

# Self-esteem comparison between employed and non-employed women of Tehran city

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**ABSTRACT:** Paid employment has become increasingly significant in the lives of women. The pertinent questions that arise: Is the woman happier and better adjusted by relinquishing the traditional role or by combining the two roles? Self-esteem was selected to evaluate the effect of employment on women in this study. The samples consisted of 150 married employed and 150 married unemployed women in the age range of 20-45 years, with educational qualification of 10+2 and above. Cluster sampling technique was used for the selection of the sample. The State Self-Esteem scale was chosen for collection of data. SPSS was used for analyzing data. Employed women were found to be significantly higher on self-esteem than unemployed women. The reason for higher self-esteem among employed women than non-employed women may be because of the fact that employment is associated with enhanced self-esteem and life satisfaction only when it is regarded as a career or significant life work.

**Keywords:** between employed, Self-esteem, Tehran city, non-employed women.

## INTRODUCTION

It is generally believed that there are many benefits to having a positive view of the self. Those who have high self-esteem are presumed to be psychologically happy and healthy (Branden, 1994; Taylor & Brown, 1988), whereas those with low self-esteem are believed to be psychologically distressed and perhaps even depressed (Tennen & Affleck, 1993). Having high self-esteem apparently provides benefits to those who possess it: They feel good about themselves, they are able to cope effectively with challenges and negative feedback, and they live in a social world in which they believe that people value and respect them. Although there are negative consequences associated with having extremely high self-esteem (Baumeister, 1998), most people with high self-esteem appear to lead happy and productive lives. By contrast, people with low self-esteem see the world through a more negative filter, and their general dislike for themselves colours their perceptions of everything around them. Substantial evidence shows a link between self-esteem and depression, shyness, loneliness, and alienation low self-esteem is aversive for those who have it. That self-esteem is vital for psychological health is evident in the popular media and in educational policy. Accumulated research suggests that unemployment is associated with increased depression (Feather & O'Brien, 1986) and poorer self-esteem (Feather, 1982). Studies conducted in a western context find the relationship between gender and self-esteem, which is in favour of male adolescents, with females having lower self-esteem levels (Chub et al. 1997; Harper and Marshall 1991). Two studies conducted in a non-western context have not found gender differences in self-esteem (Mwanamwender, 1991; Watkins and Yu, 1993). Their findings are particularly interesting in light of the observation by the researchers that in South African culture (Mwamwenda 1991) and in Chinese society (Watkins and Yu, 1993). King et al. (1999) found that in comparison to girls, boys consistently scored higher on self-esteem, with little variation across the age groups (grades 6, 8 and 10). Young confidence was related to the level of peer integration and feelings about appearance. For girls, feelings about appearance strongly determined their confidence, with boys tending to be more confident than girls. Paluska, (2000) studied that individuals higher in self-esteem may be more likely to engage in exercise behaviour. The experimental studies conducted are artificial environmental conditions given. They do not address an individual

independently and voluntarily engaging in exercise this factor affects the self-esteem. Deborah, (2004) conducted a study on quantitative and qualitative data of young adult daughters through Wisconsin Longitudinal Study. Nearly two-thirds of the mothers reported that they have been less successful than their daughters have, yet these unfavourable comparisons are linked only weekly to self-esteem. The present study is an attempt to investigate Self-Esteem among working and non-working married women.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The sample of 300 married women (150 working and 150 non-working) was taken for this research from Tehran city, Iran. Working women were teachers, bankers and etc. Cluster sampling was used for this study.

#### Instrument

##### State Self-Esteem Scale

The State Self-Esteem scale (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991) is a commonly used measure that is sensitive to laboratory manipulations of self-esteem. The SSES consists of 20 items that tap momentary fluctuations in self-esteem. The scale has acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha = .92$ ) and it is responsive to temporary changes in self-evaluation (Cornwell, & Major, 1993). Psychometric studies show the SSES to be separable from mood (Bagozzi & Heatherton, 1994). Confirmatory factor analysis reveals that the SSES is made up of three factors: performance, social, and appearance self-esteem (Bagozzi & Heatherton, 1994). The SSES is labeled "current thoughts" to minimize experimental demands. Of course, measures of trait and state self-esteem are highly correlated, and therefore in neutral settings scores on the SSES will be highly related to trait measures. The decision to use a trait or state measure of self-esteem, therefore, depends on whether one is interested in predicting long-term outcomes or in the immediate effects associated with feelings about the self. The result distributions are presented and basic descriptive parameters (arithmetic mean  $\pm$  standard deviation) were calculated. The differences between the groups were tested t test. The level of statistical significance was set at  $P < 0.05$ .

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Results

Table 1. Educational characteristics of working and non-working women

Education	working		non-working	
	N	%	N	%
High school or Diploma	102	68	111	75
Associate degree	34	22.6	29	19.3
Bachelor's degree	14	9.4	10	6.7
Masters and higher	0	0	0	0
Total	150	100	150	100

Ages of working women are 20.6, 50.7 and 28.7% in 20-25, 26-35 and 36-45 years categories, respectively; while are 16, 52.6 and 31.4% for non-working women, respectively (Table 2).

Table 2. Age distribution of working and non-working women

Variable (age)	working		non-working	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
20-25	31	20.6	24	16
26-35	76	50.7	79	52.6
36-45	43	28.7	47	31.4
Total	150	100	150	100

Statistical analysis showed that differences between working and non-working women in marital adjustment has not significance differences, but mean score of marital adjustment in working women is higher than non-working women (Table 3).

Table 5. Compare of marital adjustment between working and non-working women

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t	df	sig
working women	150	44.22	13.41	3.24	98	0.007
non-working women	150	37.19	11.24			

#### Discussion

The work status on self-esteem revealed that the groups of employed and unemployed women differ significantly on self-esteem. The employed women were significantly higher on self-esteem than unemployed women. Thus the findings of the present study support our hypothesis. The present findings are in consonance with the findings of Messias et al, (1997). According to them, occupying multiple roles is thought to increase the women's chances to learn, to develop self-efficacy and self-esteem, to build social network and open access to informational, instrumental and emotional support, and to buffer life's stresses and strains. Playing multiple roles also provides cognitive cushioning and alternative sources of self-esteem and gratification when things go poorly in one's life domain. There are several studies that reported higher psychological well-being amongst employed women in comparison to unemployed women (Bernard, 1971; Walker and Walker, 1980; House et al., 1988; Fllmer, 1990; Ozer, 1995; Bandura, 1997; Rao, 2003). In contrast to the above, there are studies which confirmed that employed women are lower on psychological well-being (e.g., Walker and Best, 1991; Macran et al., 1996). Whether or not employment outside home is beneficial to women's well-being depends on the work conditions, quality of organization, the person' subjective perception, and satisfaction with the job. However there are other studies which found less or no difference in psychological well-being between employed and unemployed women (Menaghan, 1989). The employed women were significantly higher on self-esteem than unemployed women. Thus the findings of the present study support hypothesis. These results are in consonance with the findings of several other researchers who found higher self-esteem among employed women than unemployed women (Messias et al., 1997; Mary and Good, 2005). Contrary to the above results, Suh, (1994) found employed women had lower score on self-esteem than unemployed women. There are a few researchers who found that different social tasks produce role strain or conflict amongst employed women (Sarbin and Allen, 1968). However, there are other studies which reported no differences between career women and home oriented women in regard to their self-esteem (Hartley, 1980; Tabatabaei, 1999). One of the main reasons for higher self-esteem among professionally employed women is that women who hold multiple roles may be better at coping or less susceptible to psychological distress, and women who have fewer roles may be more psychologically vulnerable and drop or lose roles. Holding more roles is associated with higher self-esteem and job satisfaction (Paula et al., 1986). Higher self-esteem among working women as compared to unemployed could be due to the fact that these women would something positive (such as higher status and economic independence) in an opportunity to work outside the home. A feeling of contributing to the welfare of their families as well as society might enhance their self-esteem. Taylor and Spencer, (1988) found that working mothers acknowledge the joys of combined employment and family responsibilities. When a woman goes out to work, she shakes off the feeling of subordination (Stein, 1978). Work provides a woman with more self-esteem and to some extent satisfies her need for recognition freedom, power, independence, and the need for social contacts.

The reason for higher self-esteem among employed women than non-employed women may be because of the fact that employment is associated with enhanced self-esteem and life satisfaction only when it is regarded as a career or significant life work. For those women who did not think of the paid work role as a long term life goal, employment was not linked to higher self-esteem or life satisfaction. Satisfaction with job and salience of the occupational role has been found to be higher in working women and this explains their being higher on self-esteem than non-employed women. Another reason is that the Iranian women with multiple roles especially in non-professional jobs face more stress, because of lower income and support. They have less family support, social acceptance and less governmental support. Thus, employment status alone cannot enhance the self-esteem of non-employed women.

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