Self-esteem as the Predictor of Life Satisfaction among High School Students in Cambodia

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Abstract

The purpose of this research paper was to measure the relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction among high school students in Cambodia. The study quantitatively used the data from Positive Youth Development (PYD) that has total of 1591 adolescents from public high schools in Phnom Penh and other three provinces: Kep, Kampong Thom, and Kampong Cham participated in the research. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and life Satisfaction Scale, were used. Among all, 707 (44.20%) were male students and 886 (55.80%) were female students. The results showed that self-esteem was positively associated with life satisfaction. The coefficient correlation (r = 0.467) shows the significantly average correlation between self-esteem and life satisfaction. It was found there is no significant difference between life satisfaction and self-esteem among gender, whereas there was a significant difference of life satisfaction between rural and urban region. However, no significant difference of life satisfaction among urban and rural region was found. Among student from grade 10, grade 11 and grade 12, there is significant different only on the level of life satisfaction but has no significant different on self-esteem level. The results give support for the proposed hypothesis that self-esteem have a positive role in association with adolescents' life satisfaction. The findings provide evidence that Self-esteem is an important predictor of major life satisfaction.

Keywords: Self-esteem, Life Satisfaction, high school students, Cambodia

1. Introduction

Self-esteem is a fundamental aspect of child's development. In western culture, the term "self-esteem" has become domestic word that teachers, parents, therapists and social workers try to focus on, to improve self-esteem of children. The self-esteem need leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world (Maslow, n.d.). Life satisfaction is considered to be a central construct in relation to other emotional, social, and behavioral constructs, and one of the variables that may have an impact on life satisfaction during adolescence is self-esteem (Moksnes & Espnes, 2013). According to Diener, E. and Diener. M. (2012), both self-esteem and life satisfaction as one's global evaluations, yet the direction of these evaluations is different. Self-esteem reflects an individual's perceptions and evaluations of himself or herself, whereas life satisfaction involves the individual's evaluation of their life as a whole, including different areas of life such as school, family, and friends as well as oneself. Self-esteem is the important construct in social sciences and everyday life. This important structure is one of the most researched variables in the fields of counseling and psychology. "Although correlated with the emotional well-being, life satisfaction posits a separate factor and is considered one of the most relevant indicators of psychological health" (Rollero et al., 2022). There were a plethora of studies on the fields, however, there is no widely accepted, standard, general definition of self-esteem (Furkan Kurnaz et al., 2020). Many psychological and educational research has become more interested in the development of self-development (Wigfield & Eccles, 1994).

Generating a more thorough understanding of the association between self-esteem and life satisfaction underlines the need for more cross-cultural research on life satisfaction in adolescents. The collection of systematic information on this issue is central to public health professionals in the planning of primary health care for the adolescent group. This may lead to better intervention efforts to promote adolescents' optimal development, in reference to resources for health and positive development. In 2017, RUPP has conducted research on "Toward Positive Youth Development among high school students in Cambodia (PYD)." Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework aims to determine which internal and external assets best support youth's current level of mental health and well-being, as well as their aspirations for future success. Within this PYD framework, the study examined perception of roles and tasks in the family, discipline and self-control in school, initiative, social competence and relatedness.

It is important that young generation experiences a happy childhood with respect to both mental and social development to be a fruitful adulthood. Cambodia's youth is particularly exposed to vulnerabilities, primarily in the context of poverty, physical and mental weaknesses, violence and abuse, and migration. Higher education remains far beyond the reach of most rural and female youth. All though, the gross enrolment rate in tertiary education among youth aged between 18 and 22 improved significantly over the last 10 years from 4.9 to 20 percent. This trend continued for the poorest households (from 0.2 to 2.6 percent) and for women (3.3 to 17.4 percent) (OECD, 2018). Nonetheless, Cambodia's youth faces certain pressures from the outside environment, including family, community, cultural norms, customs and society. The purpose of the current study was to extend the results of previous research by examining the typology of gender, locality, and grade levels (Rollero et al., 2022). This study uncovers insights and evidences by addressing the following research questions:

(1) What are the levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction among Cambodian high school students?

(2) Are there significant differences in self-esteem and life satisfaction by gender, region, and grade level?

(3) Is there a relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction?

2. Review of Literature

Definition
Self-esteem

Self-Esteem in reviewing quality of life research it is evident that different studies have used widely different definitions and methods of assessing quality of life. These have been rooted in the prevailing culture, an assumption made by policy makers and researchers. Pavot and Diener define life satisfaction as ''a judgmental process, in which individuals assess the quality of their lives on the basis of their own unique criteria'' (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Self-esteem is one of human needs in Maslow theory of human motivation. According to Maslow, self-esteem refers a need or desire to get well recognition from other and from ourselves.

Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction, defined in a simple and clear way, is not viewed as an easily understandable concept in reality. For this reason, many different definitions can be encountered. In the Dictionary of Developmental Psychology, life satisfaction is the degree of contentment with one's own lifestyle. Life satisfaction has been defined as the experience of

joy, contentment, or positive well- being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile (Lyubomirsky, 2013). Some research indicates, life satisfaction is an important psychological variable in the adolescence period (Çivitci & Çivitci, 2009).

Self-esteem and life satisfaction concept among Cambodia people

In Cambodia so far no work has been carried out towards construct validation of self-esteem scale for adolescents and adults. Thus only a valid and reliable measure of self-esteem based on solid theory and improved methodology could change the present status of research in Cambodia. Thus the concept of self-esteem among student might also vary from the concept of adult. Moreover, it seems in this new era, Cambodian people are facing a complex process of regeneration of values from new technological societies while being aware of cultural traditions of their ancestors.

A study on self-esteem among Cambodian student has shown that high self-esteem people in Cambodia prefer to express their aspirations in terms such as intelligence, language skills, and being responsible then they would love to travel around the world, having a good partner and become a rich person in future. Cambodian students with low self-esteem would express themselves in terms like being healthy, with great language skills and becoming beautiful and smart. Then they would also like to travel around the world, having a good partner and becoming rich person. Although the two groups have many similarity in their choices for their future but they differ too (Khalid et al., 2013).

Self-esteem and life satisfaction among high school student

As some research indicated that life satisfaction is an important psychological factor in adolescent. Research has shown that grateful people are prone to perceive high levels of social support from others, which may enhance their self-esteem and in turn, may result in life satisfaction (Kong et al., 2015). Student usually compare him/herself to the other students who is smarter or better looking appearance that it has largely negative reductions on the individual's ability to find satisfaction in life (Hill, 2015).

During the adolescent years, children experience the change associate with puberty. They moving from elementary school to high school. Rosenberg has proposed that these change can have a significant impact on student's self-perception and self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1989). Many young adolescent has increase negative perception about school and about themselves. According to Rosenberg, after the transition to high school, adolescent's general self-esteem is lower. This happen might due to the different in school environment of elementary and high

school. One research found that transition from elementary school to high school has important change in adolescent's general self-esteem.

Self-esteem and life satisfaction

As self-esteem reflects how one evaluates the self, the extent to which one is satisfied with self-constitutes an important component of satisfaction with one's own life. So lower self-esteem and negative evaluations of self, lead to lower life satisfaction.

The role of self-esteem is associated with life satisfaction in adolescents aged 13–18 years, as well as the potential moderating role of gender and age on the relation between self-esteem and life satisfaction (Moksnes & Espnes, 2013). In line with the positive psychology movement, investigations of adolescents' life perceptions may add valuable information in understanding their achievements, maintenance of happiness and well-being. Self-esteem has been found to be an important characteristic in this context. The research found that self-esteem plays a positive role in adolescents' life satisfaction. So, to be truly satisfied and stimulated by life, a person needs to be intrinsically satisfied. It is thus apparent that a person can be happy only when he has a realistic appraisal of his abilities and potentials to develop realistic aspirations and expectations. And finally, an optimistic outlook and cheerful disposition towards life is a healthy outlook without which it is difficult to have satisfaction in life. Another research also shown the relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction. Hill (2015) has shown that high levels of self-esteem and that having high levels of subjective happiness tends to mean high levels of life satisfaction.

Gender different relate self-esteem

Gender and Life Satisfaction also is an important study on life satisfaction stating the reasons of Life satisfaction among women. The study depicts that women have average level of life satisfaction at all age levels. It is found that with an increase in age, the overall life satisfaction decreases; whereas, with an increase in personal income, the overall life satisfaction increases. Moreover, with an increase in family income, the overall life satisfaction of women also increases (Moksnes & Espnes, 2013).

According to the research on Gender Differences in self-esteem and happiness among University Students, the findings of the research show that gender has an impact upon the development, expression and demonstration of self-esteem and there are considerable gender differences in self-esteem of university students (Naderi et al., 2009). Furthermore, the male students reported higher level of self-esteem as compared to the female students.

A study on 72 students in Iran explored relationship between social support, self-esteem and student's educational development. The t-test analysis suggested that boys reported more self-esteem as compared to female students (Naderi et al., 2009). The findings further revealed no significant gender differences in level of happiness among university students. However, mean differences suggested that boys reported more happiness than female students. The findings are consistent with those of (Diener, 2012), which suggested that males students had significantly higher happiness level than female students.

3. Research Methodology

Population and Sample

This study employs the quantitative approach by using survey questionnaire. The data was approved by project of Positive Youth Development (PYD) that initiated by Department of Psychology at the Royal University of Phnom. The objective of current research was to explore the relationship between high school students self-esteem and life satisfaction.

The study includes 1591 high school students – 886 female students (56%) and 703 male students (44%) aged 13 to 23 *(M = 16.46, SD = 1.31).* The sample came from capital city of Phnom Penh and three provinces in Cambodia, namely Kep, Kampong Thom and Kampong Cham. Six high schools were selected, three of which are in capital city of Phnom Penh and three in the provinces. All the high school students were in grade 10 to 12.

Instruments

This section presents the measurements used to assess self-esteem and life satisfaction, in addition to the demographic information such as gender, religion, and grade.

To measure self-esteem, Rosenberg Self-Esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) was used. The scale was developed to measure how a person perceives their self-esteem. There are 10 items in the scale. The samples of the scale are "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" and "All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure." The original scale of Rosenberg Self-Esteem used a 4 point rating scale. However, in the PYD research a 5 point Likert scale is used to make it parallel with other scales in the questionnaire. The 5 point Likert scale ranges from 1 for *Not At All True,* 2 for *Not True*, 3 for *Somewhat True*, 4 *True*, and finally 5 for *Very True*. Five items in the scale are positive statements and the other half are negative statements about self. The respondents indicated how much they think the statements are true for them by circling a

number from 1 to 5. Five negative items were reverse coded. The higher the score in this scale, the higher the self-esteem.

Self-esteem is subjected to exploratory factor analysis to determine that how many grouping factors for this scale. The results show that the self-esteem is a uni-dimensional scale. Five items were removed from the scales due to low factor loading (less than .30). After removing these five items, the reliability of the scale shows the Cronbach's Alpha of .60 which is a fair reliability. The table below will show the items remaining for the self-esteem in the current study.

Table 1 Items for self-esteem in the current study

Item	Self-Esteem
1	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
2	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
3	I am able to do things as well as most other people.
4	I feel that I am the person of worth, at least on equal plane with others.
5	I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Life satisfaction scale is derived from Multi context Assessment Battery for Youth Development (MAB-YD, 2015), developed by Psychology Department team at De La Salle University, Manila. This scale asks about how satisfied one is with their life in general, relationship with family, relationship with friends, studies, living conditions and day-to-day activities. The sample questions are "How satisfied are you with your life in general?" and "How satisfied are you with your day-to-day activities?" The five-point Likert scale is presented with: 1 for very unsatisfied, 2 unsatisfied, 3 somewhat satisfied, 4 satisfied and 5 highly satisfied. The reliability of the scale shows the Cronbach's Alpha of .73 which is a high reliability.

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, the PYD study was reviewed and approved by Cambodian Ministry of Health and National Ethic Committee, which is the institution that gives approval to research studies throughout the country. For students under the age of 18, consent form was sent to their parents via their teachers, to obtain permission for their children to participate in this study. Nine data collectors were trained by two senior supervisors in order to conduct reliable data collection. Self-ration questionnaires were delivered to the students under

supervision of the trained data collectors. Each student spent around one to one-and-a-half hours to complete the questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, the trained data collectors checked the whole questionnaire to ensure the minimal errors made by the students.

Data Analyses

All calculations were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26 with a 95% confidence level. First, the descriptive statistics of the participants were analyzed. In order to estimate the differences and degree of correlation between all of the variables, calculations were performed using independent sample t-test and the Pearson correlation coefficient. In the analysis, the dependent variable (Y) was life satisfaction, the independent variable (X) was the level of self-esteem.

4. Findings

Descriptive Statistics

The purpose of the current study was to examine the relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction among high school students in Cambodia. It also investigated the role of gender, locality, and grade levels on self-esteem and life satisfaction.

Table 2 shows the target area chosen from one city (Phnom Penh) and three provinces (Kep, Kampong Thom and Kampong Cham). However, the percentage of students living in Phnom Penh is 50.90%. While the percentage of students living in urban areas is 59.30%. The difference might be explained by a number of students, from the provinces, living in a city within their province. The study was conducted on adolescents studying from grade 10 to grade 12 in high schools.

Table 2 Locality and grade level of participants

Variable		Frequencies (#)	Percentages (%)
Region			
	Urban	944	59.30%
	Rural	647	40.70%
Provinces			
	Phnom Penh	810	50.90%
	Kep	301	18.90%
	Kampong Thom	264	16.60%
	Kampong Cham	216	13.60%

Grade

Grade 10	534	33.60%
Grade 11	560	35.20%
Grade 12	497	31.20%

Among the six items of life satisfaction in table 3, 'how satisfied are you with your relationships with family?' was one of the most common activities reported by the students, with the mean scores of 3.29, 3.15, and 2.88 respectively. However, five items of self-esteem were reported low compared to life satisfaction items, with the mean scores of 2.82 on 'I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.' And other items were relatively lower reported scores.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Life Satisfaction and Self-Esteem (n = 1591)

Life Satisfaction Items	*Mean*	*SD*
How satisfied are you with your life in general?	2.88	0.843
How satisfied are you with your relationships with family?	3.29	0.794
How satisfied are you with your relationships with friends?	2.76	0.703
How satisfied are you with your studies?	3.15	0.815
How satisfied are you with your living conditions?	2.72	0.826
How satisfied are you with your day-to-day activities?	2.43	0.776
Total Life Satisfaction	2.87	0.518
Self-Esteem Items	*Mean*	*SD*
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	2.75	0.847
I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	2.58	0.747
I am able to do things as well as most other people.	2.74	0.767
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	2.82	0.838
I take a positive attitude toward myself.	2.53	0.947
Total Self-Esteem	2.68	0.5141

Gender and Regional Differences on Life Satisfaction and Self-esteem

The independent sample t-tests were carried out to assess gender differences on the study variables on life satisfaction and self-esteem. As shown in Table 4, Female students slightly outscored male students on Life satisfaction, whereas male students reported higher levels of self-esteem than female students. No significant gender differences emerged in

relation to self-esteem *t (1586) = - 0.968, p > 0.05* and life satisfaction *t (1586) = 0.030, p > 0.05* among the two groups.

Table 4 Gender differences in Life satisfaction and self-esteem (n = 1591)

Gender Comparison		N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Life Satisfaction	Female	886	2.870	0.518	0.030	1586	0.976
	Male	702	2.869	0.520			
Self-esteem	Female	886	2.672	0.509	-0.968	1586	0.333
	Male	702	2.697	0.518			

Table 5 reported that there were a statistically significant differences of life satisfaction between rural and urban region. Rural region tends to be reported higher life satisfaction *(M=2.93, SD = 0.48)* than urban region *(M = 2.83, SD = 0.54) with t (1589) = 3.968, p < 0.05.* Surprisingly, rural region also reported higher self-esteem *(M=2.71, SD = 0.52)* than urban region *(M = 2.66, SD = 0.51),* but there was no significant differences among the two region *t(1589) = 1.887, p > 0.05.*

Table 5 Regional differences in life satisfaction and self-esteem (n = 1591)

Dependent Variables	Region	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Life Satisfaction	Rural	647	2.93	0.48	3.968	1589	0.000
	Urban	944	2.83	0.54			
Self-esteem	Rural	647	2.71	0.52	1.887	1589	0.059
	Urban	944	2.66	0.51			

The comparisons of Life Satisfaction and Self-esteem on Grade Levels

A one-way analysis of variance was performed to test for grade differences on the self-esteem and life satisfaction. As seen in Table 6, it was found that there was a significant differences of Life satisfaction within the three group *F (2, 1588) = 4.469, p < 0.5.* Students in the grade 10 sample was reported higher life satisfaction than in the grade 11 and grade 12, with the mean score 2.912, 2.877, and 2.817 respectively.

Table 6 Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance in life satisfaction and self-esteem among grade levels (n = 1591)

	Grade	N	Mean	SD	ANOVA		
					df	F	p
Life Satisfaction	Grade 10	534	2.912	0.504	2	4.469	0.012

	Grade 11	560	2.877	0.537	1588		
	Grade 12	497	2.817	0.508			
Self-esteem	Grade 10	534	2.682	0.515	2		
	Grade 11	560	2.703	0.526	1588	0.762	0.467
	Grade 12	497	2.664	0.499			

Predicting Life Satisfaction from demographics, grade level, and Self-esteem

Six variables (self-esteem, gender, grade level, and province, region, and age group) were analyzed to measure the correlations with life. According to table 7, Self-esteem was moderately strong and significant correlated with life satisfaction, $r = 0.467, p < 0.5$; whereas province indicated relatively low relationship, $r = 0.106, p < 0.05$ and grade level and region indicated a negatively significant correlation with life satisfaction $r = -0.074$ and $r = -0.099, p < 0.05$ respectively.

Table7 Correlations of all Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Life Satisfaction	1						
2. Self-esteem	.467**	1					
3. Gender	-0.001	0.024	1				
4. Grade Level	-.074**	-0.014	0.035	1			
5. Province	.106**	.113**	-.061*	-.063*	1		
6. Region	-.099**	-0.047	.066**	.118**	-.668**	1	
7. Age group	-0.029	0.004	0.014	0.012	0.010	0.018	1

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Prior to conducing a hierarchical multiple regression, the relevant statistical analysis were tested. A three stage hierarchical multiple regression was conducted with student's life satisfaction as the dependent variable from independent variables: Age group, gender, region, grade level, and self-esteem. Age group, gender, and region were entered at stage one of the regression to control for individual's difference and their geographical areas. Grade level was entered in stage two and self-esteem at stage three.

Table 8 Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables predicting Life Satisfaction (N=1586)

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	19.371	20.462	12.445
	(1.004)	(1.163)	(1.096)
Age Group	-.109	-.030	.010
	(.060)	(.074)	(.065)
Gender	.084	.063	-.031
	(.159)	(.159)	(.141)
Region	-.666***	-.598***	-.0431**
	(.160)	(.164)	(.145)
Grade Level		-.221	-.242*
		(.119)	(.106)
Self-esteem			.561***
			(.027)
Adj. R^2	.010	.012	.226
N	1586	1586	1586

*$p < 0.05$, **$p<0.01$, ***$p<0.001$
Entries in this table are the unstandardized regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses

The hierarchical multiple regression revealed that at model 1, Age, gender, and regional area contributed significantly to the regression model, $F_{(3, 1582)} = 6.363$, $p< .001$) and accounted for 1.0 % of the variation in Life Satisfaction. Grade level variable explained an additional 1.2% of variation in Life Satisfaction and the change in R^2 was significant, $F_{(4, 1581)} = 5.39$, $p < .001$. Finally, the addition of self-esteem to the regression model was also significant, $F_{(5, 1580)} = 93.450$, $p < .001$. When all five independent variables were included in model three of the regression model, neither age group nor gender were significant predictors of Life Satisfaction. The most important predictor of life Satisfaction was self-esteem. Together the five independent variables accounted for 22.6% of the variation in Life Satisfaction.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study supports the theoretical and empirical understanding of self-esteem as having a strong positive relation to life satisfaction, although a longitudinal study is needed to explain the causal relationship between the variables in the current study. It would be logical to assume that interventions facilitating self-esteem, as one target area among an array of

forces, may be important for promoting life satisfaction and positive functioning in the adolescent group. Another study was based on a research which found many of the specific self-esteem domains were associated with the life satisfaction, and global self-esteem was generally the best predictor of adaptive outcomes (Thompson, 2017). Global self-esteem was associated with higher life satisfaction.

The research on self-esteem and life satisfaction among adolescents, and found self-esteem has a positive role in adolescents' life satisfaction (Moksnes & Espnes, 2013). The association found between self-esteem and life satisfaction in the present study is supported by previous findings (Proctor et al., 2008; Gilman & Huebner, 2006). Furthermore, a study with 71 participants found self-esteem was strongly correlated with the level of life satisfactions (Hill, 2015). A research with secondary school in Vietnam showed high educational stress and physical and emotional abuse by parents or other adults in thehousehold were major risk factors correlated to low self-esteem (Nguyen et al., 2019). Furthermore, lowerself-esteem and increased anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation was detected.

The current findings showed that gender and age group seems not to be a significant predictor on life satisfaction and it revealed that no gender differences in self-esteem and satisfaction, which are different from the previous study (Khalid et al., 2013). The research found no differences among male and female high school students on their self-esteem level and life satisfaction. In line with Moksnes and Espnes (2013) the study further found that there was slightly significant association between urban and rural student on life satisfaction and self-esteem. This result would need some further researches on the subject from different perspectives as this study was not designed to investigate the reasons for low level self-esteem among urban and rural people contributed to the life satisfaction. In summary, the current study, as well as the other research, found self-esteem has a positive correlation with life satisfaction among high school students in Cambodia. However, longitudinal research investigating the reciprocal and dynamic relation between self-esteem and life satisfaction is needed to investigate causality and the generalizability of the results.

In conclusion, this study presents an empirical framework for the researchers through examining the effect of self-esteem on life satisfaction among high school students in Cambodia. The results of the study imply that self-esteem plays a vital role in predicting life satisfaction among high school adolescents. Evidently, there are many factors associated with life satisfaction. Work on enhancing these factors is crucial for promoting the satisfaction. These factors are relationship with family and friends, fulfilment from study, living conditions,

and contentment with daily activities. In addition, it suggested that balancing competing desires and needs is important for one's mental health and that both are integral to life satisfaction (Lucas & Moore, 2019). Maintaining one's good health is another key factor for nurturing self-esteem and eventually the life satisfaction. The last implication concerns self-deprecation. It is reflection of one's real self and one's actual ideas about oneself.

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