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**Neha Sharma**  
Assistant Professor (Human  
Development & Family  
Relations) Department of  
Human Development & Family  
Relations Govt. Home Science  
College, Sector-10, Chandigarh,  
India.

**Jatinder Kaur Gulati**  
Head & Professor,  
Department of Human  
Development Punjab  
Agricultural University,  
Ludhiana, India.

**Correspondence**  
**Neha Sharma**  
Assistant Professor (Human  
Development & Family  
Relations) Department of  
Human Development & Family  
Relations Govt. Home Science  
College, Sector-10, Chandigarh,  
India.

## Gender differences in happiness, Self-esteem and personality traits in adolescents living in socio-economic hardship

**Neha Sharma, Jatinder Kaur Gulati**

### Abstract

The present study investigates the happiness profile of adolescents living in socio-economic hardship and gender differences in happiness, different traits of personality and self-esteem among adolescents living in socio-economic hardship. Oxford Happiness Inventory, Self Esteem Inventories, Eysenck's Personality Inventory and Socio-Economic Status Scale (Form B) were administered on 360 adolescents (15-18 years of age) belonging to intact two parent families and living in conditions of socio-economic hardship. Results revealed that despite living in conditions of socio-economic hardship, majority of the rural adolescents perceived high degree of happiness. Female adolescents perceived significantly more happiness as compared to their male counterparts. Males reported significantly higher psychoticism, whereas, females manifested significantly more extraversion. Neuroticism was nearly equal in both males and females. Males adjudged their self-worth better than females in different situations i.e. general, home, social, school and total self-esteem.

**Keywords:** *Happiness, self-esteem, personality, socio-economic hardship*

### 1. Introduction

Through the past century, psychologists have mainly focused on human unhappiness (such as anxiety and depression) and neglected the positive aspect of human potential. Only until comparatively recently, especially after Bradburn's (1969) [8] discovery of the independence of positive and negative affect, that psychologists have started to look at the correlates, definitions and predictors of happiness (Argyle, 1987; Eysenck, 1990; Myers, 1992; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) [1, 23, 84, 88, 55]. Argyle *et al.* (1989) [4] defined happiness as having three partly independent components: (1) the average level of satisfaction over a specific time period; (2) the frequency and degree of positive affect; and (3) the relative absence of negative affect. They, therefore, devised a measure of happiness that has proved a robust and comprehensive measure of both reliability and validity (Furnham and Brewin, 1990) [25]. Howard Mumford Jones once said that "happiness...belongs to that category of words, the meaning of which everybody knows but the definition of which nobody can give" (cited in Freedman, 1978) [49]. Although happiness may have different meanings for different people, most agree that it is a "glow" word (Parducci, 1995) [83] – that is, a pervasive and lasting sense that life is fulfilling, meaningful, and pleasant (Myers, 1992) [88]. To study this sometimes elusive construct, researchers have achieved a modest amount of agreement on how it should be measured and defined. The most widely-accepted definition is that of Diener and his colleagues, who prefer to use the label subjective well-being, defining it as a combination of life satisfaction (a cognitive judgment) and the balance of the frequency of positive and negative affect (i.e., hedonic tone) (Diener, 1985, Larsen *et al.*, 1991) [95]. Making the assumption that most people know whether they are happy, a number of researchers have allowed the individuals being measured to define happiness for themselves (Gurin *et al.*, 1960; Kozma and Stones, 1980; Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999) [50, 51, 52]. Socio-economic hardship has been identified as a salient risk factor for the psychological well-being of children (Huston *et al.* 1994) [29] leading towards stress and unhappiness among individuals experiencing it. Poverty is a conglomerate of conditions and events that amount to a pervasive stressor. Economic hard times can have severe consequences for individuals causing increased risk for mental stress among its members (Conger *et al.* 1992) [13, 59].

A large body of research demonstrates associations between poverty and negative outcomes for children who experience it (e.g., Elder, 1974; Elder, Conger, Foster, & Ardel, 1992; Gecas, 1979; Huston, 1991; Kohn, 1963; Lempers, Clark-Lempers, & Si-mons, 1989; McLoyd, 1989, 1990; Patterson, Griesler, Vaden, & Kupersmidt, 1992; Slaughter, 1988; Zill & Coiro, 1992; Zill, Moore, Smith, Stief, & Coiro, 1991) <sup>[58, 59, 61, 64, 60, 62, 63, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69]</sup>. Family economic hardship has been associated with a wide variety of negative outcomes for children, including low self-esteem (Isralowitz & Singer, 1986) <sup>[89]</sup>, heightened levels of both internalizing and externalizing behavior problems (Werner, 1989), and lack of acceptance by peers (Patterson, Vaden, Griesler, & Kupersmidt, 1991; Patterson, Vaden, & Kupersmidt, 1991) <sup>[90, 91]</sup>. Existing research suggests that childhood difficulties in behavior and peer relationships are associated with adjustment problems in adolescence and adulthood, including delinquency, school dropout, and psychopathology (Parker & Asher, 1987) <sup>[92]</sup>; this association makes the relation between poverty and childhood socio emotional problems a cause of even greater concern.

Personality traits (particularly extraversion and neuroticism) have been consistently found to be the main causes of individuals' general happiness accounting for up to half of the total variance (Eysenck, 1990; Argyle and Lu, 1990; Furnham and Brewin, 1990; Headey and Wearing, 1991; Myers and Diener, 1995; Brebner *et al.*, 1995; Furnham and Cheng, 1997, 2000; Francis *et al.*, 1998) <sup>[23, 86, 25, 53, 84, 26, 34, 56]</sup>.

Further, Self-esteem has been defined as a global feeling of self-worth or adequacy as a person, or generalized feelings of self-acceptance, goodness, and self-respect (Coopersmith, 1967; Crocker and Major, 1989; Rosenberg, 1965, Wylie, 1979) <sup>[93, 80, 54, 85]</sup>. This global, personal judgment of worthiness is characterized as the evaluative component of the self (Campbell, 1990) <sup>[79]</sup>, and as distinct from collective or racial self-esteem (Crocker and Major, 1989) <sup>[80]</sup>. According to Epstein (1973) <sup>[81]</sup>, people have a basic need for self-esteem, and, at least in Western cultures, they use numerous strategies to maintain it (Dunning *et al.*, 1995; Taylor and Brown, 1988; Diener and Diener, 1995; Markus and Kitayama, 1991) <sup>[82, 96, 77, 99]</sup>. Self-esteem forms early in the course of development, remains fairly constant over time, and is relatively immune to change (Campbell, 1990) <sup>[79]</sup>. Thus, High self-esteem has been reported to be one of the strongest predictors of psychological well-being (Rosenberg, 1965; Campbell, 1981; Diener, 1984) <sup>[54, 78, 75]</sup>.

Adolescence is a period of psychological and social transition between childhood and adulthood, when a child moves from dependency to independency in his behavior. Adolescence is a cultural and social phenomenon and therefore the endpoints are not easily tied to physical milestone. The time is identified with the dramatic changes in the body, along with developments in a person's psychology and academic career which will lead him to live life in a contented and happy way. (Soundar, 2005).

Therefore, there was a felt need to answer to the question that, how personality traits and self-esteem of adolescents resist to the ill effects of poverty related stress and they perceive happiness in their life. Also, it was important to study how adolescent males and females differ in perceiving happiness. Therefore, the present study investigates the happiness profile of adolescents living in socio- economic hardship and gender differences in happiness, different traits of personality and

self-esteem among adolescents living in socio- economic hardship.

### Research Methodology

The sample comprised of 360 rural adolescents in the age range of 15-18 years belonging to intact two parent families and living in conditions of socio-economic hardship purposively drawn from Government Senior Secondary Schools of Mohali district of Punjab. The sample was divided to have equal number of boys (n = 180) and girls (n = 180). Their socio-economic status was confirmed by using socio-economic status scale by Kulshreshta (1981) <sup>[30]</sup>. All these adolescents belonged to low socio-economic status category only. The selected subjects were approached in the schools to assess their perception of happiness and individual attributes like self-esteem and personality pattern.

### Tools/Measures

1. Oxford Happiness Inventory (Argyle, 2001) <sup>[2]</sup>. This questionnaire was administered to assess the perception of happiness among adolescents. It is a 29 item questionnaire measuring the main components of happiness i.e. achievement and satisfaction, enjoyment, vigour and health. The test-retest reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.90.
2. The Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1986) <sup>[15]</sup> was used to examine the self-esteem profile of adolescents. It contains 58 items which measure self-esteem of the adolescents in different situations of life like general, home, social and school. Test retest reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.92.
3. Eysenck's Personality Inventory (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1975) <sup>[57]</sup> was used to assess the personality of the adolescents. It was designed to give the measure of three important personality dimensions i.e. psychoticism, extraversion and neuroticism. These traits are measured through 90 questions carefully selected after lengthy item analysis and factor analysis (Eysenck 1975) <sup>[57]</sup>. Test retest reliability of the scale is 0.92.
4. Socio-Economic Status Scale Form B (Kulshreshta, 1981) <sup>[30]</sup> was used to judge the socio-economic status of the respondents. This scale is meant for measuring the socio-economic status of the rural respondents. It is a verbal scale which contains 20 items. It measures various characteristics of the respondents and their families like parents' education, parents' occupation, number of siblings, family type, birth order and possession of household articles and agricultural implements etc.

### Results and Discussion

The results are presented in three sections. The first section reports the introductory analysis on happiness profile of adolescents living in socio-economic hardship and gender differences therein. The second section deals with Personality pattern of adolescents living in socio-economic hardship and gender differences. In the final section, Self-esteem profile of adolescents living in socio-economic hardship are reported along with the gender differences.

### Section 1. Happiness profile of adolescents living in socio-economic hardship

**Table 1:** Percent distribution across different levels of happiness as perceived by adolescents living in socio-economic hardship

Happiness level	Total		Male		Female		Chi-Square
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Low	10	2.78	7	3.89	3	1.67	1.03
Average	107	29.72	47	26.11	60	33.33	
High	243	67.50	126	70.00	117	65.00	

Total Sample N = 360; Males = 180; Females = 180

Table 1 reveals the distribution of the sample across different levels of happiness as perceived by adolescents living in poverty. In the total sample, major proportion (67.50%) of the adolescents reported happiness at high level followed by 29.72 percent who perceived average level of happiness. Only 2.78 percent of adolescents recorded low happiness. Majority of the female (65%) as well as male adolescents (70 %) reported happiness at high level. Only 28.33 percent female adolescents perceived average level of happiness and among male adolescents, 31.11 percent recorded average level of happiness. Less than 2 percent female adolescents and only 3.89 percent male adolescents recorded low happiness. Chi-square value depicted gender differences to be non-significant as far as distribution of both the genders across different levels of happiness as perceived by adolescents, was concerned.

**Table 2:** Gender differences in perception of happiness (Mean ± SD) as perceived by adolescents living in socio-economic hardship

	Total		Male		Female		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
<b>Happiness scores</b>	140.50	20.58	139.21	22.87	141.79	17.97	2.08**

\*\* p < 0.05, (males: n<sub>1</sub> = 180; females: n<sub>2</sub> = 180)

The mean happiness scores among two genders were significantly different, with females scoring higher as compared to male adolescents. It shows that females perceived more happiness as compared to male adolescents (p<0.05).

**Section 2: Personality pattern of adolescents living in socio-economic hardship**

Table 3 reveals gender wise distribution of adolescents living in socio-economic hardship across different traits of personality

**Table 3:** Gender wise distribution of adolescents living in socio-economic hardship across different traits of personality

Personality traits	Male		Female		Total		Chi-Square
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
<b>Psychoticism</b>							
Low	61	33.89	75	41.67	136	37.78	2.52
Average	103	57.22	93	51.67	196	54.44	
High	16	8.89	12	6.67	28	7.78	
<b>Extraversion</b>							
Low	49	27.22	36	20.00	85	23.61	3.04
Average	122	67.78	131	72.78	253	70.28	
High	9	5.00	13	7.22	22	6.11	
<b>Neuroticism</b>							
Low	93	51.67	89	49.44	182	50.56	0.52
Average	44	24.44	50	27.78	94	26.11	
High	43	23.89	41	22.78	84	23.33	

**Psychoticism**

Psychoticism is an independent dimension which describes the personality as solitary, troublesome, cruel, lacking in feeling and empathy, hostile to others, sensation seeking and liking odd and unusual things. In the total sample, major proportion of the adolescents (54.44%) reported average level of psychoticism followed by 37.78 percent who revealed low level of psychoticism. Only 7.78 percent of adolescents were in high category of psychoticism. It was observed that more than half of the adolescents both male (57.22%) and female adolescents (51.67%) reported moderate level of psychoticism. Majority of female adolescents (51.67%) recorded average level of psychoticism followed by those (41.67%) who showed low psychoticism. Among male adolescents, 33.89 percent of them recorded low level of psychoticism. It was revealed from the data that only 8.89 percent of male adolescents were in high level of psychoticism. Chi-square value revealed gender differences to be non-significant as far as distribution of male and female adolescents across different levels of psychoticism was concerned.

**Extraversion**

Extraversion, one of the dimensions of personality ranges from sociable, talkative, enthusiastic at one end to sober, reserved and cautious at the other. Data on extraversion revealed that majority of adolescents in the total sample (70.28%) reported average level of extraversion followed by 23.61 who were low in extraversion. Only 6.11 percent adolescents in the total sample recorded high level of extraversion. Major proportion of the adolescents that is 72.78 % girls and 67.78 % boys recorded average level of extraversion. Among girls 20 percent recorded low level followed by those few 7.22 % who were in high level of extroversion whereas 67.78 % adolescent boys were moderately extraverts followed by only 5 percent who were high in extraversion. Non-significant gender differences across different levels of extraversion were reported by chi-square value.

**Neuroticism**

Neuroticism refers to general emotional liability of a person, his emotional over-responsiveness and his liability to neurotic breakdown under stress. Half of the sample (50.56%) recorded low level of neuroticism followed by 26.11 percent who revealed average level of neuroticism. Major part of adolescents both males (51.67%) and females (49.44%) recorded low level of neuroticism. Among female respondents, 27.78 % of them reported moderate level of neuroticism followed by those who were in high category of neuroticism. Similar results were reported by male adolescents. Chi-square value revealed gender differences to be non-significant as far as distribution of male and female adolescents across different traits of personality were concerned. To sum up, though gender differences were found to be non-significant, yet, the distribution of the sample across different levels of personality traits showed that larger percentage of rural poor male adolescents held moderate psychoticism as compared to females. Data on personality showed that majority of the rural low socio-economic status adolescents held average psychoticism and extraversion whereas neuroticism was held at low level by major section (50.56%) of the respondents.

**Table 4:** Gender differences in different dimensions of personality (mean score ± SD) of adolescents living in socio-economic hardship.

Personality Dimensions	Male		Female		Total		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Psychoticism	3.15	1.52	2.86	1.38	3.00	1.45	1.90*
Extraversion	6.39	1.19	6.62	1.18	6.51	1.19	1.84*
Neuroticism	2.53	1.06	2.52	1.06	2.53	1.06	0.09

\* p < 0.10 (males: n = 180; females: n = 180)

Table 4 reveals gender differences in mean score in different dimensions of personality of adolescents living in socio-economic hardship. The t-value revealed gender differences to be significant in two dimensions of personality of rural adolescents living in socio-economic hardship. Differences were significant in psychoticism (p<0.1) and extraversion (p<0.1). Males reported higher mean score in psychoticism as compared to females where as females recorded greater extraversion than males. Neuroticism mean score was equal in both of males and females. Rural males reported higher psychoticism whereas females manifested more extraversion.

**Section 3. Self-esteem profile of adolescents living in socio-economic hardship**

Table 5 reveals gender wise distribution of the adolescents across different dimensions of self-esteem.

**Table 5:** Gender wise distribution of adolescents living in socio-economic hardship across different dimensions of self esteem

Self-Esteem dimensions	Male		Female		Total		Chi-Square
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
<b>General self esteem</b>							
Low	5	2.78	3	1.67	8	2.22	6.14**
Average	92	51.11	117	65.00	209	58.06	
High	83	46.11	60	33.33	143	39.72	
<b>Home esteem</b>							
Low	17	9.44	22	12.22	39	10.83	0.72
Average	159	88.33	154	85.56	313	86.94	
High	4	2.22	4	2.22	8	2.22	
<b>Social esteem</b>							
Low	70	38.89	75	41.67	145	40.28	0.29
Average	106	58.89	101	56.11	207	57.50	
High	4	2.22	4	2.22	8	2.22	
<b>School esteem</b>							
Low	15	8.33	14	7.78	29	8.06	5.83**
Average	58	32.22	80	44.44	138	38.33	
High	107	59.44	86	47.78	193	53.61	
<b>Total self esteem</b>							
Low	6	3.33	12	6.67	18	5.00	6.68**
Average	67	37.22	84	46.67	151	41.94	
High	107	59.44	84	46.67	191	53.06	

\*\* p < 0.05

**General self esteem**

It was revealed that major section of the rural poor adolescents in this data (58.06%) reported average general self-esteem followed by 39.72 percent who reported high general esteem. Only 2.22 percent of the total sample depicted low general self-esteem. It was observed that more than half of the sample, both males (51.11%) and females (65.00%) reported average general self-esteem. A very low proportion of both the genders, males (2.78%) and females (1.67%) reported low general self-esteem and 46.11 per cent male adolescents and 33.33 per cent female adolescents recorded high general self-esteem. Chi square value revealed gender differences to be

significant (p<0.05) as far as distribution of male and female adolescents across different levels of general self-esteem was concerned. It shows that the male adolescents living in the conditions of poverty significantly held higher general and school esteem as compared to their female counterparts

**Home esteem**

It was observed from the table that a larger proportion (86.94%) of the sample perceived moderate home esteem followed by 10.83 percent of the total sample who were low in home esteem. Only 2.22 percent adolescents were in high category of home esteem. Data on home esteem showed that more than 80 per cent of both male (88.33%) and female (85.56%) rural poor adolescents depicted average home esteem. A very low percentage of both the genders that is 2.22 per cent in each group recorded high home esteem whereas only 9.44 per cent males and 12.22 per cent females revealed low home esteem. Chi-square value revealed gender differences to be non-significant in distribution of male and female adolescents across different levels of home self-esteem.

**Social esteem**

More than half of the adolescents (57.50%) in the total sample manifested moderate level of social esteem followed by 40.28 percent who were low in social esteem. Only 2.22 percent depicted high social esteem. Majority of the rural low socio-economic status adolescents, both males (58.89%) and females (56.11%), recorded average level of social self-esteem. Among female respondents, 41.67 per cent perceived low social esteem whereas 38.89 per cent of male adolescents reported low social esteem. Only 2.22 per cent female adolescents recorded high social esteem. Similar results were available for male adolescents. Chi-square value revealed gender differences to be non-significant as far as distribution of male and female adolescents across different levels of social esteem was concerned.

**School esteem**

In the total sample, 53.61 percent of the rural poor adolescents manifested high school esteem whereas 38.33 percent recorded moderate school esteem. Only 8.06 percent of adolescents were low in school esteem. Data represented that a major proportion of rural male adolescents that is 59.44 per cent, held high school esteem, whereas, 47.78 per cent female adolescents showed high school esteem. Among male respondents, 32.22 per cent reported moderate level of school esteem. Contrarily, more number of female respondents (44.44%) recorded moderate level of school esteem. A very less number of adolescents, both males (8.33%) and females (7.78%) reported low school esteem. Gender differences were significant (p<0.05) in distribution of male and female adolescents across different levels of school esteem. Significantly higher percentage of males held high school esteem as compared to females, whereas females held average school esteem in a larger proportion.

**Total self esteem**

Majority of the rural poor adolescents (53.06%) reported high overall self-esteem followed by those who depicted average (41.94%) overall self-esteem. Only 5 percent adolescents recorded low overall self-esteem. It was observed from the table that a larger proportion of the rural low socio-economic status male respondents (59.44%) reported high overall self-esteem whereas 46.67 per cent of females recorded the similar level of total self-esteem. A very less proportion of

adolescents, both males (3.33%) and females (6.67%), recorded low total self-esteem. Whereas when the two genders females (46.67%) were compared on total self-esteem, higher percentage of girls (46.67%) recorded moderate overall self-esteem than boys (37.22%). Gender differences were significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) as far as distribution of male and female rural poor adolescents across different levels of total self-esteem was concerned. To conclude, gender differences in distribution of the sample across different levels of self-esteem presented that significantly larger percentage of rural poor male adolescents held high general, school and total self-esteem as compared to females who held average self-esteem in these dimensions. Overall data on self-esteem showed that majority of the rural low socio-economic status adolescents held average general, social and home esteem whereas the school and total esteem was held at high level by major section of the respondents.

**Table 6:** Gender differences in self-esteem (mean score  $\pm$  SD) of adolescents living in socio-economic hardship

Self-Esteem dimensions	Male		Female		Total		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
General self esteem	15.89	2.97	14.99	3.04	15.44	3.03	2.84***
Home self esteem	5.19	1.36	4.96	1.26	5.08	1.31	1.66*
Social self esteem	4.69	1.07	4.60	1.13	4.64	1.10	0.78
School self esteem	6.53	1.27	6.32	1.27	6.43	1.28	1.57
Total self esteem	32.30	4.47	30.87	4.52	31.59	4.54	3.02***

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.10$

(Males:  $n = 180$ ; females:  $n = 180$ )

Table 6 depicts gender differences in mean score of self-esteem among adolescents living in socio-economic hardship. Males perceived better self-esteem as compared to females in various dimensions in judging about themselves in different situations such as general, home, social, school and total self-esteem. Differences were significant in general self-esteem ( $p < 0.01$ ), home self-esteem ( $p < 0.10$ ) and total self-esteem ( $p < 0.01$ ).

## Discussion

The present study was conducted to assess the happiness profile of adolescents living in socio-economic hardship and gender differences in happiness, different traits of personality and self-esteem among adolescents living in socio-economic hardship. The experiential generalization that adolescents who are living in conditions of socio-economic hardship and poverty have poor psychological well-being which has been observed repeatedly in the previous research (Sobolewski and Amato 2005, Eisenberg 1979 and Thompson *et al* 1995) [43]. But it is not reasserted by the present results. The solace of this study is that in spite of living in such impoverished conditions, a large proportion of the adolescents perceived high level of happiness. Lever (2004) [32] asserted that statistically subjective well-being is related to the socio-economic group to which subjects belong, with the poorest subjects reporting the least satisfaction. Gender differences in mean scores of happiness in this study, as perceived by adolescents living in socio-economic hardship revealed that the female adolescents perceived more happiness as compared to male adolescents. Argyle and Lu (1990) [3, 86] also documented that females reported significantly higher scores in happiness. On the contrary, Francis *et al* (1998) [24, 56] reported significantly higher scores among males in happiness. Findings are also inconsistent with the results indicated by Mehon *et al* (2005) that there were no significant gender differences in happiness between adolescent boys and girls.

The results of percent distribution and gender differences in various traits of personality reported that majority of the respondents manifested average to low psychoticism and extraversion whereas neuroticism was held at low level by major section of the respondents. Males reported significantly higher psychoticism, whereas, females manifested significantly more extraversion. Neuroticism was nearly equal in both males and females. Findings are in congruence with the past research by Francis *et al* (1998) [24, 56] which compares the responses of students from the English speaking world short revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck *et al* 1985) [76], a 48 item inventory with separate sets of 12 items measuring extraversion, neuroticism, psychotics and social desirability was administered to samples of undergraduate students in Unites Kingdom, Unites States, Australia, Canada as part of their course work. Results showed that happiness was positively correlated with extraversion and negatively with neuroticism in all the samples but the results were not reaffirmed as far as gender differences were concerned as no significant gender differences in scores on happiness in any of the samples were found. Against this background Francis (2003) [70] re-examined the relationship between happiness and both gender and Eysenck's dimensional model of personality. A battery of tests containing Oxford Happiness Inventory (Argyle *et al* 1989) [4] and revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Eysenck (Eysenck *et al* 1985) [76] was administered as part of the induction programme to the incoming undergraduates at a college of Higher Education in Wales. The sample comprised of 121 men and 335 women. The result confirms that happiness is positively related with extraversion and were in line with the previous research. Contrarily, findings were not supported in terms of psychoticism and gender differences. Findings of the study demonstrates that majority of the rural poor adolescents held average level general, social and home esteem, whereas, the school and total esteem was held at high level by major section of the respondents. Males adjudged their self-worth better than females in different situations i.e. general, home, social, school and total self-esteem. Differences were significant in general self-esteem, home and total self-esteem. We found girls to have lower self-esteem than boys in line with previous research (Robins *et al.*, 2002, Robins and Trzesniewski, 2005) [74, 73] suggest that a decline in self-esteem during adolescence may be due to cognitive development and the ability to compare oneself to one's peers on a range of different dimensions as well as the receipt of negative feedback from others. What may explain why girls declined but not boys? Girls might be susceptible to conflicting messages about their role in society. Clay *et al.* (2005) [71] also found significant declines in girls' self-esteem with gender differences being greatest in middle adolescence. They suggested that body image may be one possible explanation for this decline as body image is a core component of self-definition. They suggested that girls are socialised in a way that attaches great importance to a particular body shape and size and that this affects girls' self-esteem. Although we are not able to verify this assertion, the possibility remains that the declines in self-esteem observed in our study may be symptomatic of similar influences and these could include socialisation experiences as well as issues related to body image. Future studies should investigate these possibilities. It is interesting to note that girls tended to be lower than boys in self-esteem across all the adolescent years, which is consistent with past research (Kling *et al.*, 1999; Robins *et al.*, 2002) [72, 74]. The findings are not in line with the study by Langner *et al.*

(1970)<sup>[98]</sup> which investigated the relationship between income and self-esteem with a population of Manhattan school children. They found that self-esteem was at its lowest among low-income boys, but among girls there were no differences across income. A study on related issues was done by Amato and Ochiltree (1986)<sup>[97]</sup>. In examining a data set from Australia, they concluded that family income was not significantly related to children's self-esteem. Additionally, they argued that self-esteem was mainly associated with interpersonal resources of the family, and not "family structure resources," e.g. parental help and attention.

### Conclusions

Despite living in conditions of socio-economic hardship, majority of the rural adolescents perceived high degree of happiness (67.50%) followed by 29.70% being in average category and only 2.78% depicted low profile of happiness. Female adolescents perceived significantly more happiness as compared to their male counterparts. Majority of the respondents manifested average to low psychoticism and extraversion whereas neuroticism was held at low level by major section of the respondents. Males reported significantly higher psychoticism, whereas, females manifested significantly more extraversion. Neuroticism was nearly equal in both males and females. Majority of the rural poor adolescents held average level general, social and home esteem, whereas, the school and total esteem was held at high level by major section of the respondents. Males adjudged their self-worth better than females in different situations i.e. general, home, social, school and total self-esteem. Differences were significant in general self-esteem, home and total self-esteem.

### Recommendations

Future research is needed to pinpoint the environmental and biological changes that are associated with reductions in self-esteem. More in depth studies may be conducted by taking into account other variables such as family structure, friendship patterns, sibling relationships etc. Intervention studies can be conducted to alleviate stress and promote happiness in families and communities. Study can be extended to other SES categories and age-groups and comparative studies can also be conducted between rural and urban population. Findings of the study would be useful for parents, counselors, psychiatrists, social workers, policy makers, educationists and researchers for holistic understanding of self-esteem, personality traits and gender differences therein in the perception of happiness. The results can provide empirical feedback to the professionals and NGOs to plan and organize intervention strategies and programs to promote happiness among families and communities. This study can be useful as a reference material for future research in the area of vulnerability and resilience to assess psychological makeup of individuals at risk.

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