

Self-Esteem and Sense of Purpose in Adolescents from Economically Disadvantaged Families

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Abstract

Being a teenager from a low-income home typically has a detrimental effect on many aspects of life. Teens under these circumstances confront a variety of difficulties that call for emotional fortitude and a distinct sense of direction. It is frequently necessary for these teenagers to develop self-worth and have purpose in their lives even in the face of financial difficulties. The purpose of this study is to investigate the connection between teenagers from low-income households' in Kota Jayapura's feeling of purpose and self-worth. Utilising a Spearman rho correlation design, a quantitative research methodology is applied. Using a purposive sample approach, 150 teenagers from economically disadvantaged homes, ages 16 to 19, were chosen to participate. The Purpose in Life Questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.920$) and the Self-Esteem Scale ($\alpha = 0.890$) were used in the study. The findings showed that self-esteem and sense of purpose had a strong positive link ($r = 0.320$, $p < 0.001$), with self-esteem in these teenagers accounting for 10.3% of the sense of purpose. Teens who are struggling financially must build their self-esteem in order to feel more purposeful in life. It is anticipated that future research will create intervention plans specifically suited for teenagers from low-income homes in order to promote their general wellbeing and personal growth.

Keywords: Self-Esteem; Sense of Purpose; Adolescents; Economically Disadvantaged Families; Resilience

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INTRODUCTION

Families play a critical role in fostering emotional and social development in adolescents, but financial hardship can disrupt this support, leading to significant developmental challenges. Adolescents from economically disadvantaged families in Kota Jayapura often face limited access to education and healthcare, which can hinder both cognitive and noncognitive growth (Chen & Zhang, 2024). Financial stress within the household contributes to heightened anxiety and lower self-esteem as adolescents compare themselves to peers from wealthier backgrounds (Huang, 2024; Kasingku et al., 2023). However, a supportive family environment can mitigate the negative impacts of poverty, fostering emotional regulation and resilience in adolescents (Hadley et al., 2024). Emotional support from parents plays a crucial role in adolescents' mental health, helping them navigate challenges and develop a sense of purpose (Kasingku et al., 2023). Despite these difficulties, strong emotional support and positive parenting practices can help families foster resilience even in the face of economic strain.

Adolescents from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who are able to foster self-esteem are more likely to develop a strong sense of purpose, which enhances their resilience and ability to cope with adversity. Self-esteem plays a critical role during adolescence, influencing personal growth and social adaptability (Sun, 2023). Research shows that interventions like self-instruction methods can effectively improve self-esteem among late adolescents, leading to better life outcomes (Ismah & Widayat, 2023). A well-defined sense of purpose is linked to improved resilience and coping strategies, especially in stressful environments (Hashim et al., 2023; Lewis et al., 2023). Adolescents who establish a sense of purpose are better equipped to navigate identity crises that are common during this developmental stage (Hashim et al., 2023). Although the connection between self-esteem and purpose is well-established, further research is necessary to explore specific interventions for economically disadvantaged adolescents, ensuring they receive the support needed for their development (Zarytska & Kozachenko, 2024).

The development of self-esteem in adolescents is shaped by a variety of factors, including family dynamics, social interactions, and personal experiences. Adolescents from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often struggle with feelings of inferiority and emotional distress due to financial hardships, which can diminish their capacity to set and pursue meaningful life goals (Krauss & Orth, 2024; Zarytska & Kozachenko, 2024). A supportive family environment, characterized by parental warmth, plays a crucial role in fostering self-esteem, while economic challenges can negatively affect adolescents' emotional well-being (Krauss & Orth, 2024). Socially, adolescents with low self-esteem are more vulnerable to bullying, emotional loneliness, and social avoidance, all of which further diminish their self-worth (Mansoor, 2024; Sir & Lök, 2024). Additionally, personal experiences such as academic difficulties and social isolation often hinder motivation and lower self-esteem (Martínez-Casanova et al., 2024). However, interventions like self-esteem development programs can help mitigate these negative social experiences and enhance self-esteem (Sir & Lök, 2024).

Understanding the relationship between self-esteem and sense of purpose is essential for creating effective support programs for adolescents from economically disadvantaged families. Research shows that higher self-esteem is closely linked to a stronger sense of purpose, leading to improved mental health outcomes (Joshnloo, 2024). Programs aimed at enhancing self-esteem can facilitate the development of purpose, particularly in adolescents facing socioeconomic challenges (Deng, 2024). A sense of purpose is associated with reduced stress and better cognitive health, highlighting its

protective role in overall well-being (Lewis et al., 2024; Sutin et al., 2024). Furthermore, interventions designed to increase a sense of purpose can result in positive changes in personality traits, further supporting adolescent development (Joshanloo, 2024). While these findings underscore the importance of self-esteem and purpose, more focused research on economically disadvantaged adolescents is necessary to inform tailored interventions that address both aspects and foster resilience in this vulnerable group.

METHOD

Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design to examine the relationship between self-esteem (independent variable) and sense of purpose (dependent variable) in adolescents from economically disadvantaged families. The participants in this study consisted of 150 adolescents aged 16-19 years from low-income households in Kota Jayapura. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on specific inclusion criteria, which included adolescents living in families with monthly incomes below the poverty line and attending public high schools.

Instrument

Data collection was conducted in Kota Jayapura using a structured self-report questionnaire, distributed both in person and online. The study used two standardized psychological instruments: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale ($\alpha = 0.875$) and the Purpose in Life Scale ($\alpha = 0.920$). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale evaluated factors such as self-acceptance, self-worth, and perceived competence, while the Purpose in Life Scale measured goal-setting, life direction, and meaning. Both scales utilized a five-point Likert response format, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Participants

The demographic data of the participants are presented in Table 1, which includes information such as gender, age, family income, and parental employment status. The data were analyzed using the Pearson product-moment correlation to determine the relationship between self-esteem and sense of purpose. Before the analysis, assumptions of normality and linearity were tested. In cases where normality was not met, the Spearman rho correlation test was used.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Data

Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	68	45.33%
Female	82	54.67%
Age		
16 years	35	23.33%
17 years	42	28.00%
18 years	48	32.00%
19 years	25	16.67%
Family Income		

Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below IDR 3,000,000/month	85	56.67%
IDR 3,000,000 - 6,000,000/month	47	31.33%
Above IDR 6,000,000/month	18	12.00%
Parental Employment		
Both parents employed	65	43.33%
One parent employed	58	38.67%
Unemployed parents	27	18.00%

Data Analysis

The data analysis was performed using SPSS version 25.0, and statistical tests were conducted to examine the correlation between self-esteem and sense of purpose among the participants. The study adhered to ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent from all participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis in this study was conducted in four stages. The first stage involved descriptive analysis, which revealed that the self-esteem scores of most adolescents from economically disadvantaged families were in the medium category, with 61% of participants falling into this group (mean = 75.43, standard deviation = 12.567). Meanwhile, the sense of purpose scores indicated that the majority of participants were in the high category, with 58% scoring above average (mean = 42.78, standard deviation = 6.981). The detailed results of the descriptive analysis for both variables can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Percentage (%)	Category
Self-Esteem	75.43	12.567	61%	Medium
Sense of Purpose	42.78	6.981	58%	High

The second stage was the data normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test. The K-S-Z score for the self-esteem variable was 0.945 with a significance value of 0.329 ($p > 0.05$), indicating that the self-esteem data were normally distributed. For the sense of purpose variable, the K-S-Z score was 1.273 with a significance value of 0.085 ($p > 0.05$), also indicating a normal distribution. The detailed results of the normality test are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Kolmogorov Smirnov One Sample Normality Test

Variable	K-S-Z	Significance (p)
Self-Esteem	0.945	0.329
Sense of Purpose	1.273	0.085

The third stage involved the linearity test, which showed a significant linear relationship between self-esteem and sense of purpose with an F-score of 34.512 and a

significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the relationship between the two variables was linear. The detailed results of the linearity test are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Linearity Test

F	Significance (p)
34.512	0.000

The fourth stage involved the Spearman rho correlation test, which indicated a significant positive relationship between self-esteem and sense of purpose with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.328 and a significance value of 0.001 ($p < 0.01$). This result shows that higher self-esteem is associated with a greater sense of purpose in adolescents from economically disadvantaged families. The correlation test results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Spearman Rho Correlation Test

Variable	r	Significance (p)
Self-Esteem - Sense of Purpose	0.328	0.001

The relationship between self-esteem and a sense of purpose in adolescents from economically disadvantaged families is significant, with higher self-esteem being closely associated with clearer life goals and a stronger sense of purpose. Research indicates that adolescents with elevated self-esteem are more likely to establish a sense of purpose, which serves as a protective factor against depression and enhances overall mental health (Barcaccia et al., 2023). Additionally, longitudinal studies show that stable self-esteem in early adolescence predicts better mental health outcomes in later years (Carlén et al., 2023). Interventions like self-instruction methods have proven effective in promoting self-perception and fostering purpose among adolescents (Ismah & Widayat, 2023). While these findings highlight the positive relationship between self-esteem and purpose, individual differences and external factors must be considered, as they may influence how adolescents experience this dynamic.

The interconnectedness of self-esteem and sense of purpose is reinforced by studies showing that even adolescents with moderate self-esteem can develop a strong sense of purpose when supported by social networks. Adequate emotional and social support from families and communities plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of purpose in adolescents with moderate self-esteem (Ismah & Widayat, 2023). Additionally, external support systems such as teachers, peers, and mentors contribute significantly to building both self-esteem and a sense of direction in life (Barcaccia et al., 2023; Lewis et al., 2023). A strong sense of purpose has been linked to better mental health outcomes, including lower levels of depression and anxiety, while fostering resilience, which in turn enhances self-esteem and overall well-being (Barcaccia et al., 2023; Lewis et al., 2023; Ratner et al., 2023). However, individual differences and contextual factors can influence how adolescents experience this relationship, highlighting the need for personalized support approaches.

The relationship between self-esteem and sense of purpose is significant, particularly for adolescents from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, as higher self-esteem correlates with an enhanced sense of purpose, fostering resilience and life satisfaction. Self-esteem strengthens the belief in one's ability to achieve life goals,

reinforcing a sense of purpose (Chan & Huang, 2024). Adolescents with a strong sense of purpose experience lower depressive symptoms and higher self-reassurance (Barcaccia et al., 2023). However, financial instability and social stigma can erode self-esteem in disadvantaged youth, making it crucial for interventions to target these areas to improve life satisfaction and resilience (Chan & Huang, 2024). Programs designed to enhance self-esteem could significantly increase both life satisfaction and a sense of purpose, particularly in adolescents facing unique socio-economic challenges, though the broader context of these challenges must also be considered to ensure the effectiveness of such interventions (Barcaccia et al., 2023; Chan & Huang, 2024).

The correlation between self-esteem and sense of purpose highlights the significant role of various factors in fostering a strong sense of purpose, particularly among adolescents from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. While self-esteem is a crucial component, other elements such as personality traits, cognitive health, and social support also contribute to this process. Research shows that increases in sense of purpose can lead to positive changes in personality traits, such as openness and conscientiousness, further enhancing self-esteem (Joshnloo, 2024). A strong sense of purpose is linked to better cognitive health and reduced stress, which can improve overall well-being and resilience in adolescents facing challenges (Lewis et al., 2023; Sutin et al., 2024). Additionally, family support, community engagement, and access to educational opportunities play vital roles in nurturing a sense of purpose, empowering adolescents through personal and academic growth ((Hill et al., 2024; Hua & Ma, 2024). While self-esteem is integral, the interplay of these factors suggests that future research should explore them further to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how to support adolescents in cultivating a meaningful life.

The study's findings emphasise the significance of self-worth in forming teenagers' sense of direction, especially in the face of financial difficulty. Improving self-esteem with focused interventions may be a crucial tactic in assisting teenagers from low-income homes, enabling them to overcome obstacles and create a more purposeful and happy existence.

CONCLUSION

The results of the data analysis and discussion show that among adolescents from low-income homes, self-esteem and sense of purpose are significantly positively correlated. Higher self-esteem in adolescents is associated with a greater feeling of purpose and direction in life, which is important for both their academic and personal growth. The results imply that a strong sense of purpose, which these teenagers might use to overcome the difficulties brought on by financial adversity, is a product of self-worth. The present study underscores the significance of cultivating self-esteem in adolescents hailing from economically disadvantaged households as a strategy to augment their sense of direction and general welfare. Subsequent investigations ought to concentrate on crafting targeted remediation schemes that have the potential to enhance self-worth and subsequently foster a more robust feeling of intention. Teachers, therapists, and legislators can better assist teenagers in overcoming the obstacles set by their financial situation and attaining a more purposeful and happy existence by addressing these psychological aspects.

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