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Developmental Trends in Self-Esteem Based on the Number of Parents in the Household

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The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a causal relationship between self-esteem and family structure, and to then evaluate any developmental trends in self-esteem. The goals of the study focused on finding precursors to low self-esteem, specifically in terms of the family structure and the age of the person. Family structure was defined in terms of one-parent and two-parent households. For this study, the number of parents in a household is operationally defined as: two-parent families include those in which two adults live in a household with at least one dependant child under the age of 18, and one-parent families include those in which one adult lives in a household with at least one dependant child under the age of 18 (Avison & Davies, 2005). Self-esteem in the present study is operationally defined as a subjective evaluation about oneself in which worthiness is expressed by the attitudes one holds towards oneself (Coopersmith, 1981). On the self-esteem continuum, higher self-esteem means that individuals consider themselves worthy, respect themselves, recognize their limitations and expect to grow and improve (Rosenberg, 1989). Higher self esteem leads people to have an overall positive feeling towards themselves. Individuals with lower self-esteem lack self-respect and self-worth, are dissatisfied with themselves, and have an overall negative feeling towards themselves (Rosenberg, 1989). This quasi-experimental cross-sectional study assessed 17 elementary school children in third through fifth grades (ages ranged from 8-11 years) who live in a household with one adult, and 30 elementary school children in third through fifth grade (ages ranged from 8-11 years) who live in a household with two adults using the Stanley Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory School Short Form (Coopersmith, 1967) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Survey (Rosenberg, 1965) to measure their current self-esteem levels. Researchers also presented 22 college-aged students (ages ranged from 18-55 years) who were raised in a household with a single adult, and 30 college-aged students (ages ranged from 18-30 years) who

were raised in a household with two adults with the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory Adult Form (Coopersmith, 1967) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Survey (Rosenberg, 1965) to measure their current levels of self-esteem. The results indicate there is no effect of family structure on self-esteem of children or adults but there is a developmental effect of age on self-esteem. The elementary aged children scored significantly lower on the self-esteem surveys than the college-aged adults. This study shows that a child's self esteem is not solely determined by the number of parents in the home. This study also adds to existing data that an adult tends to have better than self-esteem than a younger child regardless of the family structure raised in. The trend in self-esteem can be attributed to many things including a better sense of identity, more education, and more life experiences. (should I leave that last part in, because I'm not sure that the study relates to those explanations of WHY the adults have more self-esteem...) What about the issue of the developmental differences...why would college student have higher self esteem regardless of family structure?

References

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