

SELF-ESTEEM IN AT RISK CHILDREN

By

Katie D. Wolf

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Research Advisor

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

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The Graduate School
 University of Wisconsin Stout
 Menomonie, WI 54751

ABSTRACT

Wolf,	Katie	D.
(Writer) (Last Name)	(First Name)	(Middle Initial)

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The purpose of the study was to complete a literature review investigating the level of self-esteem in at risk children. Defining at risk children is a challenging quest. However, once identified, these individuals can be examined further and in some instances, more positive interventions can be implemented to help foster positive outcomes, such as positive self-esteem. Many factors can contribute to one possessing a low self-esteem. The individual's background, specifically the family institution in which they were raised seems to have the greatest impact on self-esteem. Studies found lists of

elements that contribute to self-esteem including: socioeconomic status, single-parent homes, attention received at home, and parental attachments, level of educational attainment of parents, parental unemployment, stress, violence, abuse and neglect, ethnicity and race, and cultural deprivation. The more negative these conditions are in the child's life, the more likely they are of possessing a low self-esteem.

Negative and unpromising experiences and conditions are factors that put a child at risk. Depending on the situation, the child is at risk of having impairments, such as vision and hearing and other disabilities, becoming overweight, poor academic success, later school drop-out, delinquency, being abused, engaging in unacceptable or inappropriate behaviors, teen pregnancy, and being financially unstable. The more risk factors in one's life, the more likely they are to have a low self-esteem, and resort to dysfunctional ways of obtaining their needs. Factors putting individuals at risk and self-esteem affect each other. Risk factors increase the likelihood that an individual will possess a low self-esteem, and individuals that evaluate themselves negatively tend to have factors in their lives that put them at risk. These two things, self-esteem and risk factors, affect each other and continue to affect each other on a consistent cycle.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

How do you feel about yourself? How do we know how anyone feels about themselves? These are very important questions, but more so, the answers to those questions are what need to be investigated further. Everyone self evaluates differently, ranging from positive judgments to severe negative judgments. We relate to these personal evaluations as self-esteem. Self-esteem affects every aspect of people's lives. Studies have found that environmental or social factors are the greatest influences to one's self-esteem. With family creating the biggest impact, studies have looked into what aspects of the family help create a high self-esteem and on the other hand, what factors contribute to the low self-esteem so many children possess. With this in mind, the question arises as to whether at risk children are more of a target to experiencing and suffering from low self-esteem since they unfortunately exhibit more disadvantages in relation to the family construct.

Self-esteem impacts individual's thoughts, feelings as well as their behaviors.

Axinn, Duncan and Thornton (1999) stated:

Self-esteem is generally conceptualized as the central evaluative component of the self and reflects the extent to which individuals believe they are worthwhile and merit respect. Consequently, children who have internalized self-respect, a sense of personal worth and positive evaluations of themselves have higher levels of well-being than those who view themselves as inadequate, unworthy, or seriously deficient as people. (p. 520)

Many various aspects of people's lives have been known to affect evaluations of themselves or affect their self-esteem. According to Ford and Ford, "Self-esteem appears

to be significantly influenced by the actual or anticipated social evaluative feedback provided by others... This has led some to propose that one's self-concept is largely a social product" (cited in Herr, 1999, p. 316). Axinn, Duncan and Thornton (1999) stated that social institutions in which individuals, "are embedded creates and molds self-esteem" (p. 521). These institutions include friends, family, school and church. Axinn, Duncan and Thornton (1999) later stated that the family institution affects and impacts self-esteem the greatest of all institutions.

Children also need discipline and rules in their life, most significantly within the home. Family rules or system rules provide consistency and allow problems to be solved efficiently, and allow living patterns to be easily adjusted. With rules and effective discipline, children learn responsibility and boundaries (Webb, 1992).

Family factors. Stress, family size, violence and abuse, discipline and rules, marital status, education, and socioeconomic status are just some of the factors that are incorporated into the family system and in turn affect children, especially their self-esteem (Rak, 1996, Smokowski, 1998; Webb, 1992). When parents are under a great deal of stress, their parenting roles are affected. They do not give enough attention to their children; therefore, children are not in a situation in which they are likely to feel good about themselves (Axinn, Duncan & Thornton, 1999).

Parental attention. In relation to the concept of attention, having a great number of siblings affects the amount of individual attention children receive in the home. The greater number of brothers and sisters one has, the more they need to compete with each other for the parents' attention. Children in large families, who do not feel like they are

receiving the appropriate or equal amount of parental time as their siblings, are less likely to engage in positive self-thinking (Menaghan & Parcel, 1991).

Violence. Violence and abuse harms the child mentally as much as it does physically. In homes in which a child witnesses or is a victim of abuse, they tend to view the world very negatively. The most common outcome in situations of violence and abuse is that the individual perceives the world around them as sad, scary, and not affirmative, including how they perceive themselves (Massey, 1998).

Divorce and single parenting. Webb (1992) stated, "More than 1 million children come from homes in which their parents are divorced, and one out of five children lives in a single-parent home" (p. 1). This is a large number of children affected by divorce and single-parent households, and the numbers are rising. The product of this is that children not be getting the love, care, and supervision needed to feel good about themselves (Webb, 1992).

Socioeconomic status. Lower incomes tend to correlate with single-parent households. In a single-parent household, source of income is generally half that of a two-parent household. Studies have found that family income can alter one's self-esteem. Children in families that are struggling economically are at a disadvantage of owning the physical materials needed to, "satisfy individual aspirations" (Axinn, Duncan & Thornton, 1999, p. 521). Living with low socioeconomic status can also create parental and marital stress. Couples who struggle to support themselves and their families financially often engage in arguments about money, and they are less likely to be supportive and involved as parents (Axinn, Duncan & Thornton, 1999). Education can

have a big impact on socioeconomic status. Lower education levels have been shown to correlate with a lower income (Smokowski, 1998).

Many children are labeled at risk because they come from single-parent families and/or struggle financially. Since at risk children fit many of the characteristics mentioned above, they seem to be potential targets of evaluating themselves with a low self-esteem.

Statement of the Problem

What does the research say about the interaction between children's self-esteem and at risk behaviors?

Research Questions

There is one research questions this study will attempt to answer. That is:

1. Do at risk children evaluate themselves as having a low self-esteem?

Definition of Terms

For clarity of this research, the following terms are defined:

At Risk – Children who are more likely to satisfy their developmental needs in dysfunctional ways because of specific internal or external factors (Ogden & Germinario, 1988).

Elementary Aged – For the purpose of this study, 'elementary aged' refers to students in grades four, five, and six.

High Self-Esteem – Appreciating oneself and acknowledging self-worth, self control and competence; with that comes a positive attitude, high self-evaluations (Walz, 1991).

Low Self-Esteem – Feelings of sadness, anxiety, guilt, shame, humiliation, anger, and frustration because thinking is more negatively based. Low self-evaluations, self-criticism and feelings of hopelessness characterize low self-esteem (Brendgen, 2002).

Low Socioeconomic Status – a household with an income below the poverty line (Department of Public Instruction, 1995).

Self-Esteem – Herr (1999) defined self-esteem as, “A judgmental process in which individuals examine their performance, capacities, and attributes according to their own personal standards and values and reach decisions about their personal worth” (p. 315). Self-esteem can be evaluated and rated on levels such as high and low.

Single Parent – Only one parent within the household caring for the child or children.

Assumptions and Limitations

It is assumed that the researcher did an exhaustive search, collecting all data available on the self-esteem in at risk children. And it is assumed that the research used for this literature review was of high quality and recent. It is also assumed that self-esteem and risk factors are well defined in the research. One limitation is that one can not find all the research germane to the topic. The author’s own viewpoint may have flavored the interpretation of the literature therefore limiting the research and literature review. And another limitation is the time and range of the literature reviewed. Some research is not as recent as others and many more topics could have been investigated.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

There is not a single definition solely designated to describing at risk children, so this chapter will include a discussion of different definitions, followed by the classification or identification of children labeled at risk. In addition, risk factors that can lead to a child being at risk will be explored. This chapter will also review the great resilient qualities many children labeled at risk possess, even though they have not been predicted to adapt as well as they have. Furthermore, this chapter will review self-esteem and what may increase the likelihood of a higher self-esteem in at risk children. And finally, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of motivation in relation to at risk children.

Defining and Identifying At risk Children

What does it mean for a child to be at risk? That question is challenging to answer, since the definition is not black and white and is ever changing. Children labeled at risk are thought to be more susceptible to experiencing physical complications such as vision or hearing difficulties, they may be or become overweight, and possess treatable or incurable diseases or illnesses. Many times they demonstrate academic difficulties such as receiving low grades, and all too commonly these individuals drop out of school before reaching twelfth grade. Behaviorally, children at risk may be considered delinquents and experience psychological problems (Rak, 1996). There are a few variations in the way Herr (1999) defined at risk. He defined individuals being at risk of becoming physically or mentally ill, being abused, engaging in unacceptable or inappropriate behaviors, and suffering from a low socioeconomic status.

Children are thought to be at risk of engaging in inappropriate behaviors or “turning to dysfunctional means to satisfy their developmental needs” (Ogden & Germinario, 1988, p. 50) because they have a low self-esteem and are unsatisfied with themselves as a result of a social, school, or family condition (Ogden & Germinario, 1988). Examples of inappropriate behaviors and turning to dysfunctional means to satisfy themselves include dropping out of school, getting involved with alcohol and drugs, and getting involved with other individuals who use and abuse alcohol and other drugs, and sexual intercourse, to name a few. Often girls who are identified at risk are more susceptible to becoming pregnant in their teen years.

School-based definitions. The state of Wisconsin addresses some of the characteristics mentioned above in their definition:

Pupils in grades 5 to 12 who are at risk of not graduating from high school because they failed the high school graduation exam administered under s. 118.30 (1m) (d), Stats., are dropouts, or are two or more of the following: (1) one or more years behind their age group in the number of high school credits attained, (2) two or more years behind their age group and basic skill levels, (3) habitual truants, (4) parents, (5) adjudicated delinquents, (6) eighth grade pupils whose score in each subject area on the examination administered under s. 118.30 (1m) (am) 1., Stats., was below the basic level, eighth grade pupils who failed the examination under s. 118.30 (1m) (am) 2., Stats., and eighth grade pupils who failed to be promoted to the ninth grade. (Legislative Council Staff, 1999, p. 10)

In the definition of at risk provided by the Wisconsin State Legislature, students are identified by their academics, such as failing, lagging behind peers, and dropping out

of school. There are many other ways children are identified and labeled at risk, and doing poorly academically is only one characteristic. Along with background knowledge and history records both of family and school, other factors allow children to be identified easier as at risk. These children that are identified at risk report negatively about school when asked about it. They tend to dislike going and being at school and participating in school activities and they often report feeling as though they do not belong.

Acting out behaviors. Children at risk sometimes exhibit poor interaction skills or social skills with their peers, and often the friends they tend to group with engage in illegal activities such as using drugs. In many instances, children at risk find themselves using and abusing drugs as well. Children can also be identified as at risk when they exhibit noncompliance toward authority figures such as parents, teachers, and police officers. All too often at risk children do not abide by the rules and rebel (Ogden & Germinario, 1988).

Internalizing characteristics. Usually children can be identified or noticed immediately when they exhibit some of these characteristics, but unfortunately other characteristics of children at risk are not as noticeable. Webb (1992) suggested many at risk children be at risk of having a low self-esteem, mood disorders, and identity confusion. She reported, "Eighty percent of all children come from dysfunctional families in which they do not receive the necessary love, guidance, and nurturing to form healthy relationships and feel good about themselves and what they do" (1992, p. 1). It is more difficult to identify those students who may suffer from a low self-esteem or mood

disorders, but these symptoms or characteristics are far from unimportant. These students need to be identified and their problems need to be addressed.

Some children identified at risk retain characteristics internally in which it would be more difficult to identify those factors, and other children display actions in a more external way by physically acting in a particular way that is more noticeable. Either way, these children need to be identified. They are at risk academically, socially, physically, and emotionally. It may be impossible to change the circumstances leading to the identification of at risk children, but early identification, helpful and corrective interventions are most beneficial (Ogden & Germinario, 1988).

Risk Factors

Risk factors are defined by Smokowski (1998) as, “Any influences that increase the probability of onset, digression to a more serious state, or maintenance of a problem condition” (p. 2). Children at risk may be more likely to experience the negative outcomes, such as those mentioned earlier, and the reasons for that are many.

In a study of at risk children and the likelihood that they will be more disruptive, it is stated that children from low income families or single-parent homes are two times more likely to have emotional and behavior problems than their peers (Study, 2000). Often these two factors correlate with each other. Many times poverty is linked to parental factors such as lower levels of education, unemployment, high levels of stress, and single-parent homes, which in turn create risk factors for children (Smokowski, 1998). Pallas (1989) suggested that many school-aged children were culturally deprived and therefore were at a disadvantage in school and with life in general.

There are numerous factors that are thought to lead to or co-occur with children being identified and labeled at risk. The factors suggested to be most common indicators of individuals' susceptibility of being labeled could be divided into four main categories: school, family, community, and individual qualities (Youssef, 1998).

School factors. Within school, grades can be identifiable indicators of risk factors. Students retained, failing, or falling behind their peers, and sudden declines in homework and grades are common risk factors. Woods (2004) suggested that children who are retained one or more years are more likely to drop out before completing twelfth grade. Also, when children are not stressed the importance of school and are not expected to succeed, the result is little commitment to school and schoolwork, therefore they are more at risk; at risk for truancy, acting out, and dropping out (Pallas, 1989; Herr, 1999; Barr & Parrett, 2001).

Family factors. Family history, composition, and style all impact children and the likelihood of becoming at risk. The amount of support offered and maintained by family members can be a precursor to children becoming at risk. If parents, siblings, and other family members are not supportive of each other, those family members, especially younger children and adolescents are more likely to be at risk and resort to dysfunctional ways of getting their needs met. Other family risk factors include low socioeconomic status, level of education attained by both parents and siblings, including school drop outs, single parent homes, and family life styles that are chaotic, draining, anxiety provoking, and unstable (Wood, 2004).

Family composition such as single-parent homes and family size can impact income and attention, which can be risk factors if either is not fitting the needs of the

child. Parental education can also affect lower family incomes. When parents do not stress the importance of school success based on their own experiences and opportunities, their views tend to be reflected onto their children, which again creates that barrier to achieve and do well in school (Pallas, 1989; Herr, 1999; Barr & Parrett, 2001).

Some parenting styles can also be potential risk factors for children. Lack of supervision, abuse, and neglect are suggested to be major contributors of children becoming at risk. Children are more likely to be labeled at risk if they have never attached or bonded with a parent. Attachment and bonding to another individual, such as a parent, are key components to high self-esteem, self-discipline, and responsibility. Parental substance use also affects parenting and how children view the world around them. Living in a home in which they are exposed to substance use is also a big risk factor (Pallas, 1989; Herr, 1999; Barr & Parrett, 2001).

Another potential risk factor for children is mobility. When families move frequently, the family experiences an inconsistent home and educational settings (Wood, 2004). Oesterreich (2004) stated that the ratio of families that move every year in America is one of five. Moving to a new home, no matter if it be a new state, city, or neighborhood, is very stressful for all family members. Depending on the child's social skills and attitude, it may be difficult to make new friends, and making and having friends is an important factor in children's lives. Moving frequently can affect the children's school performance, especially if they transfer during the school year. Moving is an inconsistent factor in the child's life. Along with inconsistency come confusion, frustration, anger, and many more emotions. All these emotions affect the child and are

risk factors for low self-esteem, dropping out of school, and engaging in unhealthy behaviors (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Oesterreich, 2004).

Ethnicity and race. Ethnicity and race are physical and social characteristics of families. Pallas (1989) stated, "Black and Hispanic students frequently score lower on tests than do whites, and are more likely to drop out of school than are whites" (p. 3). In addition to race and ethnicity, children's primary language spoken can impact their risk factors. Those who are limited or non-English speaking generally struggle in school more so than their primary English speaking peers, which puts them at risk (Pallas, 1989; Herr, 1999; Barr & Parrett, 2001).

Community factors. One of the most predominant risk factors is poverty. Poverty can be classified as a source of family problems or individual problems, but it can also be a community issue. Children from low income families have a more difficult time getting their needs met (Pallas, 1989; Woods,).

Individual factors. The list of qualities that individual children may possess which provoke the child to be at risk is very attenuated. Donnelly (1987) suggested, "The roots of at-risk behavior begin in the elementary grades with low achievement patterns, high absenteeism, and low self-esteem" (p.2). Although some researchers believe the roots of at-risk behavior to begin in elementary level, some of the at risk qualities individuals have are internal from birth. Some of these predestined qualities include emotional and behavioral disorders, little tolerance for frustration, and insufficient interaction and social skills. Some characteristics which may be internal or develop from life experiences, include bad grades and performing poorly academically, and low self-esteem (Webb, 1992). Other characteristics developed through experience that are risk factors or are

consequences of being at risk include substance abuse, teen pregnancy, problems with the law, truancy, absenteeism, dilatory, suspension (Woods,), along with giving into peer pressures, and poor social skills (Herr, 1999). Woods (), suggested a correlation between students that drop out of school and the incidence of risky behaviors such as, “premature sexual activity, early pregnancy, delinquency, crime, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide” (p.2). Individuals raised by deviant parents, those children with aggressive behavior disorders and those terribly deprived socially, culturally, economically, and nutritionally are at a disadvantage in many ways therefore increasing the chances of them being at risk (Herr, 1999).

Self-Esteem

Cohen (2003) defined self-esteem as, “how we feel about ourselves on a day to day basis” (p.1). In addition, Pawel (2001) included it as our perception of our “inside qualities, our worth as human beings, sense of purpose in life, and how lovable we think we are” (p.1). Individuals with low self-esteem suffer common emotions including sadness, distress and worry, guilt, disgrace, embarrassment, frustration and ire (Brendgen, 2002). Individuals with low self-esteem are also more at risk for depression, attempting suicide, and committing suicide, becoming pregnant early, and for being victimization by others. There is evidence also suggesting childhood self-esteem is later correlated with eating disorders in adolescence, how much they make in their job/career and how long they can hold a job (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2004). There are a great number of factors than can contribute to one’s self-esteem. Effect of parenting, exposure to violence, ethnic background, community factors, and there is evidence of gender differences regarding self-esteem and the prevalence rate between genders.

Single parent households. Children living in households with only one parent present are more likely to suffer from a low self-esteem because lack of attention, stress and income due to only one parent supporting and ahead of the household. Ballard (1995) reported that the amount of single parent households is up and on the rise; "From 1960 to 1988 the percentage of children living in households with only one adult tripled" (p. 4). One million children come from homes where parents are separated or divorced; the result is that one of five children are living in single parent households (Webb, 1992). When families break apart, more specifically, when fathers leave the home and are not part of their children's lives, children are more likely to experience low self-esteem. Since fathers are thought to give and model social skills, arouse inquisitiveness, regulate control and discipline and be a protector creating a feeling of safety, so many needed factors are missing without fathers present. And girls raised without a father suffer from a low self-esteem and are more at risk to become pregnant themselves in their teenage years because of their low self-esteem (Ballard, 1995).

Parenting. Mothers and fathers parenting styles contribute to the type of self-esteem their children have. When parents neither give their children approval nor do they accept them, the children's self-esteem is likely to decline (Rowntree Foundation, 2004). Parents that do not compliment and praise the good things, but rather emphasize the wrong choices their children make are more likely to damage the children's self-esteem (Kernis, Brown, Brody, 2000).

Fathers that are very derogatory to their children and use offensive words and tones that are verbally abusive damage their children's self-esteem. Children hear all this negativity about themselves, they begin to believe it, so their self-esteem and self-worth

becomes lower and lower. Another damaging style of fathers is to use, “guilt arousal and love withdrawal” (Kernis, Brown & Brody, 2000, p.) to control their children and their behaviors (2000).

Mothers’ parenting styles also affect the self-esteem of their children, but in a different way than fathers’ parenting styles. The more inconsistent a mother’s discipline, the more confusing for the children. Confusion can lead to self-esteem problems. The children receive mixed messages from inconsistency, especially from discipline. One message children receive through inconsistency is that the mother does not care and are not as occupied with their children (Kernis, Brown & Brody, 2000)

Mothers parenting skills are affected when they work outside of the home. The circumstances and conditions from work carry home with her therefore effecting how she parents her children. Menaghan and Parcel (1991) stated, “Working conditions have intergenerational repercussions on maternal parenting and their capacity to provide appropriate and responsive nurturing to children” (p. 2). Stress from work is one of the main factors that impact parenting in mothers. When mothers are employed in desired jobs their parenting tends to be more positive even if they are experiencing stress at the workplace. If mothers are enjoying their job, they take the complexities better. This type of stress offers them and makes them feel as though they have more independence and self-direction, which is easier to cope. The result of working and enjoying their job, is that mothers tend to provide more “cognitively enriching, affective and physically appropriate home environments” (Menaghan & Parcel, 1991, p. 2). This type of environment is more rewarding for children and they are more likely to feel good about being at home, and about themselves. On the other hand, when mothers are not employed

in fulfilling jobs, their personal self-esteem is lowered and it affects their parenting style, which in turn, affects their children's self-esteem and how they feel about themselves. When mothers are working in an unfavorable job, especially if the wages they are earning are not very good, they do not get as much satisfaction out of their job and feel good about themselves. The type of stress they experience is less tolerable and they bring that stress home, which affects their parenting skills. When mothers are stressed from work, especially when they need to work additional hours to make enough money to support the family, the allotted time and energy for their children deteriorates. When parents do not spend sufficient amount of quality time with their children, the children experience the effects as well. Children exhibit a lower self-esteem when they spend little time with parents because of the neglected feelings they experience (Menaghan & Parcel, 1991).

When parents work abundant hours, children feel neglected, but family size also can produce the same feelings. Menaghan and Parcel (1991) reported that children are more likely to be neglected or receive less personal attention when parents need to divide their attention amongst a number of children. Again, when children feel neglected, they do not feel good about themselves, and their self-esteem is lowered. A negative parenting characteristic is violence or hostility. When parents are stressed out, maybe from work or what not, and/or just have few systems they can turn to for support, they are more likely to parent in more hostile and violent manners (Menaghan & Parcel, 1991).

Violence. Violence impacts self-esteem in a variety of ways. Both being a victim of violence and being a bystander can have a negative effect on self-esteem. Children, who are not direct physical victims of violence, but consistently witness abuse in the home, are more likely to exhibit emotional disturbances such as low self-esteem. Neglect,

another form of abuse also impacts children's self-esteem. These children have a more difficult time obtaining and maintaining healthy relationships because of the negative emotional impression from not bonding or forming attaching to anyone at home. Children regularly exposed to violence have more difficulty dealing with stress and have a more difficult time in school. And children are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem when they are not and do not feel as if they are succeeding in school (Massey, 1998). When children have a high self-esteem, they generally work harder to do the best they can. They "strive for excellence" (Pawel, 2001, p.2). So it is thought that these children will try to be higher achievers in school (Pawel, 2001; Menaghan & Parcel, 1991).

Race and ethnicity. Studies have shown a difference in level of self-esteem between racial and ethnic groups. Campbell and Twenge (2002) reported that Whites are thought to describe themselves having a higher self-esteem in general compared to other racial and ethnic backgrounds, however this does not seem to be the case. Although Caucasians report higher self-esteem than a majority of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, African Americans seem to describe themselves with the highest self-esteem compared to other racial and ethnic groups, even Caucasians (2002). On the contrary, a correlation was found between self-esteem and delinquency in Caucasians, and not any other ethnic background (Frisby, 1997). Frisby (1997) also stated that individuals who are proud of and positively identify themselves with their culture display or report higher self-esteem (p. 744 – 4).

A suggested cause of lower self-esteem in minorities is from the discrimination they receive in school. Minorities are more likely to have people prejudge them, therefore causing them to be discriminated against. If teachers are discriminating in the classroom,

there is deficient amount of information taught and the information will not be as worthy and rewarding. The students discriminated against are also less likely to receive additional help. When minority students, or any students for that manner, observe these negative behaviors, and attitudes toward them, they are going to feel less in themselves. These students are going to have a lower self-esteem because of the negative attention or lack there of received. They tend to be less ambitious in the classroom, do more poorly academically and this all contributes to a declining self-esteem (Dionne & Watson, 1990).

Community. The way in which low socioeconomic status effects the self-esteem in children is twofold: parental stress and not getting their needs met. Often, parents have a difficult time finding jobs, and when they do, they are not economically rewarding. Parents who are employed and are not earning enough money to support their family are frequently stressed because of this economic disadvantage. Because parents are worn out and stressed out, their relationships with their spouses and children are effected. There seems to be more spousal disagreements, and negative parenting toward the children. This negative parenting in turn lowers children's self-esteem (Axinn, Duncan, & Thornton, 1999; Menaghan & Parcel, 1991).

Children that come from low socioeconomic status families do not have as much of an opportunity to obtain physical things that they need and want. So many things can fall into this category of needs and wants; anything from new clothing to being able to see a doctor and dentist on a regular schedule. When children's major needs and wants are not fulfilled, they are more likely to feel inferior and posses a lower self-esteem (Axinn, Duncan & Thornton, 1999).

Gender. Studies have shown that females report and have lower self-esteem than males (Twenge & Campbell, 2002; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2004). The way in which individuals perceive their successes and failures greatly impact their level of self-esteem or how they report feeling about themselves. Self-esteem, school performance and academic experience all affect each other. Cohen reported that in school, when females are successful, they relate it to external factors. For instance, if a female were to perform very well on an exam, she is more likely to say the exam was easy or the teacher used a lenient grading procedure. Females take less account for their successes and play them off for external factors not in their control. Males on the other hand credit their successes internally. They are more likely to say their intellectual ability is great therefore they did well on an exam. In terms of failures, males and females generally like to do the opposite. Females use more internal explanations as to why they have failed, or did poorly on an exam. For instance they say they did not try or are not smart enough. When males experienced failures, they attributed them externally. If a male received a low grade on an exam, they are more likely to blame the teacher or other external stimuli. This explains how a low self-esteem affects individuals' academic performances and continues to have a cycling effect. Females who have a low self-esteem will think lower of themselves when they do not master subjects in school. And when they receive the bad grade, they learn to satisfy their perceived notions of why they failed. Since males tend to view their performance differently, it makes it easier to understand how and why they report having higher self-esteem (Cohen, 2003 & Hess, R; Copeland, E. 1997).

Connection Between Self-esteem and At Risk

Self-esteem and factors putting children at risk intercorrelate. Being at risk can contribute to possessing a lower self-esteem, and having a low self-esteem can affect a student to be at risk. Many of the contributing factors of children at risk can affect their view of themselves. The more factors characterizing students at risk will increase the likelihood of having a lower self-esteem. For instance, children from low socioeconomic status families generally start school with lower academic skills than their peers from average to high socioeconomic status backgrounds. Coming from a low income family and initially demonstrating lower academic skills puts an individual at risk for failing in school. In a study done by Howse, Lange, Farran and Boyles (2003), at risk children received lower scores on vocabulary, mathematics, and reading tests. When children do not perform well academically, they feel incompetent and less motivated. Persistence of these feelings has a draining effect on esteem; therefore they are more likely to have a lower self-esteem (Howse, Lange, Farran, & Boyles, 2003).

Donnelly (1987) reported, "At-risk students who are not experiencing success in school and are potential dropouts. They are usually low academic achievers who exhibit low-self-esteem" (p. 1). She continued to characterize at risk students in terms of those from ethnic backgrounds, male gender, low socioeconomic status and families with little income, and children of parents whom do not have high levels of educational attainment. Rak (1996) identified both biological and environmental factors that affect self-esteem. In terms of biology, congenital defects and a mother's poor nutrition when carrying the child can create negative consequences to the child therefore putting them at risk. As for environmental factors, there are many. In addition to the factors listed above by

Donnelly, family size and conflict, violence, abuse, and parents with a mental illness are all environmental factors making children more inclined to be at risk. These children are at risk of doing poorly in school and even dropping out of school, and of possessing a low self-esteem. The reason for this is because these factors (all risk factors just mentioned) hinder the quality of care parents perform. Self-esteem is so reliant on structure of parenting, and affection parents administer to their children. So, when children do not receive the love, affection, guidance, discipline, correction and regulation of rules from their parents, they are more likely to have a lower self-esteem than those children receiving that quality care (Rak, 1996; Singg & Farquhar, 2001). Parents are the ones to provide stability and security to their children because children need this to feel safe, secure, loved and part of a family. All these features influence a more positive self-view, or self-esteem (Tucker Burgo, 2002).

Self-esteem stems highly from feelings of confidence and competence. Whether or not an individual feels confident or competent, it is a result of their background, experience and the way they view themselves in those situations. Factors within the child, the child's family and the community in which the child was raised all influence his or her experiences. The children receive negative messages from their environment, whether it is negative or no attention from parents or a financially unstable family, and believe it because they have a difficult time seeing the positive side. Once children start to think negatively, they have a tendency to look for information that matches what they already think about themselves and ignore the positive things. Self-esteem and risk factors affect each other interchangeably and continue to affect each other cyclically (South Hampton, 2004).

CHAPTER III: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Self-esteem is how individuals evaluate themselves. And self-esteem affects individuals' thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Various aspects in individuals' lives help create whether an individual has a high or low self-esteem. The individual's background, more specifically, the family institution in which they were raised seems to have the greatest impact on self-esteem. Studies found a number of factors within the family institution that impact children and their self-esteem. Some of these factors include: low socioeconomic status, single-parent homes, amount of attention children receive from parents, parent/child attachments, or lack there of, low parental level of educational attainment, parental unemployment, great amounts of stress within the home environment, exposure to violence, abuse and neglect, ethnicity and race, and cultural deprivation. When a child's experience has been more negative than positive, and they have been exposed to many negative unpromising conditions, they are more likely to possess a lower self-esteem.

These negative and unpromising experiences and conditions are factors that put a child at risk. Depending on the situation, the child is at risk of having impairments, such as vision and hearing and other disabilities, becoming overweight, performing poorly in school, dropping out of school, becoming delinquent, being abused, engaging in unacceptable or inappropriate behaviors, teen pregnancy, and being financially unstable. Ogden and Germinario (1988) reported that children are at risk of "turning to dysfunctional means to satisfy their developmental needs" because they have a low self-esteem and are not satisfied with themselves as a result of a social, educational, or family condition, or a combination of them (p. 50). The more risk factors in one's life, the more

likely they are to have a low self-esteem, and resort to dysfunctional ways of obtaining their needs.

Children identified at risk generally have negative reports about school, exhibit poor interaction skills or social skills, and are more noncompliance towards authority figures. These characteristics are just some of the ways at risk children are identified, because they are the most recognizable. It is also very important to note the less noticeable characteristics. It is easiest to point out individuals whom may be at risk by the types of external behaviors they exhibit, but the internal behaviors many possess which are less noticeable are just as important to be aware of. One attribute that can affect a person's behavior and attitude is self-esteem. Those individuals who possess a low self-esteem tend to suffer from sadness, distress, worry, guilt, disgrace, embarrassment, frustration and ire.

There are many factors that contribute to the cause of low self-esteem. Single-parent families, parenting style, violence, race and ethnicity, community factors and gender can all influence self-esteem. Low socioeconomic status also has an indirect affect on self-esteem in children. Factors that contribute to children being at risk increase the likelihood of low self-esteem. For example, if a student has poor scholastic skills, they are likely to have a low self-esteem because they developed a failing or 'failure identity' (Singg & Farquhar, 2001, p. 1). If a child is abused or neglected by their parents, they receive negative messages and begin to think of themselves in that negative perspective. When children start to think negatively, they tend to interpret information negatively to enhance what they already think about themselves.

Risk factors can contribute to individual's possessing a low self-esteem, and when individuals have a low self-esteem, they are more likely to engage in the behaviors children identified at risk are portrayed as engaging in. Factors putting individuals at risk and self-esteem affect each other. Risk factors increase the likelihood that an individual will possess a low self-esteem, and individuals with that evaluate themselves negatively tend to have factors in their lives that put them at risk. These two things, self-esteem and risk factors, affect each other and continue to affect each other on a consistent cycle.

Limitations

The literature review has several limitations. Although the researcher attempted to review all the resources available on at risk children and self-esteem, the researcher could not find all the literature. In addition to limitations of the research, the researcher's perspective on self-esteem and at risk children may be biased. There are also many confounds to self-esteem research including debates of definition and criteria and the methods for collecting data about one's self-esteem.

Recommendations

Based on the research examined for this review, there have been many studies completed on at risk children and on self-esteem. There seems to be a lot, but there is limited research on the combination of the two and how they affect each other. More research can be done on the specific factors of at risk children and how they affect their self-esteem. More research needs to be done on the age in which children begin possessing a low self-esteem and how we can attack the problems causing negative self-perceptions.

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