
Literature and humanities	13 (24.1%)	7 (35%)	6 (28.6%)	-	26 (26%)
Basic Sciences	20 (37%)	6 (30%)	8 (38.1%)	4 (80%)	38 (38%)
Engineering	18 (33.3%)	6 (30%)	6 (28.6%)	1 (20%)	31 (31%)
Medical	1 (1.9%)	1 (5%)	-	-	2 (2%)
Art	1 (1.9%)	-	1 (4.8%)	-	2 (2%)
Physical education sciences (sports)	1 (1.9%)	-	-	-	1 (1%)
Total	54 (100%)	20 (100%)	21 (100%)	5 (100%)	100 (100%)

Table 4. Frequency distribution of self-esteem in terms of respondents' status

Status	Normal	Drug Addiction	Theft	Prostitution	Total
Very low	9 (10.3%)	34 (41.5%)	31 (38.8%)	16 (48.5%)	90 (31.9%)
Low	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.2%)	3 (3.8%)	-	5 (1.8%)
Average	20 (23%)	13 (15.9%)	19 (23.8%)	5 (15.2%)	57 (20.2%)
High	4 (4.6%)	2 (2.4%)	2 (2.5%)	1 (3%)	9 (3.2%)
Very high	53 (60.9%)	32 (39%)	25 (31.3%)	11 (33.3%)	121 (42.9%)
Total	87 (100%)	82 (100%)	80 (100%)	33 (100%)	282 (100%)

The impact of self-esteem on the tendency of people toward drugs ( $P = 0.001$ ) theft and robbery ( $P = 0.001$ ), and prostitution ( $P = 0.001$ ) was obtained through chi-square test. The self-esteem correlated with addiction, theft, and prostitution; So, addicted subjects, those with history of theft, and those with a history of prostitution had lower self-esteem than normal healthy subjects.

## Discussion

In this study, "self-esteem" was effective in reports of those with records of addiction, theft and prostitution; so that people with addiction, theft and prostitution had lower self-esteem than normal individuals.

Kounenou found that increased self-esteem is the predictor of avoidance of drugs and narcotics.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Kahn reported that lack of self-esteem can be correlated with increase in likelihood of some crimes and drug abuse. Wheeler found that increased self-esteem in girls can reduce the probability of drug abuse and desire for premarital sexual intercourses.

Guglielmo et al. reported that low self-esteem is correlated with drug use.<sup>17</sup> Feltis also reported that there was a very strong negative correlation between trend of drug use and amount of self-esteem in adolescents, and children. Those whose self-esteem did not grow well, are more probable to consume drugs.<sup>18</sup> Smart and Ogborne reported that youths under treatment for drug abuse had lower self-esteem.<sup>19</sup> Emery et al. found that student's self-esteem (at home or at school) is reversely correlated with drug use (illegal substances and drugs), tobacco and alcohol.<sup>20</sup>

Previous studies stated that there is a correlation between crime and low self-esteem and concluded that low self-esteem causes abnormal behaviors.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps one of the main causes of delinquency is that offenders have low self-esteem.

There are some evidences that offenders considered themselves as undesirable people,

did not love themselves, and had no value and respect for themselves; generally, drug addicted people have inferiority complex.<sup>14,16</sup>

A previous study showed that low self-esteem is strongly correlated with alcohol drinking. They also stated that Mild cannabis users, in comparison with non-users of cannabis, have lower self-esteem and are more sinful.<sup>21</sup>

McMurran quoted that some criminals have low self-esteem.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps, one of the major known causes of crime of offenders is that they have low self-esteem. McMurran showed that low self-esteem is strongly correlated with alcohol consumption; and found that mild cannabis consumers, in comparison with non-users of cannabis have lower sense of self-worth and are more sinful.<sup>22</sup> Offenders know themselves as lazier, more sad and less smart than non-offenders; they believe they are undesirable, they do not love themselves, and have no value and respect for themselves.<sup>23</sup>

According to the results of the present study, since those with history of drug addiction, theft and prostitution had lower self-esteem than normal people, it is recommended that people of the society in various ways try to strengthen and improve their self-esteem and self-belief by understanding their abilities, faith in God, and by strongly resisting every feeling of inferiority and self-humiliation. In addition, one should never try to humiliate and mock other people so as to ruin their personality. Officials and authorities must also work to increase and improve self-esteem of unhealthy people with the above stated problems.

Ultimately, it should be noted that one of the basic limitations of the present study was that, considering the cross-sectional nature of the study, the transposition of cause and effect is unknown and therefore only the association of self-esteem with addiction, theft and prostitution can be concluded rather than the causative role of self-esteem with those variables.

**Conflict of Interest:** The Authors have no conflict of interest.

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## نقش عزت نفس در گرایش افراد به اعتیاد، سرقت و روسپیگری

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### چکیده

**مقدمه:** اعتیاد، سرقت و روسپیگری از جمله مهم‌ترین مشکلات اجتماعی در جامعه معاصر می‌باشد. از طرف دیگر، عزت نفس یکی از اساسی‌ترین متغیرها و مفاهیمی است که احتمال تأثیر آن بر مشکلات مذکور می‌رود. هدف از انجام این تحقیق، بررسی و شناسایی نقش عزت نفس در گرایش افراد به اعتیاد، سرقت و روسپیگری در شهر کرمان بود.

**روش‌ها:** جامعه آماری این پژوهش را افراد دارای سابقه اعتیاد، سرقت و روسپیگری در زندان کرمان و همچنین افراد عادی تشکیل می‌دادند. نمونه تحقیق شامل ۳۰۰ نفر بود که ۲۰۰ نفر آنان افراد با سابقه اعتیاد، سرقت و روسپیگری در زندان مرکزی کرمان و ۱۰۰ نفر از افراد عادی غیر زندانی بود. به علت عدم عودت برخی پرسش‌نامه‌ها و یا تکمیل ناقص آن‌ها، فقط ۲۸۳ پرسش‌نامه از افراد مبتلا و عادی لحاظ شد. ابزار تعیین عزت نفس، پرسش‌نامه عزت نفس Eysenck بود.

**یافته‌ها:** عزت نفس در گرایش افراد به اعتیاد، سرقت و روسپیگری نقش داشت.

**نتیجه‌گیری:** بر اساس یافته‌های تحقیق می‌توان نتیجه گرفت که افراد معتاد، سارق و روسپیگر دارای عزت نفس کمتری نسبت به افراد عادی می‌باشند. ضروری است با افزایش عزت نفس اشخاص، احتمال گرایش آنان به اعتیاد، سرقت و روسپیگری کاهش داده شود.

**واژگان کلیدی:** عزت نفس، اعتیاد، سرقت، روسپیگری.

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