

## **SELF-ESTEEM OF MINORITY CHILDREN: A STUDY OF THE PAKISTANIS IN SCOTLAND**

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*The study explored the consequences of minority status for Pakistani children's self-esteem by comparing their level of self-esteem with that of indigenous (Scottish) children. 160 children (80 Pakistani minority and 80 indigenous) aged 10-11 years participated in the study. The level of self-esteem of the children was assessed by the Piers-Harris Short Form and Semantic Differential Scale. The results indicate that the minority status of the Pakistani community in Scotland do not have negative consequences for the children's self-esteem and that the Pakistani minority and indigenous children have similar levels of self-esteem. Theoretical implications of the findings have been discussed.*

In recent years there has been growing interest in the self-esteem of the ethnic minority children in Britain. Studies carried out in Britain and elsewhere show that the self-esteem of children (their evaluation of themselves) is based on their experiences and is an important determinant of their behaviour (Wells & Marwell, 1976).

Social scientists generally maintain that children of ethnic minorities, which rank low in the social status hierarchies of the society, would have lower self-esteem than that of indigenous children. This belief rests primarily on the three principles of self-esteem formation, namely, reflected appraisals (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934); social comparison (Festinger, 1954) and self-attribution (Kelly, 1952).

The principle of reflected appraisals suggest that since ethnic minorities are exposed to many negative appraisals from the larger society, they would have low self-esteem. The principle of social comparison maintains that because, on average, the ethnic minorities tend to compare unfavourably with the majority in socially valued areas, therefore, they would have lower self-esteem than the indigenous population. The principle of self-attribution suggests that since ethnic minorities have low status in the broader society, they may

interpret it as an indication of a lack of personal worth and thus would have low self-esteem. However, the research findings of studies investigating the self-esteem of the minority children in Britain are inconsistent. Some studies indicate that ethnic minority children in Britain experience problems in levels of self-esteem (Bagley & Verma, 1979; Lomax, 1977; Milner, 1973). On the other hand, studies conducted by Stone (1981) and Bagley, Verma and Mallick (1982) suggested that ethnic minority children in Britain do not have lower self-esteem than their indigenous peers. The above studies have been conducted in England and Wales, and the level of self-esteem of minority children in Scotland has not been examined so far.

Pakistanis are an important minority group in Scotland. In recent years the number of Pakistani minority children has rapidly increased in Scottish schools (Khalid, 1985), but little is known about their level of self-esteem. However, it is observed that due to a strong British tradition of racism (Bagley & Verma, 1979) Pakistani ethnic minority children are confronted with an image of their group which is at worst derogatory and at best ambivalent. This is borne out by numerous negative representations of ethnic minorities on television and in commercials (Troyna, 1981). The consequences of low status assigned to their ethnic group for the self-esteem of the Pakistani ethnic minority children in Scotland is not known.

This study examines the self-esteem of Pakistani ethnic minority children born in Scotland of Pakistani immigrant parents. The aim of this study is to discover the consequences of minority status for the Pakistani children's self-esteem by comparing their level of self-esteem with that of the indigenous (Scottish) children.

## **METHOD**

### **Subjects**

The sample consisted of 80 Pakistani minority and 80 indigenous, ten to eleven years old children equally divided for sex. These children belonged to multi-ethnic schools in Scotland, and were drawn from middle-class, 'intact families'.

Here 'intact family' is defined as the one where both the parents are alive and living together. This was done in order to cut out the consequences of a broken family situation on children's self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967).

## **Materials**

Two measures were used to assess the global self-esteem of the children: (1) Piers-Harris Short Form; and (2) Semantic Differential Scale.

The Piers-Harris Short Form is a rating scale consisting of 39 simple declarative statements drawn from Piers-Harris Scale (Piers & Harris, 1964). The statements cover physical appearance, social behaviour, academic status, depreciation, dissatisfaction and contentment with self. The items on the scale are equally divided between positive and negative forms and between high and low reflection of self. Sample of Piers-Harris Short Form items is: I like being the way I am; I am unhappy; My class-mates in school think I have good ideas; My family is disappointed in me. This scale was particularly suitable for this study as it had been developed for use with young children from different ethnic backgrounds in Britain by Bagley et al. (1982). The other measure used was the Semantic Differential Scale (Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum, 1957). For the purpose of this study 10 bi-polar adjectives were used which were: Good - Bad; Cheerful - Gloomy; Friendly-Unfriendly; Clever - Stupid; Popular - Unpopular; Beautiful-Ugly; Kind - Horrible; Clean - Unclean, and Slim - Fat. These adjectives were drawn from a pool of adjectives generated by ten to eleven years old primary children in multi-ethnic schools in Glasgow. The concept measured was 'myself'. The test-retest reliability of the scale for the Pakistani minority children was .73 and for the indigenous .64.

## **Administration**

The two measures were administered individually, in two different interview sessions, in accordance with the standard instructions given by the Piers & Harris (1964) and Osgood et al. (1957).

**RESULTS**

A two-way Anova (Sex x Culture) was employed to analyse the scores on the Piers-Harris Short Form. None of the *F*-ratios were significant, indicating that the Scottish and the Pakistani Children displayed, on average, similar

Table 1

*Analysis of Variance: Self-esteem by Sex and Culture.*

	Sources of Variance	SS	DF	MS	F	Sign. Level
Pier-Harris Short Form	Culture	74.26	1	74.26	0.77	n.s.
	Sex	2.26	1	2.26	0.02	n.s.
	Culture x Sex	6.01	1	6.01	0.06	n.s.
	Error	15028.58	156	96.34		
	Total	15111.10	159			
Semantic Differential Scale	Culture	84.10	1	84.10	3.09	n.s.
	Sex	62.50	1	62.50	2.29	n.s.
	Culture x Sex	0.10	1	0.10	0.00	n.s.
	Error	4242.88	156	27.19		
		4389.58	159	27.61		

levels of self-esteem. Further comparison between corresponding sub-groups using *t*-tests showed no significant differences.

Table 2

Correlation Between Piers-Harris Short Form and Semantic Differential Scale.

	Boys	Girls	Total
Pakistani	.84***	.80***	.79***
Scottish	.86***	.93***	.89***

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Similar results were found for the Semantic Differential Scales (table 1). The agreement between the results of the Piers-Harris Short Form and Semantic Differential is not surprising, as the two scales intercorrelated highly for all groups and sub-groups involved (table 2).

## DISCUSSION

A principal finding of this study is that the Pakistani minority children's level of self-esteem does not differ substantially from the level of self-esteem of the indigenous children. This means that the Pakistani minority children have comparable levels of self-esteem with the majority children.

These results are quite different from the results of some of the studies which suggested that the self-esteem of the minority children is lower than the self-esteem of the majority children (Bagley & Verma, 1979, Lomax, 1977, Milner, 1973). However, they are in accordance with the more recent studies of Loudon (1981) and Stone (1981).

Our findings are also important in the light of the theoretical formulations of self-esteem. The principles of reflected appraisals, social comparisons and self-attribution suggested that direct experience of prejudice, low evaluation and other dissonant social factors have negative effects on the self-esteem of the minorities. However, when we examine these theories in relation to our data, it is observed that the Pakistani children, at least at the primary level, are able to

combat these negative social effects due to a number of social and psychological factors operating within the Pakistani community in Scotland.

It has been observed that Pakistanis in Scotland usually reside in areas with high concentration of ethnic minority pupil and their social network is most likely to consist of children from their own community (Khalid, 1986). In such social environment, the children are less likely to be teased about their ethnic characteristics. Protected by such an environment, they have the support of other Asian children within the school, and are more likely to reject or laugh off the low status that any prejudiced teacher, pupil or text might assign to their ethnic group. So, at least at the primary level, the Pakistani minority children are less likely to be made aware of their ethnic group's low rank in the total society. It has also been observed that the Pakistani children's significant other people whose judgement they value and trust are more likely to be members of their own ethnic community (Khalid, 1983). Thus, when we examine our results in the light of the principle of reflected appraisal (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934) we find that the Pakistani minority probably see themselves through the eyes of their own community members.

The reference groups with whom individuals share a set of norms are more likely to provide the standard comparison point against which individuals can evaluate themselves (Kelly, 1952; Sherif & Sherif, 1956). An earlier work indicates that Pakistani children are more likely to have sustained social interactions with the children of their own ethnic group (Khalid, 1985). Thus, a vast majority of Pakistani children compare themselves with the other Asian children, particularly the children with whom they interact. Therefore, despite their exposure to mass media (as documented by Husband, 1972) the Pakistani minority children are unlikely to make comparisons between themselves and their indigenous counter-parts while evaluating themselves. Similar views have been expressed by Rosenberg (1972) with respect to the self-esteem of the Blacks in the U.S.A.

The attribution theorists suggest that in explaining some behavioural outcome, people may attribute it either to internal properties of the individual or to factors in the

external situation. Hence, behaviour for which external factors are responsible does not affect the self-evaluation of an individual (Milner & Ross 1975). Our results also suggest that ascribed status of race and ethnicity may not affect the self-esteem of the Pakistani minority children in Scotland.

In Britain, the existence of prejudice against ethnic minorities such as Jews, Asians, Blacks and Catholics is a familiar fact of history. Groups have been hierarchically ranked within the British society with remarkable consistency over the decades (Bogardus, 1982; Burns 1975; Hartley, Rosenbaum & Schawartz, 1948; Teplin, 1977). Associated with the pattern of prejudice are a number of racial, ethnic and religious stereotypes, some favourable, but most of them demanding (Husband, 1972). Staying within their own ethnic community may protect the Pakistani minority children from direct expressions of prejudice, yet they must face the fact that a low status is assigned to their ethnic group in the British Society. The question is: how do the Pakistani minority children deal with prejudice and the stereotyped image of their ethnic group.

The need to preserve self-esteem is probably universal (Allport, 1955). Researchers have found that different groups employ different mechanisms for the preservation of their self-esteem (Lewin, 1948; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). We observe that the Pakistani minority community in Scotland is no exception. It seems that they preserve their self-esteem by encouraging positive intra-group attitudes which result in a strong positive identity called as "positive chauvinism" by Tajfel & Turner (1979). It is important to note that the Pakistanis in Scotland appear to have maintained a close, cohesive family structure with roles and responsibilities clearly defined (Siann & Khalid, 1984). Thus the Pakistani minority children are securely located within a family which embodies long cultural traditions of language, diet, dress and religion. These are all the things which are highly valued and give their children a clear and positive sense of who they are (Khalid, 1986). Thus by encouraging positive intra-group attitudes, the Pakistani Community in Scotland also helps to maintain their children's self-esteem.

The above discussion, to some extent, can explain the otherwise puzzling findings of the relationship of minority

status to self-esteem. This explanation does not necessarily apply to all minority groups. What it does make plain is that even the most compelling theory and most self-evident conclusions (i.e., low status in society results in low levels of self-esteem or, conversely, high status in society would result in high levels of self-esteem) cannot be taken for granted. A number of erroneous theoretical conclusions, we believe, may result from the social scientists' tendency to view the situation of the minority group members from the perspective of the broader society rather than from the viewpoint of the minority groups themselves. Our results suggest that the Pakistani minority children in Scotland appear to have resources which enable them to maintain a level of self-esteem equal to that of the indigenous children.

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