

**EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG
ADOLESCENT STUDENTS: ROLE OF IRRATIONAL BELIEFS**

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Abstract

Irrational beliefs are attitudes and values which people hold without any objective evidence. Such thoughts typically clutter the minds of people with feelings of resentment and distaste which creates a lot of problems in a person's life. Irrational beliefs effect the functioning of an individual by lowering the skills emotional competence and self-esteem. Although the concept of irrational beliefs has received extensive attention, yet the concept needs to be addressed covering varied aspects. The present research aimed to examine the relationship of irrational beliefs with emotional skills and self-esteem. For this purpose, Shortened General Attitude and Belief Scale (SGABS) by Lindner, Kirkby, Wertheim, & Birch (1999), Social Skills Inventory by Riggio & Carney (2003) and Self-Esteem Inventory by Coopersmith (2002) were administered on 300 (150 females and 150 males) participants. The correlation coefficient was used to analyze the data. Findings of the present study revealed significant negative correlation of irrational beliefs with emotional skills and self-esteem. Implications of the findings have been discussed.

Keywords: *irrational beliefs, emotional skills, self-esteem and adolescents*

Early adolescence, which encompasses the first years of the transition from childhood to puberty, is a developmental period during which experiences of negative feelings such as anxiety, shyness, depression, and anger are intense. Early adolescence period poses disadvantages regarding irrational beliefs, emotional skills and self-esteem. Irrationality means any thought, emotion or behavior that leads to self-defeating or self-destructive consequences, which significantly interferes with the survival and happiness of the organism. Koopmas, Sanderman, Timmerman and Emmelkamp (1994) have defined irrational beliefs as “unrealistic reasoning processes by which external events are interpreted and through which emotional distress is mediated.” More specifically, irrational behavior usually has several aspects: (1) people who have an irrational behavior significantly denigrate or refuse to accept themselves; (2) irrational behavior interferes with their ability to get along in a satisfactory manner with the members of their significant social groups; (3) it seriously blocks their ability to achieve the kind of interpersonal relationships that they would like to achieve; (4) it hinders their ability to work joyfully and in a gainful manner and (5) it interferes with their own best interests in other important respects.

Ellis has differentiated between (rational beliefs) and (irrational beliefs) arguing that in rational-thinking, people tend to be relative in their judgments and evaluations using mostly such words as maybe, possible, probably, etc. This way of perception and visualization creates in them self-consistency and adaptability to reality which will lead to feelings of consent, efficacy, comfort, and stability. In irrational-thinking, people tend mostly to make absolute and resolved judgments and most often use such words as must, should be, ought to be, supposed to be, etc. Such judgments and perceptions in most cases contradict with the self and life realities, which add another form of emotional stress like anxiety, depression, and sadness (Dryden, 1999).

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The consequences of irrational, rigid convictions regarding negative trigger events will be uncomfortable and are called inadequate negative consequences, whereas the consequences of rational, flexible convictions regarding negative trigger events will not be embarrassing, and are called adequate negative consequences (Dryden & DiGiuseppe, 1990).

Ellis (1994) has been remarkably consistent over the years in his view that there are basically four types of irrational beliefs. These are as following: Demanding beliefs (often expressed as must, absolute should, have to's, oughts, etc): The person is insisting that she gets what she wants or does not get what she does not want; Awfulising beliefs (often expressed as 'it is awful that...', 'it is terrible that...' it is the end of the world that...'etc.): the individual who holds such that no good situations could possible come from this awful state of affairs; Low frustration tolerance (LFT) belief (often expressed as "I cannot bear it," "its intolerable," 'it's too hard, etc.): the beliefs that they do not have withstand the negative conditions that they are facing or think they will encounter; Depreciation beliefs: The individual assigns a global negative evaluation to i) oneself (self-depreciation), ii) another person or group of people (other depreciation), or iii) life conditions (life depreciations).

According to Davies (2006), irrational beliefs mean those illogical and rigid views about events which are inconsistent with reality. These beliefs consequently lead to self-disturbing behaviors. Also, they are linked with poor individual functioning and individual adjustment. On the other hand, rational beliefs are logical and flexible.

Emotional Competence/ Skills

Emotional intelligence was described formally by Mayer & Salovey (1997) as "the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/o; generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth."

Goleman (1995) defines Emotional intelligence as "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in the relationships." Research on emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Goleman, 1995) has gained much attention and has revived interest in the study of individual differences in emotional abilities, in social intelligence and in the measurement of basic social skills. The ability model (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) of emotional intelligence includes abilities to identify/encode others' emotions, accurately express/ encode one's own emotions, and monitoring and regulation of felt emotions, among other elements.

Emotional competence is the ability in which one is aware and able to manage one's own and others' emotions, as well as the skill to regulate emotional experience within oneself (intrapersonal) and to be effective in interactions with others (interpersonal) (Humphrey et al., 2010; Shamlou, 2003). Additionally, emotional regulation is the scrutinizing, evaluating and appropriate modification of emotional reactions (both positive and negative) in a socially appropriate manner. The development of this skill is specifically important as it can influence other personal attributes and affect how do children think about themselves and interact with their world (Eisenberg et al., 2004; Eisenberg et al., 2014; Sharifi, 2005). There are various factors which might affect emotional skills such as anxiety, anger, low self-esteem, depression, etc. Cognitive

processes affecting emotional skills include negative self-evaluations, excessive high performance standards, unrealistic expectations, misperceptions and irrational beliefs (Civitci&Civitci, 2009). Extensive work has been done on the problems of adolescents but limited literature has been seen the relationship between irrational beliefs and emotional skills. Establishing the relationship between irrational beliefs and emotional skills in early adolescence may shed light on the way that cognitive structures of adolescents which are an important element of emotional skills operated in this period.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a term which reflects overall emotional evaluation of his/her own worth. It is a judgment of oneself as well as an attitude towards the self. Self-esteem includes beliefs (e.g., “I am competent”, & “I am worthy”) and emotions such as a triumph, desires, pride and shame. Smith and Mackie (2007) defined it as “self-esteem is positive and negative self-evaluation as in how we feel about it.” Self-esteem is also known as the evaluative dimension of the self that includes the feelings worthiness, prides and discouragement (Newman et al., 1975). One’s self-esteem is closely associated with self-consciousness. Self-esteem is a disposition that a person has which represents their judgments of their own worthiness. In the mid 1960s, Rosenberg and social learning theorists defined self-esteem as a personal worth or worthiness. Branden (1969) defined it as “the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness. Thus, self-esteem is an important component for the growth of an individual. Self-esteem is not a trait but a process of evaluation of an individual his/her own worth. Therefore, it is influenced by many other factors like family environment, perfectionism, social skills and irrational beliefs.

A study conducted by Horan (1996) has shown that students with more irrational beliefs have shown the below average self-esteem. Further, computer intervention targeted irrational beliefs which are linked with low self-esteem. Both rationality and self-esteem favored cognitive restructuring. Another study by Nielsen et al. (1996) have demonstrated that specific irrational beliefs found to be correlated with low self-esteem, the control treatment focused on iBs not empirically related to self-esteem. There were two cognitive restructuring interventions. Each intervention produced appropriate change on targeted irrational measures. The self-esteem improvements of the subjects within each treatment were consistently related to changes on the previous linked with beliefs. Sava et al. (2011) have studied the relationship between irrational beliefs and explicit & implicit self-esteem in two consecutive studies conducted on undergraduate students. Two robust findings have shown the negative correlation between explicit self-esteem and self-downing, a particular type of irrational beliefs and the absences of a correlation between implicit self-esteem and any type of irrational beliefs. The findings of the study have also suggested that disputing irrational beliefs with therapeutic intervention may affect only explicit self-esteem while implicit cognitions or self-esteem remains unaffected.

Self-esteem is also closely related with emotional skills. For this, Loton (2007) conducted a study to identify and investigate the potential relationships between problematic electronic game play and a range of emotional skills and self-esteem along with social functioning in an adult sample. In his study he also found the relationship

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between self-esteem and emotional skills and results showed that there is significant positive relationship between both of them, moreover they significant predict problematic play.

Few of other investigations are also carried out by Bijstra, Bosma, and Jackson (1994a) to see the relationship of self-esteem with emotional functioning and it was grouped into three categories: Sub-assertives (exemplified by a relatively high level of anxiety and a low level of performance in social situations), Assertives (low anxiety, high performance) and Indifferents (low anxiety, low performance). These three groups demonstrated discernible profiles in the psycho-social domains self-esteem, well-being and coping. The Sub-assertives had the most negative profile. The Assertives had a lower level of self-esteem and well-being, moreover, they made less use of adequate and more use of inadequate coping-strategies. The Indifferents reflected an intermediate profile. They had higher levels of self-esteem and well-being but they made less use of inadequate coping-strategies than the Sub-assertives and less use of adequate coping-strategies than the Assertives.

Furthermore, Bijstra et al. (1994a) had also shed light on the fact that adolescents' level of self-esteem, well-being and coping to be dependent on their level of social skills, it was seen that positive changes in social skills would lead to positive changes in all three variables. Thus, it was concluded that adolescents showed higher levels of self-esteem and well-being after training, and that they used less inadequate and more adequate coping-strategies.

Previous studies have established a very strong and consistent relationship between self-esteem, introversion, social anxiety and social skills. Results have also depicted that social skills have extensively vital marker of psychosocial health, such as the size of interpersonal and social support networks, self-esteem, personal adjustment and psychopathology (Riggio, Throckmorton, & DePaola, 1990; Riggio, Watring, & Throckmorton, 1993). Emotional competence is strongly associated to the affective component of self-awareness and one's sense of psychological well-being. It appeared that the understanding and regulation of emotions in the self-evaluative process may facilitate positive affect, which in turn is related to general and personal self-esteem (Coetzee, 2005).

Objectives

To study the relationship between irrational beliefs and emotional skills; To determine the relationship between irrational beliefs and self-esteem; To study the inter-relationship of emotional skills and self-esteem.

Hypotheses: It is expected that irrational beliefs would be negatively correlated with emotional skills; It is expected that there would be negative correlation between irrational beliefs and self-esteem; It is expected that emotional skills would be positively correlated with self-esteem.

Research Design

The sample comprised of 300 adolescents (150 males and 150 females) would be randomly selected from different schools. The age range of the participants was 15 to 18 years and the consent of the participants was taken. The tools comprised of Shortened General Attitude and Belief Scale (SGABS) (Lindner, Kirkby, Wertheim, & Birch, 1999): Measure of irrational beliefs; Social Skills Inventory (Riggio & Carney, 2003): Measure of emotional skills and Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory

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(Coopersmith, 2002). The aim of present research was to investigate the relationship of irrational beliefs with emotional skills and self-esteem. The appropriate conditions were created to conduct the study, where participants could fill the questionnaires without any distraction. Rapport was built with subjects and they were instructed as: "There are some statements in these questionnaires. You have to tick the best option according to you. There is no right and wrong answer, so please try to tick all the statements carefully and honestly. There is no time limit for the completion but try to complete them as soon as possible. Your responses would be kept confidential." After the completion, all participants were thanked for their participation in the study. The statistical analyses of the data involved correlation analysis.

Results

In order to analyze the association of irrational beliefs with social-emotional skills and self-esteem, Pearson product moment correlation was computed. The results of the present study have been shown in Table 1.0, 1.1 and 1.2. Tables are the correlation matrix, depicting correlation between irrational beliefs, emotional skills and self-esteem and their dimensions. As depicted in table 1.0, there was significant negative correlation between irrational beliefs and emotional skills and correlation coefficient came out to be $r = -0.213$, $p < 0.01$. It means if individual is high on irrational beliefs then he will be low on social skills and emotional skills. Next significant finding is that there is negative relationship between irrational beliefs and self-esteem. As shown in Table 1.1 correlation matrix, correlation coefficient between two was $r = -0.19$, $p < 0.01$ which reflected that person with high irrational belief were low on self-esteem. Inter-correlation between emotional skills and self-esteem was also investigated and positive correlation was found between them as hypothesized. The correlation between these two was $r = 0.157$, $p < 0.01$. It means that people high on emotional skills were high on self-esteem.

Table 1.0 - shows the correlation of irrational beliefs with emotional skills

	SD	nAch	nApp	nComf	DF	OD	Totl_irr	EE	ES	EC	Total_E
SD	1	.436**	.417**	.395**	.416**	.337**	.678**	-.120*	-	-	-.213**
nAch		1	.359**	.537**	.576**	.395**	.729**	-	-.042	-	-.167**
nApp			1	.426**	.357**	.375**	.596**	-	-.094	-	-.213**
nCom				1	.458**	.420**	.735**	-.092	.028	-	-.105
DF					1	.444**	.710**	-	-.016	-	-.173**
OD						1	.630**	-	-.050	-	-.167**
Totl_irr							1	-	-.063	-	-.213**
EE								1	.210**	.287**	.650**
ES									1	.351**	.770**
EC										1	.741**
Totl_E											1

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Table 1.1 - shows the correlation of irrational beliefs with self-esteem

	S D	nAc h	nAp p	nCo mf	DF	OD	Totl_i rr	Gen._S E	SC H	Soc	Hom e	Total_S E
SD	1	.436**	.417**	.395**	.416**	.337**	.678**	-.264**	-	-	-	-.282**
nAch		1	.359**	.537**	.576**	.395**	.729**	-.123*	.066	.015	.003	-.050
nApp			1	.426**	.357**	.375**	.596**	-.164**	-	-	-.091	-.162**
nCom				1	.458**	.420**	.735**	-.121*	.056	.002	-.012	-.061
DF					1	.444**	.710**	-.161**	.001	.021	-.033	-.104
OD						1	.630**	-.183**	-	-	-	-.241**
Totl_ir r							1	-.206**	-	-	-.108	-.191**
Gen._S E								1	.148*	.205**	.311*	.805**
SCH									1	.243**	.171*	.483**
Soc										1	.097	.514**
Home											1	.643**
Total SE												1

Table 1.2 - Showed relationship between self-esteem and emotional skills

	EE	ES	EC	Totl_E	Gen._SE	SCH	Soc	Home	Totl_SE
EE	1	.210**	.287**	.650**	-.010	.111	.063	.047	.056
ES		1	.351**	.770**	-.052	.148*	.219**	.125*	.119*
EC			1	.741**	.118*	-.037	.119*	.161**	.162**
Totl_E				1	.020	.108	.194**	.156**	.157**
Gen._SE					1	.148*	.205**	.311**	.805**
SCH						1	.243**	.171**	.483**
Soc							1	.097	.514**
Home								1	.643**
Totl.SE									1

**p<.01, *p<.05 Self-downing= SD, Need for achievement= nAch, Need for approval= nApp, Need for comfort= nComf, Demand for fairness= DF, Other downing= OD, Total irrationality= totlirr, Emotional expressivity= ES, Emotional sensitivity, Emotional control=EC, Total of emotional= Totl_E, General self-esteem=Gen.SE, School= SCH, Social environment= Soc, Total self-esteem=Totl.SE

Discussion: The aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship of irrational beliefs with emotional skills and self-esteem. The study was designed to find out the relationship between these three variables. It was found in the present investigation that there was significant negative relationship between irrational beliefs and emotional skills at 0.01 level which showed that increased level of irrational beliefs would reflect the lower level of emotional skills. Because irrational beliefs would never allow a person to think rationally and objectively in that case a person cannot give his/her 100% contribution to social world and would not be able to deal with his emotions properly, it would lower his capacity to think for others and their

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emotions. Research studies have also been conducted and they showed that irrational beliefs also lead to negative behavioral responses including aggression, withdrawal, impulsivity and lack of emotional and academic resilience (Bernard, 2006; Vernon, 2007). Vernon and Bernard (2006) has depicted that the emotional problems are the results of a dysfunctional way of thinking i.e., irrational beliefs and this faulty style of thinking interferes with goal setting and achievement, academic success and social interactions with classmates and teachers.

Similarly, it was found in the present study that there is significant negative relationship between irrational beliefs and self-esteem at 0.01 level. It represented that individuals with high irrational beliefs would be low on self-esteem, which means that irrational beliefs stopped a person to think rationally and he started making conclusions on basis of few negative events and evaluate himself with few negative events which forced him to make wrong inferences for his self-concept which shakes his self-esteem. Findings from others studies are also in line with the finding of the present study. A study conducted by Orth, Robins and Widaman (2012) has proposed that self-esteem was better replica as a cause of various life outcomes. Particularly self-esteem had a moderate effect on lifetime trajectories of affect, mood and depression, small to moderate effects on personal relationship and job satisfaction, and limited effects on health.

Lee (1998) has investigated relationship between individual's irrational beliefs and their levels of self-esteem and found that there was a negative relationship between the number of irrational beliefs and an individual's own level of self-esteem. The Daly and Burton (1983) and McLennan (1987) have examined joint relationship of depression and self-esteem to Ellis' irrational beliefs on an Australian sample (N=268) of students and nonstudents. The results of the study have shown that irrational beliefs to be jointly related to low self-esteem and depression.

Inter-correlation between emotional skills and self-esteem was also investigated in present study and significant positive relationship was found between both the variables at level of 0.01 as hypothesized. Individuals high on emotional skills are high on self-esteem because a person showed good social and emotional skills would have good reputation among others which is related with high self-concept and high self-esteem. Leary et al. (1995) conducted a study and showed that low self-esteem is one of the strongest predictors of emotional and behavioral problems. Individuals with low self-esteem likely to be more anxious, depressed, lonely, jealous, shy, low on social skills and generally unhappy as compared to individuals with high self-esteem. People with low self-esteem are also less assertive, less likely to enjoy close friendships and more likely to drop out of school. Research studies depicted strongly association of low self-esteem as a risk factor for psychological distress and behavioral problems, some studies recommended raising self-esteem as a mode to remediate a variety of social and emotional problems. Self-esteem involves internal feelings and self-consciousness that persuade emotionally healthy functioning in the social context (George, 2000).

Implications of the present study

The findings of the present research have significant implications in the area of counseling of adolescent students. Individuals who are high on irrational beliefs cannot view the self, others and life objectively and many biases come across their

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mind and they become slave of many other psychological problems such as low self-esteem and low level of emotional skills. In order to make irrational beliefs into rational ones, enhancing their social-emotional skills and boosting self-esteem intervention can play an important role. Moreover, it is not difficult to recognize a student with high irrational beliefs and low on emotional skills and self-esteem in a class. The teachers can help the students conquer their fears and insecurities. This would help them in overcoming irrationality and improving their personal as well as academic life by using their caliber to the maximum extent.

Despite the important findings and implication of the present research, there are some **limitations** such as the study has not included any variables pertaining to social environment, no comparison between students from rural and urban background, self-reports may also have affected the study results because of social desirability and the researcher's presence and study could also be conducted in manner of opting for matched experimental and control groups. Further, there are some **suggestions** for future research, it can take into consideration the effect of family environment and parent-child relationship. Longitudinal, quantitative and qualitative studies could be conducted with similar sample and with similar variables for follow up.

To recapitulate, it can be said that irrational beliefs play an important role in establishing the image of self and image in social circle because people behave in the way they think. And if thinking is not rational then they can spoil their self-image and cannot cope with social stressors effectively. So it becomes important to find out the irrational beliefs to enhance self-esteem and emotional skills. If person has good self-concept then he can deal with social and emotional problems and become a better adjusted individual.

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