

Self-Esteem and Its Relationship with Passive Aggression and Perceived Social Support among Working Adults in Bangalore, Karnataka, India

Kaatyashini Sivaraj¹, Dr. Shivanand Pawar²

¹ 241MSCD00988, Fourth Semester, Department of Psychology PG Studies, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

² Guide, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Abstract: *The present study examined the levels of self-esteem, passive aggression, and perceived social support among working adults in Bangalore and investigated the relationships between self-esteem and the other two variables. A quantitative, nonexperimental, cross-sectional correlational design was used with 90 working adults aged 24–55 years selected through purposive sampling. Self-esteem was assessed using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), passive aggression was assessed using the Test of Passive Aggression (TPA), and perceived social support was assessed using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the variables, and Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to examine associations. Most participants reported moderate self-esteem (70.0%), moderate passive aggression (53.3%), and moderate perceived social support (71.1%). Self-esteem was significantly and negatively related to passive aggression, $r(88) = -.568, p < .001$, and significantly and positively related to perceived social support, $r(88) = .677, p < .001$. Thus, both null hypotheses were rejected. The findings suggest that self-esteem is an important psychological correlate of indirect aggressive tendencies and perceived social support among working adults. Because the study was correlational and used purposive sampling, the findings indicate association rather than causation and should not be generalized beyond comparable populations without further research.*

Keywords: self-esteem, passive aggression, perceived social support, working adults, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, MSPSS

1. Introduction

Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of personal worth and value. It develops through interpersonal experiences, social acceptance, achievement, and important life events and can change across the lifespan (Harris & Orth, 2020; Orth et al., 2018). Among working adults, self-esteem may be relevant to interpersonal functioning because work involves repeated evaluation, collaboration, feedback, role expectations, and social comparison.

Passive-aggressive behaviour involves indirect expression of dissatisfaction, resentment, resistance, or hostility rather than direct communication. It may appear through avoidance, procrastination, reluctance to communicate disagreement, withdrawal, or indirect resistance. Such behaviours can interfere with workplace relationships and task functioning (Johnson & Klee, 2007; Perry & Flannery, 1982).

Perceived social support refers to an individual's perception that meaningful people are available to provide emotional, practical, and interpersonal support. Support from family, friends, and significant others can contribute to psychological adjustment and may buffer the effects of stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Thoits, 2011).

Self-esteem and social relationships appear to be closely connected. Harris and Orth (2020), in a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies, found evidence for a reciprocal relationship between self-esteem and social relationships. This suggests that supportive relationships may contribute to positive self-evaluations while self-esteem may also influence

the quality of social relationships. In a workplace context, perceived support may therefore be an important psychological resource.

The relationship between self-esteem and aggressive behaviour is more complex. Bushman et al. (2009) examined the proposed link between low self-esteem and aggression and highlighted the importance of considering the conditions under which self-esteem is related to aggressive responses. Rill et al. (2009) reported a negative relationship between self-esteem and verbal aggressiveness in romantic dating relationships. Although these studies do not directly measure passive aggression in working adults, they provide a basis for examining whether self-evaluation is associated with indirect negative interpersonal behaviour.

Research involving workplace relationships also indicates that indirect negative behaviours can occur in professional environments. Wilson et al. (2011), for example, identified passive-aggressive behaviour among forms of horizontal hostility in nursing relationships. Sundin et al. (2006) further demonstrated that organisational and job-related factors are associated with perceived workplace social support.

2. Research Gap and Rationale

Although self-esteem, aggression, and social support have each received considerable attention, comparatively fewer studies have examined these three constructs together among working adults, particularly in the Indian context. Existing literature has frequently focused on adolescents, young adults, students, clinical groups, or specific occupational groups.

Passive aggression has also received less attention than overt, reactive, or proactive aggression. The present study therefore focused on working adults in Bangalore to examine the levels of the three variables and the relationships between self-esteem and passive aggression and between self-esteem and perceived social support.

Aim

The aim of the present study was to examine self-esteem and its relationship with passive aggression and perceived social support among working adults in Bangalore, Karnataka, India.

Objectives

- To assess the level of self-esteem among working adults.
- To assess the level of passive aggression among working adults.
- To assess the level of perceived social support among working adults.
- To examine the relationship between self-esteem and passive aggression.
- To examine the relationship between self-esteem and perceived social support.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and passive aggression. H₁: There is a significant relationship between self-esteem and passive aggression. H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and perceived social support. H₂: There is a significant relationship between self-esteem and perceived social support.

3. Literature Review

Szczesniak et al. (2021) examined self-esteem, life satisfaction, and self-presentation among 328 young adults aged 18–35 years. Self-esteem was positively related to self-promotion and negatively related to self-deprecation, while life satisfaction was also associated with self-evaluative styles. The findings support the view that self-esteem is connected with how individuals evaluate and present themselves in social contexts.

Rouault et al. (2022) investigated the formation of performance estimates among young adults with relatively high and low self-esteem. Although objective task performance did not differ robustly, participants with low self-esteem tended to underestimate their performance. This suggests that self-esteem may influence subjective interpretation of personal competence even when actual performance is similar.

Perry and Flannery (1982) provided an early clinical conceptualisation of passive-aggressive personality patterns and described several patterns involving inhibition, resentment, vindictiveness, and difficulties in adaptation and interpersonal functioning. Johnson and Klee (2007) later examined passive-aggressive behaviour in organisational settings, supporting the relevance of indirect resistance and interpersonal behaviour to workplace functioning.

Rill et al. (2009) found that self-esteem was negatively associated with verbal aggressiveness in romantic dating relationships. While verbal aggression is not equivalent to passive aggression, the finding provides related evidence that self-evaluation can be associated with interpersonal forms of aggression.

Whelpley and McDaniel (2016) reviewed the relationship between self-esteem and counterproductive work behaviours. Their work is relevant to the present study because it places self-evaluation within an occupational context and illustrates the importance of examining self-esteem in relation to workplace behaviour.

Harris and Orth (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies and found a meaningful link between self-esteem and social relationships. The findings support the conceptualisation of social support and self-esteem as interconnected psychological resources. Similarly, Sethi (2022) and Safwa and Shari (2022) reported positive associations between perceived social support and self-esteem among young adults in India.

Zhang et al. (2020) examined social support, resilience, self-esteem, and post-traumatic stress symptoms among intensive care unit nurses across China. Their findings provide occupational evidence for considering self-esteem and social support together in working populations. Sundin et al. (2006) also highlighted the importance of organisational conditions in shaping perceived workplace support.

4. Synthesis

Taken together, previous research suggests that self-esteem is related to interpersonal functioning and social relationships, while social support can operate as a psychological resource. Passive-aggressive behaviour represents an important but comparatively less studied form of indirect interpersonal difficulty. The present study integrates these strands by examining self-esteem, passive aggression, and perceived social support in a sample of working adults in Bangalore.

5. Methodology

Research Design and Participants

The study employed a quantitative, nonexperimental, cross-sectional correlational research design. The sample consisted of 90 working adults from Bangalore, aged 24–55 years. Purposive sampling was used. Participants were required to be working adults within the specified age range and to have English as the medium of instruction. Non-working individuals and those outside the specified age range were excluded.

Measures

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). The RSES is a 10-item measure of global self-esteem using a four-point response format. The project describes the scale as assessing self-worth

through positive and negative self-evaluations and reports evidence of internal consistency and test-retest reliability (Sinclair et al., 2010).

Test of Passive Aggression (TPA). The TPA is a self-report measure assessing passive-aggressive tendencies through self-directed and other-directed dimensions. Its 14 items address behaviours and attitudes such as indirect refusal, difficulty expressing disagreement, procrastination, avoidance of commitments, lateness, resistance, and indirect expressions of dissatisfaction. The project reports good internal consistency for the self-directed component ($\alpha = .86$ in the cited sample).

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). The MSPSS consists of 12 items assessing perceived support from family, friends, and significant others. It uses a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (Very Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Very Strongly Agree), with total scores ranging from 12 to 84. The original scale demonstrated good internal consistency, with reported subscale alphas of .87, .85, and .88 (Zimet et al., 1988).

Procedure and Ethics

Data were collected from eligible working adults after the purpose and scope of the study were explained. The project reports that oral consent was obtained from participants. Responses were collected using the study measures and were subsequently scored for analysis.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics included frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used to examine the direction and strength of the relationships between self-esteem and passive aggression and between self-esteem and perceived social support. Statistical significance was evaluated at $p < .05$.

Analytical Framework

Variable	Measure	Primary analysis
Self-esteem	RSES	Frequency, %, M, SD
Passive aggression	TPA	Frequency, %, M, SD
Perceived social support	MSPSS	Frequency, %, M, SD
Self-esteem $\times$ passive aggression	RSES + TPA	Pearson r
Self-esteem $\times$ social support	RSES + MSPSS	Pearson r

6. Findings and Discussions

Descriptive Findings

Variable	Low	Moderate	High
Self-esteem	8 (8.9%)	63 (70.0%)	19 (21.1%)
Passive aggression	22 (24.4%)	48 (53.3%)	20 (22.2%)
Perceived social support	7 (7.8%)	64 (71.1%)	19 (21.1%)

The descriptive findings indicate that moderate levels were the most common category for all three variables. Seventy percent of participants reported moderate self-esteem, 53.3% reported moderate passive aggression, and 71.1% reported moderate perceived social support. The distribution suggests that the sample was predominantly characterised by middle-range scores rather than extreme levels.

Inferential Findings

Relationship	r	p	Interpretation
Self-esteem – Passive aggression	-.568	< .001	Significant negative; moderate-to-strong
Self-esteem – Perceived social support	.677	< .001	Significant positive; moderate-to-strong

A statistically significant negative correlation was found between self-esteem and passive aggression, $r(88) = -.568$, $p < .001$. Thus, participants with higher self-esteem tended to report lower passive aggression, while participants with lower self-esteem tended to report higher passive aggression. The coefficient of determination was approximately $r^2 = .322$, indicating that 32.2% of the variance was statistically associated in this sample; this does not imply causation.

A statistically significant positive correlation was found between self-esteem and perceived social support, $r(88) = .677$, $p < .001$. Participants reporting greater perceived social support tended to report higher self-esteem. The coefficient of determination was approximately $r^2 = .459$. Again, this represents statistical association and not a causal effect.

Hypothesis Decisions

H_{01} was rejected and H_1 was accepted because the relationship between self-esteem and passive aggression was statistically significant. H_{02} was rejected and H_2 was accepted because the relationship between self-esteem and perceived social support was statistically significant.

Findings and Discussions (continued)

Self-Esteem

The predominance of moderate self-esteem suggests that most participants had neither markedly negative nor exceptionally positive evaluations of themselves. This is consistent with the broader literature showing that self-esteem is influenced by social relationships and experiences across adulthood (Harris & Orth, 2020; Orth et al., 2018). Research among young adults in India has also reported positive links between perceived social support and self-esteem (Safwa & Shari, 2022; Sethi, 2022). The present finding extends this general pattern to working adults in Bangalore.

Passive Aggression

More than half of the participants (53.3%) fell in the moderate passive-aggression category. This suggests that indirect expressions of dissatisfaction, resistance, or disagreement were present to a moderate degree in the sample. The finding is relevant to organisational literature describing passive-aggressive behaviour as an interpersonal problem that may

affect workplace relationships (Johnson & Klee, 2007). Wilson et al. (2011) similarly identified passive-aggressive behaviours among forms of horizontal hostility in nursing workplaces.

The significant negative correlation between self-esteem and passive aggression is consistent with related research linking self-esteem to aggressive or counterproductive interpersonal behaviour. Rill et al. (2009) found that self-esteem was negatively related to verbal aggressiveness, while Whelpley and McDaniel (2016) reviewed evidence connecting self-esteem with counterproductive work behaviours. The present study adds to this literature by specifically examining passive aggression rather than overt aggression alone.

Perceived Social Support

Moderate perceived social support was reported by 71.1% of participants, indicating that most participants perceived a reasonable but not exceptionally high level of support from important people. The significant positive correlation between

social support and self-esteem is consistent with Harris and Orth's (2020) meta-analytic evidence that self-esteem and social relationships are closely connected. Zhang et al. (2020) also demonstrated the relevance of social support and self-esteem within a working occupational population.

Integrated Interpretation

The two significant relationships point in complementary directions. Higher self-esteem was associated with lower passive aggression, whereas higher perceived social support was associated with higher self-esteem. These findings suggest that self-evaluation and interpersonal resources may be important aspects of psychological functioning among working adults. However, the cross-sectional design does not establish temporal direction, and the relationships should not be interpreted as evidence that self-esteem causes changes in passive aggression or social support.

Comparison With Previous Research

Previous study	Key finding	Relevance to present study
Szczesniak et al. (2021)	Self-esteem related to self-presentation and life satisfaction	Supports importance of self-evaluation
Rill et al. (2009)	Self-esteem negatively related to verbal aggressiveness	Consistent with negative self-esteem–aggression association
Harris & Orth (2020)	Self-esteem linked with social relationships	Supports positive self-esteem–support relationship
Whelpley & McDaniel (2016)	Self-esteem associated with counterproductive work behaviours	Provides occupational context
Zhang et al. (2020)	Social support and self-esteem examined among nurses	Supports relevance to working adults
Wilson et al. (2011)	Passive-aggressive behaviour identified in workplace hostility	Supports workplace relevance of passive aggression

Implications

The findings have practical implications for workplace psychological well-being. Since most participants reported moderate levels of the three variables, interventions need not focus only on severe difficulties. Routine programmes that encourage healthy self-evaluation, assertive communication, constructive conflict management, and supportive interpersonal relationships may be useful. Organisations may also benefit from creating environments in which employees can express disagreement directly and safely rather than through avoidance or indirect resistance.

The positive relationship between perceived social support and self-esteem suggests that strengthening supportive relationships may be relevant to employee well-being. Support can include accessible supervisors, respectful peer relationships, opportunities for collaboration, and encouragement to use family and social resources when appropriate.

7. Limitations

- The sample was limited to 90 working adults from Bangalore and was selected through purposive sampling.
- The cross-sectional correlational design does not permit conclusions about causality or temporal direction.
- The study relied on self-report measures, which may be affected by response biases and social desirability.

- The study focused on the selected variables and did not examine other possible influences such as job stress, organisational climate, personality, or demographic differences.

8. Future Research

Future studies could use larger and more diverse samples from different Indian cities and occupational sectors. Longitudinal research could examine how self-esteem, passive aggression, and social support influence one another over time. Researchers may also examine workplace-specific social support, gender and occupational differences, self-esteem stability, and intervention outcomes. Qualitative studies could further explore how employees experience and manage indirect conflict in professional settings.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The present study examined self-esteem, passive aggression, and perceived social support among 90 working adults in Bangalore. Moderate levels were most common across all three variables. A significant negative relationship was found between self-esteem and passive aggression, indicating that higher self-esteem was associated with lower passive aggression. A significant positive relationship was found between self-esteem and perceived social support, indicating

that participants who perceived greater support also tended to report higher self-esteem.

The findings support both alternative hypotheses and contribute to the understanding of psychological and interpersonal functioning among working adults. In particular, the study highlights the potential relevance of positive self-evaluation and supportive social relationships when considering indirect interpersonal behaviours. The results should, however, be interpreted within the limits of the sample, self-report methodology, purposive sampling, and correlational design.

Recommendations

- Develop workplace programmes that promote healthy self-esteem, self-awareness, and realistic self-evaluation.
- Provide training in assertive communication, emotional regulation, constructive disagreement, and conflict resolution.
- Encourage supportive workplace relationships through mentoring, peer support, and respectful supervisory practices.
- Create channels through which employees can express concerns and disagreement openly and safely.
- Include psychological well-being activities that strengthen coping and access to social support.
- Where appropriate, provide access to counselling or employee assistance services for persistent interpersonal or emotional difficulties.
- Use periodic awareness programmes to distinguish constructive assertiveness from indirect resistance or passive-aggressive communication.

Overall Contribution

The study provides an integrated examination of self-esteem, passive aggression, and perceived social support within a working-adult sample in Bangalore. While the findings cannot establish causal relationships, they identify statistically significant associations that may be relevant to employee psychological well-being and interpersonal functioning. The study also addresses a contextual gap by considering passive aggression alongside self-esteem and social support rather than examining these constructs independently.

References

- [1] Bushman, B. J., Baumeister, R. F., Thomaes, S., Ryu, E., Begeer, S., & West, S. G. (2009). Looking again, and harder, for a link between low self-esteem and aggression. *Journal of Personality*, 77(2), 427–446. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2008.00553.x>
- [2] Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 98(2), 310–357.
- [3] Harris, M. A., & Orth, U. (2020). The link between self-esteem and social relationships: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 119(6), 1459–1477. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000265>
- [4] Johnson, N. J., & Klee, T. (2007). Passive-aggressive behavior and leadership styles in organizations. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 14(2), 130–142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1071791907308044>
- [5] Orth, U., Erol, R. Y., & Luciano, E. C. (2018). Development of self-esteem from age 4 to 94 years: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 144(10), 1045–1080. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000161>
- [6] Perry, J. C., & Flannery, R. B. (1982). Passive-aggressive personality disorder: Treatment implications of a clinical typology. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 170(3), 164–173. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00005053-198203000-00005>
- [7] Rill, L. M., Baiocchi, E. M., Hopper, M. J., Denker, K., & Olson, L. N. (2009). Exploration of the relationship between self-esteem, commitment, and verbal aggressiveness in romantic dating relationships. *Communication Reports*, 22(2), 79–90.
- [8] Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton University Press.
- [9] Rouault, M., Will, G. J., Fleming, S. M., et al. (2022). Low self-esteem and the formation of global self-performance estimates in emerging adulthood. *Translational Psychiatry*, 12, Article 272. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41398-022-02031-8>
- [10] Safwa, K., & Shari, B. (2022). Relationship with parents, perceived social support and self-esteem among young adults. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 10(2). <https://doi.org/10.25215/1002.136>
- [11] Sethi, A. (2022). The role of perceived social support in self-esteem and resilience among young adults. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.25215/1101.211>
- [12] Sowislo, J. F., & Orth, U. (2013). Does low self-esteem predict depression and anxiety? A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 139(1), 213–240. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028931>
- [13] Szczesniak, M., Mazur, P., Rodzen, W., & Szpunar, K. (2021). Influence of life satisfaction on self-esteem among young adults: The mediating role of self-presentation. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 14, 1473–1482. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S322788>
- [14] Thoits, P. A. (2011). Mechanisms linking social ties and support to physical and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 52(2), 145–161.
- [15] Whelpley, C. E., & McDaniel, M. A. (2016). Self-esteem and counterproductive work behaviors: A systematic review. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 31(4), 850–863. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-01-2014-0008>
- [16] Wilson, B. L., Diedrich, A., Phelps, C. L., & Choi, M. (2011). Bullies and victims: A workplace phenomenon. *Nursing Forum*, 46(3), 155–164.
- [17] Zhang, et al. (2020). Social support, resilience, self-esteem, and post-traumatic stress symptoms among intensive care unit nurses. [Reference details as listed in the project.]

- [18] Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N. W., Zimet, S. G., & Farley, G. K. (1988). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 52, 30–41.
- [19] *Note. The original project contains a few reference entries that were marked as requiring verification or have incomplete bibliographic details. Those entries should be checked against the original publications before journal submission.*