

Influence of Maternal Employment on the Self-Esteem of Adolescents: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT Mothers' participation in the workforce is a significant social and economic phenomenon that influences family functioning and adolescent development. This study examines the impact of maternal employment on adolescent self-esteem, with particular attention to gender differences. Using an exploratory research design, data were collected from 201 adolescents (104 with working mothers and 97 with non-working mothers) from the Jorhat district of Assam, employing the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The findings reveal that adolescents of working mothers demonstrate significantly higher self-esteem than those of non-working mothers, likely due to greater independence, exposure to role models, and enhanced social interactions. Additionally, male adolescents of working mothers reported higher self-esteem than female adolescents, while no significant gender differences were observed among adolescents of non-working mothers. These results suggest that societal expectations and gender norms may shape self-esteem development differently. The study highlights the important role of maternal employment in fostering adolescent self-confidence and underscores the need for supportive interventions to promote positive self-esteem among adolescents regardless of maternal work status.

INTRODUCTION

Maternal employment represents a significant aspect of modern family life, reflecting shifting societal norms and economic dynamics. While working mothers often serve as role models of independence and resilience, non-working mothers typically provide higher levels of direct parental involvement. These differing dynamics can influence adolescents in unique ways, shaping their self-perception and confidence. The complex interplay between maternal employment and adolescent self-esteem varies across cultural, social and familial contexts, warranting comprehensive investigation. In today's society, the prevalence of working mothers outside the home is rising, impacting family dynamics and influencing adolescent growth. Globally, there is an increasing tendency for working mothers to leave their jobs to prioritise family responsibilities (Vanderkam 2005). According to the Social Development Foundation of Assocham (2015), 25 percent of Indian mothers leave the workforce to focus on raising their children. One focusing area is how maternal employment affects the self-esteem of teenagers. Self-esteem, the assessment of one's value and abilities, significantly in-

fluences teenagers' emotional health, academic performance, and social interactions shaping their overall well-being (Christy and Mythili 2020). Maternal employment is a defining characteristic of modern family life, shaped by evolving societal expectations, economic pressures, and changing gender roles. Working mothers often model autonomy, adaptability, and resilience, whereas non-working mothers may provide greater direct supervision and emotional availability, leading to varied developmental experiences for adolescents (Mitra 2022; Rani and Kohli 2018). These contrasting family environments can influence adolescents' self-perception, confidence and psychosocial adjustment. The relationship between maternal employment and adolescent self-esteem is complex and context-dependent, shaped by cultural values, family structure, and socioeconomic conditions, thereby necessitating comprehensive investigation (Cong and Cheong 2023).

This study seeks to compare self-esteem levels among adolescents of working and non-working mothers, exploring how varying maternal roles impact emotional and psychological development. By examining these relationships, the research aims to provide valuable insights into the broader im-

plications of maternal employment on adolescent well-being, contributing to a nuanced understanding of parenting practices and their influence on adolescent growth. Hence, it is of utmost importance to study the level of self-esteem of adolescents of working and non-working mothers. Assessing an adolescent's self-esteem can be a useful way to build strong self-confidence among the youngsters, and will also be beneficial for those with psychosomatic complaints in their growing age to receive proper care and counselling at the right time.

Objectives

With this back drop the present study entitled "Influence of Maternal Employment on the Self-Esteem of Adolescents: A Comparative Study" was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To compare the levels of self-esteem of adolescents of working and non-working mothers
2. To find out the gender difference in the self-esteem of adolescents of working and non-working mothers

Review Of Literature

There have been numerous studies examining the relationship between maternal employment and adolescent self-esteem, yet the findings remain varied, with some highlighting positive influences while others suggest potential challenges in emotional and psychological development.

Foon (1988) conducted a study that revealed adolescents of employed mothers tend to possess higher self-esteem and achieve better academic outcomes compared to those whose mothers are not employed. The study emphasised that working mothers often serve as strong role models, demonstrating independence, discipline and perseverance. Their professional engagement helps adolescents internalise positive attitudes toward responsibility, self-reliance and ambition. Exposure to such empowered role models encourages adolescents to value hard work and develop a balanced sense of identity. Consequently, maternal employment contributes not only to the child's emotional confidence but also to enhanced academic and social competence.

Sharma (2015) found that adolescents of working mothers generally display higher levels of self-

confidence compared to those whose mothers stay at home. The study suggested that seeing their mothers balance professional and personal responsibilities fosters a sense of admiration and motivation among adolescents. This exposure helps them develop independence, assertiveness and a stronger belief in their own abilities to achieve goals.

Rani and Kohli (2018) conducted a study examining the self-esteem of adolescents with working and non-working mothers. Their findings indicated that the employment status of mothers did not result in any notable differences in the adolescents' self-esteem. This suggests that factors other than maternal employment, such as family environment, parental support and peer influence, may play a more significant role in shaping adolescents' self-confidence and overall emotional well-being.

Mitra (2022) examined the self-confidence levels of adolescents based on their mothers' employment status and found no significant differences between those with working mothers and those with non-working mothers. The study suggests that maternal employment alone may not substantially influence adolescents' self-confidence. Other factors, such as family support, parenting style, peer interactions and socio-cultural environment, are likely to play a more critical role in shaping the self-assurance and personal development of adolescents.

Teoh and Alfiqah (2010) explored the factors influencing self-esteem and discovered that gender had no significant impact on adolescents' self-esteem levels. Instead, their study highlighted the importance of personality traits and social factors in shaping self-worth. Traits such as extraversion, openness, conscientiousness and emotional stability were found to strongly contribute to higher self-esteem. Additionally, the presence of social support from family, friends, and peers played a vital role in fostering confidence and a positive self-image. These findings suggest that individual characteristics and supportive relationships are more influential than gender in determining self-esteem.

Booth and Gerard (2011) emphasised that while both boys and girls develop self-esteem, the sources contributing to it may differ between genders. Boys and girls may derive confidence from distinct experiences, relationships or societal expectations, shaping their self-perception in unique ways. In contrast, studies by Srivastava and Agarwal (2013) and Ramesh and Jain (2018) found no

significant gender differences in overall self-esteem among young adults, suggesting that despite differing sources, the resulting levels of self-esteem are comparable. These findings indicate that while the pathways to building self-esteem may vary, gender alone does not determine its overall development.

Agam et al. (2015) proposed that gender differences in self-esteem may arise from the ways boys and girls respond to their environments. Boys often develop self-esteem through competitive situations and interactions involving power and achievement, which reinforce confidence and assertiveness. In contrast, girls tend to internalise emotions, making their self-esteem more sensitive to personal experiences and social relationships. Supporting this perspective, Chaurasia and Mahapatro (2016) observed that men generally exhibited higher self-esteem than women, indicating that societal roles, behavioural patterns, and exposure to external challenges may contribute to gender-based differences in self-confidence and self-perception.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

An exploratory research design was employed to conduct the present study on maternal employment and the self-esteem of adolescents. This design was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between maternal work status and its impact on adolescents' self-esteem, allowing for the exploration of patterns and differences through comparative analysis.

Hypothesis

The study aimed to assess the following hypotheses:

1. There would be no significant difference in self-esteem of adolescents of working and non-working mothers.
2. There would be no significant difference in self-esteem of male and female adolescents of working mothers.
3. There would be no significant difference in self-esteem of male and female adolescents of non-working mothers.

Sample

The total number of populations in the selected schools (based on the number of respondents having working and non-working mothers and where gender representation was also satisfactory) was 419. The sample size for the study was determined using the sample size determination formula, or Cochran's method for a finite population. A total of 201 respondents consisting of 86, 81 and 34 in total were selected to meet research standards by being proportionately allocated from each school. The samples were selected through stratified random sampling. The strata were based on gender and working and non-working mothers. The samples were adolescents from IX (ninth) and X (tenth) grades of selected schools. As per the research criteria, 104 adolescents of working mothers and 97 adolescents of non-working mothers constituting the total sample of 201 adolescents were selected for the study.

Tools Used

Demographic Profiling Sheet

A structured questionnaire was developed to gather background details from the selected respondents. It included information on gender, class, family type, locality, parental educational qualifications, and parents' occupational status.

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

The study utilised the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) to measure respondents' self-esteem levels. Created by sociologist Morris Rosenberg in 1965, this tool is widely recognised and validated for assessing global self-esteem. The scale consists of 10 statements rated on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Five items are positively framed, while the remaining five are negatively framed, ensuring a balanced assessment of self-esteem. Responses are scored as 4, 3, 2 and 1 for positive statements, while negative statements are scored in reverse order (1, 2, 3 and 4). The total score reflects overall self-esteem, with higher scores indicating greater self-worth. The RSES demonstrates strong reliability, with a Guttman scale coefficient of reproducibility of 0.92, ensuring excellent internal consistency.

tency. Additionally, test-retest reliability over two weeks shows correlations of 0.85 and 0.88, indicating high stability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the comparison of self-esteem levels between adolescents of working mothers and those of non-working mothers. The obtained p-value is well below the conventional threshold of 0.05 at the 5 percent level of significance, indicating a statistically significant difference in self-esteem between adolescents of working and non-working mothers. This finding suggests that maternal employment may positively influence adolescents' psychological development. One possible explanation is that adolescents of working mothers often experience greater independence and responsibility in daily life, which may contribute to the development of self-reliance and confidence. Exposure to diverse social environments and broader interactions may also enhance social competence and emotional maturity (Mitra 2022; Cong and Cheong 2023).

Working mothers may additionally act as role models who demonstrate autonomy, resilience and strong work ethics, thereby shaping their children's perceptions of competence and self-worth. Such role-modelling effects can encourage adolescents to develop positive self-perceptions and greater self-efficacy (Orth et al. 2022; Sharma and Gupta 2021). Furthermore, adolescents of employed mothers may learn to manage responsibilities independently, which can strengthen decision-making skills and personal confidence. Recent studies also suggest that supportive family environments combined with maternal employment can contribute to higher levels of psychological well-being and self-esteem among adolescents (Kumar and Saini 2024; Rani and Kohli 2018). A 2025 study by Huang and Wan found that positive parental rearing styles significantly enhanced adolescent self-esteem, with supportive parenting fostering stronger body image satisfaction and emotional well-being. Similar-

ly, Xu et al. (2025) demonstrated that parenting styles indirectly influenced adolescents' subjective well-being through self-esteem, emphasizing that emotionally supportive and autonomy-promoting parenting environments are strongly associated with healthier psychological adjustment.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to levels of self-esteem of working and non-working mothers (n=201)

<i>Levels of self-esteem</i>	<i>Adolescents of working mothers (n=104)</i>	<i>Adolescents of non-working mothers (n=97)</i>
High	21 (20.19)	1 (1.03)
Average	78 (75.00)	66 (68.04)
Low	5 (4.81)	30 (30.93)

Table 2 presents the distribution of adolescents according to their levels of self-esteem based on the employment status of their mothers. The findings highlighted a significant difference in levels of self-esteem between adolescents of working and non-working mothers. Among adolescents of working mothers (n=104), 20.19 percent exhibited a "High" level of self-esteem, while 75 percent fell under an "Average" level of self-esteem, and 4.81 percent showed a "Low" level of self-esteem. In contrast, among adolescents of non-working mothers (n=97), only 1.03 percent had "High" self-esteem, 30.93 percent exhibited "Low" self-esteem and 68.04 percent exhibited "Average" level of self-esteem. Contemporary research increasingly highlights that socioeconomic stability, emotional support, and family communication patterns are more important determinants of adolescent self-esteem than maternal employment status alone (Jeong and Jang 2025).

Table 3 presents the gender differences in self-esteem among adolescents of working mothers, revealing a calculated t-value of 4.836 with a significance value of 0.00. Since the p-value is lower than the conventional threshold of 0.05, the results indicate a statistically significant difference in self-esteem between male and female adoles-

Table 1: Self-esteem levels between adolescents of working mothers and those of non-working mothers

<i>Respondents (n=201)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Calculated t-value</i>	<i>Significant value</i>
Adolescents of working mother (n=104)	20.76	5.08	199	6.302	0.00
Adolescents of non-working mothers (n=97)	19.98	3.34			

Table 3: Self-esteem levels between male and female adolescents of working mothers

<i>Respondents (n=104)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Calculated t-value</i>	<i>Significant value</i>
Male (n=56)	23.13	3.99	102	4.836	0.00
Female (48)	17.90	4.80			

cents within this group. This difference may be influenced by prevailing societal expectations and gender norms that shape adolescents' socialisation processes. Male adolescents are often encouraged to develop independence, assertiveness and competitiveness, characteristics that may align closely with the values modelled by working mothers. In contrast, female adolescents may experience mixed expectations related to traditional gender roles and increasing autonomy, which can affect their perceptions of self-worth and confidence (Orth et al. 2022; Cong and Cheong 2023).

Furthermore, male adolescents are frequently exposed to social contexts that emphasise competition, power and achievement, while female adolescents tend to engage more in emotionally expressive interactions such as self-disclosure and social support, which may influence the way self-esteem develops during adolescence (Bleidorn et al. 2021; Kumar and Saini 2024). Previous research consistently indicates that male adolescents tend to report higher levels of self-esteem than females. For instance, Sowislo and Orth (2013) found that males generally demonstrate higher self-esteem across developmental stages, particularly during adolescence. More recent studies also support this trend, highlighting persistent gender differences in self-esteem that emerge during early and middle adolescence (Orth et al. 2022; Cong and Cheong 2023). Huang and Wan (2025) reported that adolescents' self-esteem is significantly shaped by parental rearing styles and body image perceptions, with female adolescents being more vulnerable to negative self-evaluations associated with physical appearance and social comparison. Jeong and Jang (2025) emphasized that supportive family communication and emotional warmth can reduce gender disparities in adolescent psycholog-

ical well-being, suggesting that environmental support may be more influential than gender alone. Furthermore, some contemporary researchers argue that gender differences in self-esteem are gradually narrowing in urban and educationally progressive settings where adolescents experience more egalitarian opportunities and social support.

Table 4 examines gender differences in self-esteem among adolescents of non-working mothers, showing a calculated t-value of 1.955 with a significance value of 0.053. As the p-value exceeds the 0.05 level, the findings indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in self-esteem between male and female adolescents in this group. This may be attributed to the relatively consistent parental involvement and emotional support often present in households where mothers are primarily engaged in caregiving roles. Continuous supervision, guidance and emotional availability can contribute to a stable home environment that promotes similar levels of confidence and psychological security among both sons and daughters. Supportive parenting practices, open communication and gender-neutral encouragement further contribute to balanced self-esteem development (Cong and Cheong 2023; Orth et al. 2022). Previous findings also suggest that nurturing family environments characterised by warmth and involvement play a significant role in fostering adolescents' positive self-perception regardless of gender (Kumar and Saini 2024; Maynard and Fayonbo 2015). Contemporary research also highlights the importance of emotional closeness and family cohesion in adolescent development. Jeong and Jang (2025) observed that adolescents who experience emotionally responsive family communication report higher psychological well-being and lower levels of stress regardless of gender. Their study further

Table 4: Self-esteem levels between male and female adolescents of non-working mothers

<i>Respondents(n=97)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Calculated t-Value</i>	<i>Significant value</i>
Male (n=49)	17.52	2.87	95	1.955	0.053
Female (n=48)	16.40	3.70			

suggested that emotionally supportive family environments may buffer the negative effects of social pressures and academic stress that often contribute to gender disparities in self-esteem. Likewise, Wang (2025) argued that parenting styles characterized by acceptance and encouragement are associated with stronger emotional adjustment and reduced self-esteem differences between male and female adolescents.

Table 5 shows the percentage distribution of self-esteem levels among adolescents based on their mothers' employment. For adolescents of working mothers, 32.14 percent of males and 6.25 percent of females have high self-esteem, while 67.86 percent of males and 83.33 percent of females exhibit average self-esteem. Working mothers may model achievement-oriented behaviour, financial autonomy, and decision-making abilities, which can positively influence adolescents' perceptions of competence and self-worth. Male adolescents, in particular, may receive stronger social reinforcement for independence and achievement, thereby benefiting more visibly from such role-modelling experiences (Orth et al. 2022; Cong and Cheong 2023). Among adolescents of non-working mothers, 2.04 percent of males and no females have high self-esteem, whereas 75.51 percent of males and 60.42 percent of females display average self-esteem. Low self-esteem is more prevalent in females (39.58%) with non-working mothers. Recent research conducted during 2025 also highlights the importance of parenting practices and emotional support in shaping adolescent self-esteem. Xu et al. (2025) demonstrated that supportive parenting styles positively contribute to adolescents' subjective well-being through self-esteem enhancement.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the relationship between maternal employment and adolescent self-esteem, focusing on differences between adolescents of working and non-working mothers and

examining potential gender variations. The results revealed a significant difference in self-esteem levels, with adolescents of working mothers reporting higher self-esteem compared to those whose mothers were not employed. This indicates that maternal employment may serve as a source of positive influence, offering adolescents role models who demonstrate independence, responsibility, and confidence, which in turn may encourage the development of similar traits in their children.

When gender differences were analysed, male adolescents of working mothers exhibited significantly higher self-esteem than female adolescents of the same group, suggesting that boys may particularly benefit from the modelling of assertiveness, decision-making, and exposure to diverse experiences provided by employed mothers. In contrast, no significant gender differences were observed among adolescents of non-working mothers, implying that the impact of maternal employment may interact with gender to shape self-perception in distinctive ways.

Overall, these findings underscore the important role of maternal employment in fostering adolescent self-esteem and highlight how exposure to independence and proactive role modeling can positively influence young people's confidence. The study suggests that both the presence of employed role models and the experiences associated with maternal employment contribute meaningfully to the social and emotional development of adolescents.

Hypothesis Testing

The study reached the following conclusions for the hypotheses:

1. The hypothesis stating no significant difference in self-esteem between adolescents of working and non-working mothers was rejected, as a statistically significant difference was found.

Table 5: Distribution of gender differences in the self-esteem of adolescents with working and non-working mothers

<i>Levels of self-esteem</i>	<i>Adolescents of working mothers (n=104)</i>		<i>Adolescents of non-working mothers (n=97)</i>	
	<i>Male (n=56)</i>	<i>Female (n=48)</i>	<i>Male (n=49)</i>	<i>Female (n=48)</i>
High	18 (32.14)	3 (6.25)	1 (2.04)	0 (0.00)
Average	38 (67.86)	40 (83.33)	37 (75.51)	29 (60.42)
Low	0 (0.00)	5 (10.42)	11 (22.45)	19 (39.58)

2. The hypothesis predicting no significant gender difference in self-esteem among adolescents of working mothers was also rejected, with males showing higher self-esteem.
3. The hypothesis suggesting no significant gender difference among adolescents of non-working mothers was accepted, as no statistically significant difference was observed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future research should include a larger and more demographically diverse sample to enhance the generalisability of findings across varied socio-economic, cultural, and regional contexts. Incorporating longitudinal and qualitative approaches could provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of maternal employment on adolescents' emotional and psychological development. Further, factors such as parenting style, family environment, and parental education should also be examined to understand their combined influence on self-esteem. Educational institutions and counsellors should organise programs that promote positive self-image and resilience among adolescents, regardless of their mothers' employment status or gender differences.

LIMITATIONS

The present study was confined to a limited geographic area and sample size, which may restrict the general applicability of its findings. Data were collected through self-reported questionnaires, which can be influenced by social desirability and response bias. Moreover, the study considered only the employment status of mothers without accounting for other variables such as paternal involvement, family income, parenting style and socio-cultural influences. The cross-sectional design also limits the ability to establish causal relationships. Future studies should address these factors through a more comprehensive and longitudinal research framework for better understanding.

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