



Self-esteem And Anxiety, Depression, and Stress of Students with and without Physically Disabled in Kathmandu

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Abstract

This study explores the levels of self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and stress among with and without physically Disabled students at Khagendra New Life Special Education Secondary School in Kathmandu. A cross-sectional deceptive research design was employed, utilizing the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and the Anxiety Depression Stress Scale (ADSS) to explore the psychological well-being of both groups. A sample size of 100 students was selected, with 50 physically disabled and 50 without physically disabled students, using convenient sampling. The results indicated that physically disabled students had significantly lower self-esteem ($M = 24.42$) compared to their physically typical peers ($M = 27.30$), with an overall mean score of 25.86. However, no significant differences were found between the two groups in terms of anxiety, depression, and stress levels. Correlation analysis revealed a negative relationship between self-esteem and the psychological factors of anxiety ($r = -0.472$), depression ($r = -0.568$), and stress ($r = -0.600$). Furthermore, positive correlations were identified between anxiety and depression ($r = 0.650$), anxiety and stress ($r = 0.635$), and stress and depression ($r = 0.649$). The findings emphasize the pivotal role of self-esteem in managing psychological distress and suggest that interventions aimed at enhancing self-esteem could help improve the mental health of both physically disabled and regular students. This study highlights the need for targeted interventions to address the psychological well-being of students, particularly those with physical disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is a critical component of an individual's psychological well-being, reflecting how one evaluates their worth and capabilities. It encompasses positive and negative self-perceptions, contributing significantly to emotional and mental health. The seminal work of Rosenberg (1965) introduced self-esteem as a measure of an individual's self-respect and self-worth, where high self-esteem signifies a sense of confidence and respect for oneself, and low self-esteem is often associated with doubt and a negative evaluation of one's abilities. Further expanding on this concept, Murphy et al. (2005) suggested that self-esteem is a complex blend of emotional and cognitive assessments of an individual's value. Over time, self-esteem is shaped by internal factors, such as personal beliefs and external social influences, making its development an ongoing process throughout life. Moreover, interactions with caregivers and significant attachment figures play a pivotal role in forming self-esteem. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to be resilient in facing challenges, maintaining positive relationships, and effectively managing life's stresses. Conversely, low self-esteem often leads to self-doubt, excessive dependence on external validation, and introversion. Such individuals are more vulnerable to emotional and psychological difficulties, including anxiety and depression (Campbell & Lavelle, 1993).

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Anxiety is a natural response to stress, typically arising in response to threats or worries about future events. However, when anxiety becomes chronic or excessive, it may develop into an anxiety disorder. The American Psychiatric Association (2013) defines anxiety disorders as the most common mental health conditions worldwide, characterized by disturbances in mood, thought patterns, and behavior. Anxiety disorders manifest in various forms, including generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and social anxiety disorder, and can severely affect one's ability to function across multiple domains of life.

The World Health Organization (WHO) predicts that depression will become the second leading global health burden in the coming years, with a significant portion of the population experiencing it. The DSM-5 (2013) outlines different types of depression, such as major depressive disorder and persistent depressive disorder, characterized by symptoms like persistent sadness, loss of interest in activities, and significant changes in weight or sleep patterns.

The impact of anxiety and depression on an individual's life is profound, affecting personal, social, and professional functioning. Effective management of these conditions is essential to preventing long-term psychological consequences. Alongside these factors, stress is another key component of mental health, often acting as a trigger for anxiety and depression. Stress arises when external or internal demands exceed an individual's coping ability, leading to physical and emotional strain. While moderate stress can serve as a motivating factor, chronic stress is linked to various mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and burnout (Baum et al., 1981; Selye, 1974).

Physical disabilities can exacerbate the psychological challenges individuals face. Disabilities, particularly those affecting mobility or sensory functions, often lead to significant restrictions in daily activities, which can contribute to feelings of isolation, frustration, and low self-esteem. Foster (2010) and Leonardi et al. (2006) emphasize that individuals with physical disabilities frequently experience body image issues and reduced social participation, both of which can heighten feelings of anxiety, depression, and stress. The World Health Organization (2001) further distinguishes between impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions, underscoring the importance of considering the impact of disabilities on an individual's overall life experience.

In Nepal, children with physical disabilities face unique challenges related to their mental health and self-esteem. These students often experience discrimination, social exclusion, and limited access to opportunities for social interaction, which can negatively affect their psychological well-being. As reported in the 2011 census, children with physical disabilities in Nepal are at risk of experiencing higher levels of anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal. These issues highlight the need for inclusive educational environments that promote the well-being of children with disabilities, ensuring they have the necessary support and resources to develop healthy self-esteem and cope with their psychological challenges.

Thagunna and Dhungel (2019) found that government school students had higher rates of learning disabilities, particularly dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. Demographic factors like school type and living area significantly influenced learning disabilities, highlighting the need for targeted interventions.

The importance of self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and stress in the lives of children with disabilities cannot be overstated. The psychological difficulties faced by students with physical disabilities often lead to diminished self-worth and increased vulnerability to mental health issues. This is especially true in educational settings, where students with disabilities may encounter additional stressors, such as stigma, social exclusion, and a lack of appropriate accommodations. These factors can create a cycle of adverse psychological outcomes, where low self-esteem exacerbates feelings of anxiety and depression, further hindering the individual's ability to function effectively in daily life.

This study aims to identify the specific psychological challenges faced by these two groups. The findings will contribute to a better understanding of how physical disabilities influence mental health and self-esteem, informing the development of targeted interventions and support strategies for students with disabilities.

METHOD

Participants

This study utilizes a cross-sectional research design to investigate self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and stress levels among students with and without physical disabilities at Khagendra New Life Special Education Secondary School, located in Gokarneshwor Municipality, Bagmati Province, Nepal. Using convenient sampling, 100 students

were selected, 50 physically disabled and 50

Measures

1. **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale(RSES):** The RSES, a ten-item scale using a 4-point Likert scale, assesses global self-worth with strong reliability (Guttman scale coefficient of 0.92) and validity, widely validated across 53 countries.
2. **Anxiety, depression, and Stress Scale (ADSS-BSPSA):** The study assessed anxiety, depression, and stress using the Anxiety, Depression, and Stress Scale (ADSS-BSPSA), developed and validated in India. The scale includes 48 items: 19 for Anxiety, 15 for Depression, and 14 for Stress, with responses scored 1 for "Yes" and 0 for "No." Scores range from 0–19 (Anxiety), 0–14 (Depression), and 0–14 (Stress). The manual provides cut points for mild, moderate, and severe levels. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were .76, .75, and .61 for the Anxiety, Depression, and Stress scales.

Procedure

After obtaining school administration approval, participants were selected through convenient sampling. Before data collection, written consent was obtained from all participants, who were provided with comprehensive information about the research both verbally and in writing. Data processing began only after obtaining their consent. A rapport was established with the participants prior to administering the tests.

physically regular students.

Scoring was carried out according to the specific guidelines for each scale. Participants were instructed to answer each question honestly and independently without discussing their responses with others.

Statistics Analysis

Data were entered into Microsoft Excel for analysis. Data were analyzed using SPSS software, employing statistical techniques such as frequency analysis, mean calculations, regression, and correlation to interpret the findings.

The collected data was coded and entered into the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 24.0) for analysis. The coded scores were analyzed using mean and standard deviation (SD) to derive the results, with data presented as frequencies and percentages. The mean and standard deviation of a few demographic details, such as age and educational level, were also calculated. The descriptive statistics were also analyzed, i.e., mean and SD of total scores. The mean age is 14.76, the level of education is 8.44, and the total score is 72.23.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings on self-esteem among physically disabled and non-disabled students. It also includes an analysis of anxiety, depression, and stress levels among both groups of students.

Table 1 : Demographic Information of Respondents

		N=100	
	Category	Respondents	Percent
Gender	Boys	42	42
	Girls	58	58
Education	Class 7	3	3
	Class 8	27	27
	Class 9	31	31
	Class 10	39	39
Ethnicity	Brahmin	6	6
	Chhetri	26	26
	Janajati	63	63
	Dalit	5	5
Religion	Hindu	56	56
	Buddhist	33	33
	Christian	11	11
	Physically handicapped	50	50
	Physically Normal	50	50

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants among participants. Table 1 shows that 58% of the participants are female, and 42% are male. Age distribution includes 36% who are 15 years old, 19% who are 16, 17% who are 17, 12% who are 14, 9% who are 18, 5% who are 19, and 2% who are 13. In terms of class, 39% are in class 10, 31% in class

9, 27% in class 8, and 3% in class 7. Ethnic distribution is 63% Janajati, 26% Chhetri, 6% Brahmin, and 5% Dalit. Religious affiliations include 56% Hindu, 36% Buddhist, and 11% Christian. There is an equal split between physically disabled and non-disabled students, comprising 50% of the sample.

Table 2 : The self-esteem of physically Disable and physically regular Students

Self-esteem	With Physically Disable		Without Physically Disable		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
15-19	13	26	-	-	13	13
20-24	11	22	9	18	20	20
25-29	17	34	27	54	44	44
30-34	8	16	14	28	22	22
35-39	1	2	-	-	1	1
Total	50	100	50	100	100	100
Mean	24.42		27.30		25.86	
St. dev.	5.234		3.105		4.519	
Minimum	15		20		15	
Maximum	37		34		37	
T-test value		Degree of Freedom		P-value		
3.346		98		0.001		

Table 2 shows the self-esteem levels of physically disabled and physically regular students in different ranges. Physically disabled students have an average self-esteem score of 24.42, while physically regular students have a score of 27.30, with an

overall average of 25.86. The t-test (3.346, p = 0.001) indicates a significant difference between the two groups. Physically disabled students show more variability in self-esteem, with a standard deviation of 5.234.

Table 3 : Level of anxiety among physically disabled and physically regular students

Anxiety	Physically Normal		Physically Disable		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Normal	6	12	13	26	19	19
Mild	8	16	11	22	19	19
Moderate	18	36	15	30	33	33
Severe	18	36	11	22	29	29
Total	50	100	50	100	100	100
Mean	7.06		5.52		6.29	
St. dev.	4.05		3.898		4.03	
Minimum	0		1		0	
Maximum	17		18		18	

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T-test value	Degree of freedom	P-value
1.937	98	0.056

Table 3 presents anxiety levels among physically disabled and regular students. Physically, regular students have an average anxiety score of 7.06, while disabled students have a score of 5.52. Overall, 19% of respondents report normal anxiety, 19% mild, 33% moderate, and 29% severe anxiety. The t-test value is 1.937 ($p = 0.056$), showing no significant difference in anxiety levels between the two groups.

Table 4 : Level of Depression among physically disabled and physically regular students

Depression	Physically Normal		Physically Disable		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Normal	5	10	8	16	13	13
Mild	11	22	13	26	24	24
Moderate	23	46	24	48	47	47
Severe	11	22	5	10	16	16
Total	50	100	50	100	100	100
Mean	5.60		4.64		5.12	
St. dev.	3.356		2.905		3.16	
Minimum	0		0		0	
Maximum	13		12		13	
T-test value	1.529		Degree of Freedom		P-value	
			98		0.129	

Table 4 shows depression levels among physically disabled and regular students. Among regular students, 10% have normal depression, 22% mild, 46% moderate, and 22% severe. For disabled students, 16% have normal depression, 26% mild, 48% moderate, and 10% severe. The average depression score for regular students is 5.60, and for disabled students, it is 4.64. The t-test value of 1.529 ($p = 0.129$) indicates no significant difference in depression levels between the two groups.

Table 5 : Level of stress among physically normal and physically disabled students

Stress	Physically Normal		Physically Disable		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Normal	8	16	5	10	12	12
Mild	4	8	4	8	8	8
Moderate	16	32	20	40	36	36
Severe	22	44	21	42	43	43
Total	50	100	50	100	100	100
Mean	7.48		7.82		7.65	
St. dev.	3.17		3.19		3.17	
Minimum	1		0		0	
Maximum	13		13		13	
T-test Value	-0.535		Degree of Freedom		P-value	
			98		0.594	

Table 5 displays stress levels among physically regular and disabled students. Among regular students, 16% experience everyday stress, 8% mild, 32% moderate, and 44% severe. For disabled students, 10% report everyday stress, 8% mild, 40%

moderate, and 42% severe. The average stress score is 7.48 for regular students and 7.82 for disabled students. The t-test value of -0.535 ($p = 0.594$) indicates no significant difference in stress levels between the two groups.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine and compare the self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and stress levels of physically disabled students and their physically typical peers at Khagendra New Life Special Education Secondary School in Kathmandu. The results indicated that physically disabled students had significantly lower self-esteem, with an average score of 24.42 compared to 27.30 for their physically typical peers. The overall mean self-esteem score was 25.86, indicating moderate self-esteem across the sample. These findings align with previous studies highlighting lower self-esteem in physically disabled individuals (Shahnawaz & Akhouri, 2016; Nazir et al., 2016), reflecting challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in social and academic settings.

Despite the significant difference in self-esteem, no substantial variation was found in anxiety, depression, or stress levels between the two groups. Physically disabled students had an average anxiety level of 5.52, while physically regular students reported 7.06. Both groups displayed moderate anxiety, suggesting that factors beyond physical disability, like social influences and academic pressures, may contribute to anxiety levels (Sharma & Agarwala, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2019).

Depression levels were moderate in both groups, with physically disabled students scoring an average of 4.64 and their typical peers scoring 5.60, leading to an overall mean of 5.12. These results suggest that physical disability does not significantly impact depression levels. This aligns with Chung et al. (2015), highlighting factors such as academic stress and social support in shaping depression.

The stress levels of both physically disabled and physically regular students were similar, with an average score of 7.82 for with physically disabled students and 7.48 for those Without physically disabled students, resulting in an overall mean of 7.64. This suggests that factors beyond physical disability, such as academic pressures, social interactions, and societal expectations, influence stress. Research by Lee and Hankin (2009) and Suzuki and Tomoda (2015) highlights how individual factors like self-esteem, alongside external pressures, impact stress. Additionally, negative correlations between self-esteem and anxiety, depression, and stress suggest that lower self-esteem contributes to

higher psychological distress, a pattern supported by previous studies (Sharma & Agarwala, 2013; Pyszczyński et al., 2015). Positive correlations between anxiety, depression, and stress further emphasize the interconnectedness of these psychological issues, reinforcing the cycle of distress (Pyszczyński et al., 2004).

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing insights into the psychological well-being of physically disabled and regular students in specialized educational settings. The lower self-esteem reported by disabled students aligns with previous studies (Mushtaq & Akhouri, 2016; Nazir et al., 2016). However, the lack of significant differences in anxiety, depression, and stress levels suggests that factors like academic pressures, social relationships, and coping strategies influence the mental health of both groups. Future research should explore the role of support systems, social integration, and physical activities as protective factors for students with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

The study finds that physically disabled students have lower self-esteem than their regular peers, which is linked to higher anxiety, depression, and stress. However, no significant differences were found between the groups in these aspects. Other factors contribute to these psychological challenges. Inclusive activities, therapies, and counseling are essential to improve self-esteem, with parents and teachers playing key roles in supporting students' well-being.

This research offers valuable insights for schools and disability organizations, guiding the development of activities and interventions to address the psychological challenges faced by physically disabled students, enhancing their well-being.

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