An Evaluation of Self-esteem on Relationship Formation among Students in Public Secondary Schools of Murang'a County, Kenya

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Abstract: Self-esteem occupies a key place in the structure of adolescents because it is related to both mental health and definition of life goals. One of the central developmental task that aids the formation and shaping of self-esteem during adolescence is the relationship formation with significant others. However, daily forms of human relationships are becoming negatively impacted by changes in culture, parenting styles, urbanization, globalization, new technologies and institutional changes with consequences in changing family structures, socialization and relations. This study, therefore, purposes to evaluate self-esteem on relationship formation among students in public secondary schools in Murang'a County, Kenya. The study adopted a mixed methodology paradigm. The target population was 101,926 students, 2,236 student peer counselors and 292 guidance and counseling teachers. The sample size was 431 respondents. The data collection tools included questionnaires for students, interview guides for teachers and focused group discussion guides for peer counselors. Quantitative data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics while the qualitative data was analyzed in narrative forms. The study evaluated self-esteem on relationship formation among students. The study established that the level of self- esteem was high among secondary school students in Murang'a County, Kenya and that a positive significant relationship exists between self-esteem and relationship formation. The study recommended that curriculum developers and policy makers need to provide curriculum that afford opportunities to promote and nurture talents among learners. In addition, teachers and parents should emphasize identification of talents by assigning tasks and responsibilities which eventually improve competencies and self-worth among learners.

Keywords: self-esteem, self-worth, self-respect, self-competences, relationship formation significant others.

1. Introduction

During adolescence, optimal development of self-esteem is embedded in high quality relationship formation with significant others. Formation of supporting quality relationships also becomes essential during adolescence due to the capacity for personal growth and the vulnerabilities associated with this stage. Therefore, both formation and maintenance of healthy relationships during adolescence become one of the crucial developmental tasks among adolescents. At the same time, adolescents struggle to form their own identity as separate individuals away from parental influence. It becomes essential to develop individuation at this time (Davis & Mc Quillin, 2021). Adolescents must strike a healthy balance between

independence and interdependence during this time. One cultural dimension that helps in this challenge is individualism versus collectivism. In individualistic cultures, people tend to have independent self-esteem and separate from others. Whereas in collectivism, individuals are more likely to have interdependent view of them as they see themselves as connected to others. Self-esteem is defined in terms of relationship with others. Collectivists' relationships tend to be deeper and more emotionally invested than those of individualists, as these relationships are tied to the belief that by helping others, one is contributing to the well-being of the self.

The roots of individualism trace back to ancient Greek philosophy particularly the work of philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. These thinkers emphasize the importance of reason, individual rights and pursuit of self-fulfillment. In contrast, collectivism finds its foundations in eastern philosophies like Confucianism, which prioritizes the well-being of community over individual desires. This collective identity is central to the definition of self-esteem and social interactions. In individualistic cultures, relationships are often seen as voluntary and it is common to choose to end relationships that are deemed not important. In collectivist cultures, relationships are hypothesized to be relatively more stable and there is greater obligation not to be a burden to others in relationships.

The United States is often cited as the epitome of individualistic culture (Potter, 2019). The entrepreneurial spirit and the "American dream" further embody the individualistic values where there is a dominant cultural belief that anyone can succeed so long as they work enough to push through the barriers they face in their lives (Potter, 2019; Triandis, 2018). These cultures include USA, North America, Northern Europe., Western Europe and Australia. Similarly, in Poland, the individualism aspect emanate from the belief of shifting from social economy management to free market mechanisms and eventually making people shifts from collectivist behaviors to individualistic behaviors in shaping self-esteem as well as interpersonal relationships (Reykowski, 1990).

In eastern cultures, there is an element of collectivism which is deeply rooted in philosophies like Confucianism, which prioritizes the stability and harmony of society. This society value respect for authority, maintaining strong family ties and prioritizing the needs of the group. The collective identity is central to social interactions and decision-making process. In these collectivist societies, social relationships are often characterized by inter-connectedness and interdependence. The focus is on social harmony and support network. This collectivism is found mainly in Latin America, Asia and African cultures. An example is in china, where description of the self is

grounded in Confucian philosophy. In this, self-esteem is seen in terms of self-fulfillment for the individual which lies in fulfilling social responsibilities to the greatest extent possible (Brick, 1991). This Confucianism culture contains many empathy sayings which direct people's behaviors in social interactions (Li et al., 2017). In addition, the Korean culture places value on interdependence. Koreans develop a sense of identity through relationships made in their social web. The core of interpersonal relationships is the concept of "*we-ness*". The Korean "immerses themselves in group for consensus opinions rather than individual opinions." (Han & Ann, 1994). Similarly, the use of the Japanese word *Nakama* used to describe interpersonal relationships that friendships happen interdependently rather than individually (Cargile, 2012).

Many of the African states have collectivistic cultures which have the origin in the African tradition of "*Ubuntu*" which is the bedrock of sound human relations of traditional African life. It is the foundation of African morality and social interactions. For instance, in Nigeria, there is an element in the culture that children must do better than parents in many ways. As such, parents push their children, drive them to achieve, and the children are "indoctrinated into this cultural belief." As such, strong relationships become important in self-conceptions among the adolescents in Africa. In addition, among individuals in Zambia, the most important thing is probably devotion to "belonging". This put emphasis on family relationships and individual sub-service to the family and the community. Similarly, in Tanzania, collectivism has the roots in "ujamaa" communism advocated by the late *Mwalimu* Nyerere ((Nyerere, 1968). He described "ujamaa" as the basis of African socialism meaning people-centeredness. This required the system to incorporate African communitarian ethos and relationships.

Kenya is a collectivist nation where Kenyans are highly interdependent on their social and family circles. Individuals are socialized to conform to the prevailing concept of self-construal. Therefore, Kenyans view themselves as part of a larger social network where relationships are highly valued and their self-concept is inter-twined with these relationships. In addition, there is an element of shared identity that characterizes self-concept in Kenya where Kenyans identify with their tribe, language and cultural practices. However, in all these tribal groups there is a major aspect of collectivism. For instance, Rainy (1989) noted that the core value of the Samburu society is '*nkanyit*', a term that translates to respect for others.

Murang'a is one of the counties in Mt Kenya region which is dominated by Kikuyu ethnic group. In his book '*facing Mt. Kenya*', Jomo Kenyatta (1938) emphasized this collectivism as an essential aspect of kikuyu society by

describing an individualist as one who is "looked upon with suspicion……there is no really individual affair, for everything has a moral and social influence". Still, in the county, relationships with peers, parents and teachers directly impact on a variety of health issues like drug and substance abuse, alcoholism, gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies among others (NAYS, 2015). Therefore, the study sought to evaluate self-esteem on relationship formation among Students in Public Secondary Schools of Murang'a County, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

Adolescence stage is viewed as a crucial stage in the development of self-esteem as well as self-identity (Okwaraji, Nduanya, Obiechina, Onyebueke & Okorie, 2018). At this stage of development, individuals become prone to re-evaluate their sense of self due to many changes they face and the desire for social acceptance. Research findings have established that self-esteem often falls when individuals transit from one school environment to another, such as changing elementary schooling to middle school, or transition from junior high school to senior high school (Ryan, Shim & Makara, 2013). These falls in self-esteem are usually temporary, unless there are other stressors such as conflicts with the parents (De wit, Karioja, Rye & Shain, 2011). Self-esteem then increases from mid adolescence to late adolescence for majority of the teenagers, especially if they feel satisfied their   relationships with peers, their appearances and abilities in athletics (Birkeland et al., 2012). In addition, further research on self-esteem revealed that during late adolescence, self-esteem start to fall due to strained family relationships and peer interpersonal relationships (Meskauskiene, 2015)

An individual's self-esteem impacts directly on the relationship quality. People develop their sense of self during their social actions. Self-esteem has been reported to be significantly correlated with formation of quality relationships (Eom & Choi, 2010). They also tend to be active in their relationships with significant others (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). A recent meta-analysis aggregated data from a number of longitudinal studies on the concept of self-esteem and several indicators of social relationships (such as attachment security, time spent with a relationship partner, popularity and perception of social rejection). The study concluded that there is a reciprocal association between the variables (Harris & Orth, 2019). An important aspect of self-esteem is self-competence. This is because a sense of personal competence is crucial for children to persevere during hard times. An empirical study was conducted to investigate the risk outcomes among adolescents in relation to maternal health. These variables were investigated in relation to

protective factors in a family setting and self-competence among students. A sample of 118 families of children transiting to early and middle adolescence were used (aged 10-17 years and males = 52%, mean age 13 years and SD=14). The mean age of the mothers was 39.2 years of age-range between 28 to 57 years (SD=5.9). The findings indicated that family environment protects adolescents' self- competences (William et al., 2012). This self-competence was in turn correlated with adolescents' risk outcomes. This suggests the need to promote family support systems for adolescents in developing countries. Given the family environment varies across cultures; the current study assesses the self-competence on relationship formation in the family and at schools in a Kenyan context.

Another aspect of self-esteem is self-worth. Research findings have shown that self-worth relates significantly with psychological well-being which is an important ingredient of relationship formation. For instance, an empirical inquiry was conducted to determine the differences in self-worth among adolescents across Central European countries and the associated psychological well-being using students in Slovakia Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary. The study sample comprised 519 students (males=50.9%, girls 49.1%, mean age=11.5, response rate=88.8%) from Slovakia and 431 students (females=47.3%, males=52.7% of mean age=11.5 from Hungary. The findings showed a large difference in self-worth among students in Slovakia& Serbia, Slovenia & Croatia for both sexes which associated positively with psychological well-being (Morris et al., 2012). This study indicates that cultural background and both factors of psychological well-being significantly associated with self-esteem suggesting need for life-skill programs as intervention measures in raising psychological well-being. Given the differences in cultural background across different nations, the current study assesses the self-worth on relationship formation among students in a Kenyan context.

Another important aspect of self-esteem is self-respect. This is a representation of one's self-esteem or a regard for the dignity of one's character. The Individual's character development derives a great influence from the value of the society (Albinus, 2012). Interpersonal relationships with significant others play a crucial role in instilling values in any society. However, recent studies have shown that societal changes in various aspects impact on this development negatively. In Nigeria, parental ineffectiveness in up-bring the youth has made moral decadence to reach unbearable level (Mofoluwawo, 2010). This has resulted to most youth compromising their self-dignity and engages in moral values (Afuye, 2013). In line with, media, whose primary function is to educate, inform and entertain had been reported to have taken a new dimension as it had injected morally unfit publications into

society, thereby polluting the minds of adolescents through undignified ways like alcohol intake, drug abuse, music among others (Abba, 2015). However, this study largely focused on moral decadence in a contemporary Nigerian family structure which have greatly impacted changes in relationships and socializations, little is known on investigating self-respect on interpersonal relationships among students in a less populous nation in east Africa like Kenya hence the current study.

In recent times, the construct of self-esteem has drawn attention from international, national and regional levels. For instance, the international boost self-esteem month is annually observed in February. This marks a period set aside in a year to help people to believe in and appreciate themselves more, despite whatever they might be facing. Additionally, in a study entitled "The link between self-esteem and social relationships: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies,'' just published in the journal of personality and social psychology by Harris and Orth (2020) established that self-esteem enhances quality of relationships, and having good social relationships seem to boost self-esteem. The findings were based on 53 studies from 13 nations (Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Finland, Germany, Greece, Korea, Netherlands, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, and USA). More than 46,000 participants were used with ages ranging from 4 to 77 years. In addition, the kinds of social relationships studied included relationships with parents and peers among others. However, Harris and Orth noted that there is virtually no research on self-esteem in the context of parents and peer relationships in adolescents. This limited the generalization of the findings.

Njoroge et al (2000) on their research on autonomy support on Kenyan adolescent found that parental autonomy support did not predict self-esteem in adolescents. According to them, adolescents are expected to demonstrate absolute conformity to and respect for their parents, elders are expected to conform to adult wishes, and subordination of individual goals in favor of responsibility to others, and respect for family/group decisions (Njoroge, 2000). The study drew a convenient sample from four schools from three provinces in Kenya and the results of the findings won't be generalized. Studies on self-esteem have been conducted on several variables like individual differences (Schmitt & Allik, 2005), causative factors (statistics of Korea, 2013), interpersonal relationships (Kim & Park, 2010) and academic development (Aryana et al., 2010; Colquhorum and Bourne, (2012). Despite the well-developed literature on self-esteem and it's correlates, a key shortcoming is that different studies have produced inconsistent findings on effect of self-esteem on social relationships with some studies showing association with parents (Brummel man et al.,2015), peers (Marshall et al.,2014) and others failing to show the relationships (

Harris et al.,2015). Even after addressing some limitations in previous studies like sample size and methodology, findings from recent studies on the two variables have been reported to be moderated by issues like relationship partners (stronger for general relationships than specific relationships) and relationship reporter (stronger for self-reported than informant reports) (Harris & Orth, 2020). Therefore, the current study endeavors to evaluate self-esteem on relationship formation among students in Murang'a County, Kenya. This will provide literature to help understand adolescents in Kenya, where empirical literature on the two variables is limited.

Furthermore, there is no study which had been carried out to assess students' self-esteem on the formation of relationships with significant others in public secondary school hence this study.

3. Methodology

The researcher adopted mixed methodology research paradigm to collect the data. This involved collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data. The researcher then adopted both quantitative and qualitative research designs. The specific quantitative design used to collect quantitative data was descriptive survey design while the phonological design was used to collect qualitative data. The study then adopted the concurrent triangulation design to combine the two types of data. The target population used was 101,926 students for quantitative data and then 2,246 peer counselors as well as 292 guidance & counseling teachers from 292 public secondary schools in the county. The study also used both probability and non-probability sampling sampling techniques to sample the participants. Specifically, systematic random sampling technique was used to choose 20 secondary schools for use in the quantitative data and purposive sampling technique was used to select 10 guidance & counseling teachers as well as 21 peer counselors for use in qualitative data. The research instruments used to collect data include questionnaires for quantitative data and both focused group discussion guides and interview guides for qualitative data. The researchers also conducted piloting in similar schools but not in the sample. This was done to test both reliability and validity of the methodology and the instruments. To establish reliability, cronbach alpha technique was used to assess the internal stability. On the other hand, both content and construct validity were assessed. On content validity, the researcher examined the objectives and consulted the experts in the department of educational psychology while construct validity was established using pearson product moment correlation where the researcher-made questionnaires were correlated with psychological scales known in psychology to measure the same construct. A correlational coefficient of 0.5 and above was considered

acceptable. In this research, a correlational coefficient of 0.67 was established and hence the questionnaires considered appropriate for use. To facilitate the data collection, the researcher trained research assistants who provided the much-needed help in the process. To analyze the quantitative data, both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used. Descriptive statistics used included frequency tables, percentages, measures of central tendencies and pie-charts. On the other hand, the inferential statistics used included both independent sample t-tests and chi-square test of association. Finally, the qualitative data was organized in terms of themes and later analyzed in narrative forms.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Self-esteem on relationship formation among students

This study purposed to evaluate self-esteem on relationship formation among students in secondary schools. The research question related to this was answered by the analysis of quantitative data collected using questionnaires. These questionnaires consisted of items requiring students to rate their agreement on a Likert scale of 5 points ranging from 1-5 where 5=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Undecided, 2=Agree and 1=Strongly Agree. The analysis of this objective consisted of three levels of data

analysis. These levels include descriptive statistics (frequency tables, frequencies, percentages, means, mode and medians), inferential statistics (t-tests for independent samples and chi-square test) and thematic analysis. Further, there was the mixing and the interpretation of the collected data which was analyzed from these levels in an attempt to understand the research problem better.

4.2 Descriptive statistics analysis of the assessment of self-esteem on relationship formation among secondary school students

The researcher analyzed quantitative data collected from students' questionnaires using descriptive statistics. The data captured the indicators from the self-esteem, which included self-worth, self-respect and self-competence among students. The data in this objective likewise captured the dependent variable which was relationship formation. This was evident in the questionnaires whose research questions balanced both the independent variable (self-esteem) and dependent variable (relationship formation). The analysis of the quantitative data using descriptive statistics began by use of frequency tables. The findings were tabulated and illustrated as in Table 1.

Table 1: Items of Students' Level of Self-Esteem

Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
I	280	70.0	90	22.5	9.0	2.0	14	3.5	7.0	1.8	400	100
II	178	44.5	178	44.5	20	5.0	13	3.3	10	2.5	400	100
III	29	7.3	57	14.3	39	9.8	112	28	162	40.5	400	100
IV	250	62.7	122	30.6	9	2.3	8	2.0	10	2.5	400	100
V	203	50.8	140	35	23	5.8	20	5.0	13	3.3	400	100
VI	250	62.5	122	30.5	9	2.3	8	2.0	10	2.5	400	100
VII	21	5.3	16	4.0	14	3.5	136	34	212	53	400	100
V111	212	53	135	33.8	30	7.5	13	3.3	9	2.3	400	100
AV	178	44.5	108	27	19	4.8	10.3	54	13.5		400	100

(Source: Researcher 2024)

KEY

F   FREQUENCIES
%   PERCENTAGE
AV   AVERAGE
I   I feel satisfied with the school I am in

II	I am able to do things as well as most other students
III	At times I think I am not good at all compared to other students
IV	I am inclined to feel that I am a failure
V	I feel that I am a person of worth at least on equal footing with others
VI	I feel I have much to be proud of as a student
VII	I wish I had more respect for myself as a student
IX	I feel am respected by other students for who I am

Table 1 presented above showed that on satisfaction with the school, 70 strongly agreed, 22.5 % Agreed, and 2.0 % were undecided, and 3.5 % Disagreed and 1.8 strongly disagreed. On the ability to do things, 44.5% strongly agreed, 44.5 % agreed, 5.0 % were Undecided, 3.3 % disagreed and 2.5 % strongly disagreed. Further, on the feeling of not good enough, 7.3 % strongly agree, 14.3 % agreed, 9.8 % were Undecided, 9.8 disagreed and 28.1 % strongly disagreed. Still, on feeling as a failure, 62.7 % strongly Agreed, 30.6 % Agreed, 2.3 % were Undecided 2.0 % Disagreed 2.5 % and Strongly Disagreed. In addition, on feeling worthy, 50.8 % strongly agreed, 35.0 % agreed, 5.8% were undecided, 5.0 % disagreed and 3.3 % strongly disagreed. On the feeling of being proud, 62.5

% strongly agreed, 30.5 % agreed, 2.3 % were Undecided, 2.0 % Disagreed and 2.5 % Strongly Disagreed. On the issue of personal respect, 5.3% strongly agreed, 4.0%, agreed, 3.5 % were Undecided, 34.0 % disagreed and 5.3 % strongly disagreed. Finally, on the feeling of being respected by others, 53.0% strongly agreed, 33.8 % agreed, 7.5 % were Undecided, 3.3 % Disagreed and 2.3 % Strongly Disagreed.

Further quantitative analysis assessed the self-esteem using the measures of central tendencies revealed useful information which was presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Measures of Central Tendencies For Self-Esteem among Students

ITEM	MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE	TOTAL
I feel satisfied with the school I am in	1.45	1.00	1	580
I am able to do things as well as most other students	1.84	2.00	1	734
At times I think I am not good at all compared to other students	2.15	2.00	1	859
I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	1.85	1.00	1	740
I feel that I am a person of worth at least on equal footing with others	1.73	1.00	1	691
I feel I have much to be proud of as a student	1.53	1.00	1	610
I wish I had more respect for myself as a student	1.67	1.00	1	667
I feel am respected by other students for who I am	1.65	1.00	1	659
TOTAL	**13.87**			**5540**

Source: Researcher, 2024

Actual mean $\frac{5540}{3200} = 1.73$

The three measures of central tendencies i.e. Mean=1.73, Mode=1 and Median=1 and 2 correspond to agreement level of the scale of measuring Self-esteem. These suggest that high self-esteem among students. This suggest a positive step in the maintenance of good health and well-being among adolescents as well as capability to deal with the cognitive, social and biological challenges during this sensitive and critical period of development in which the

young person is prone to both stress and depression (Sahin, 2014). In addition, this positive step is crucial because it helps to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It also helps in the development of mental health (a component of self-esteem) which had been listed as one of the measures for health and well-being. Though the majority of the students reported high level of self-esteem,

many factors could have a significant impact on this construct during adolescence.

Further quantitative analysis of the measure of central tendencies classified the levels of self-esteem using the categories illustrated in Table 3 shown

Table 3: Levels of Self-Esteem among Students

RANGE	CATEGORY	LEVEL OF ESTEEM
1.0-1.80	STRONGLY AGREE	HIGH
1.81-2.60	AGREE	HIGH
2.61-3.40	UNDECIDED	MODERATE/MEDIUM
3.41-4.20	DISAGREE	LOW
4.21-5.0	STRONGLY DISAGREE	LOW

(Source: Researcher, 2024)

From Table 3, it is evident that both the categories of strongly agree and agree were both classified as high self-esteem. Further, the category of undecided was classified as moderate/ medium level of self-esteem while both categories of Disagree and Strongly Disagree were classified as low self-esteem. Further analysis led to the tabulation of frequencies representing each level of self-esteem and the findings were presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Frequencies Showing Levels Of Self-Esteem among Students

LEVEL OF SELF-ESTEEM	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
HIGH	385	96.25
MEDIUM	15	3.75
LOW	0	0.00

(Source: Researcher, 2024)

Table 4 reveals that 385 (86.5 %) respondents reported relatively high level of self-esteem. In addition, 15 (12.25 %) respondents reported medium levels of self-esteem while none (0.00%) of the respondents reported low levels of self-esteem.

Further descriptive analysis of the obtained data using a pie-chart produced findings which were illustrated as shown in figure 3
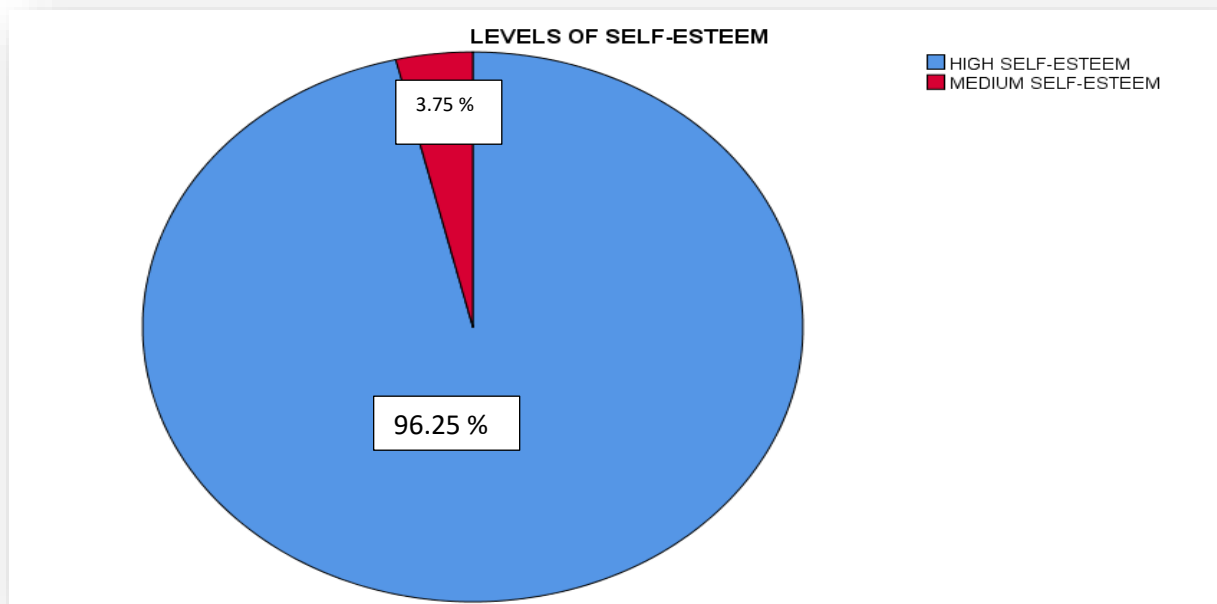
LEVELS OF SELF-ESTEEM

- HIGH SELF-ESTEEM
- MEDIUM SELF-ESTEEM

3.75 %

96.25 %

Figure 1: Pie-Chart Showing Levels of Self-Esteem among Students

Figure 1 shows that 385 (96.25 %) respondents reported high levels of Self-esteem. In addition, about 15 (3.75 %) reported medium level of self-esteem while none of the respondents in the sample reported low self-esteem. Consideration of the level of self-esteem among adolescent was found appropriate in this study because several empirical studies have revealed that low levels of self-esteem may negatively impact on adolescents' social relationships (Harris and Orth, 2020; Zapata-Lamana et al.,2021). In addition, high levels of self-esteem assist adolescents to experience high quality interpersonal relationships (Cameron & Granger, 2019). In addition, empirical studies have produced findings that revealed that adolescents with low level of self-esteem reported a smaller social network and relatively lower levels of social support ((Marshall et al., 2014). Consist with the findings in this study, Kohli (2018) revealed that students reported high levels of self-esteem.

4.3 Inferential statistics in students' self-esteem on relationship formation

The researcher began the analysis of the quantitative data at the level of inferential statistics using a t-test for independent samples to compare the means of boys and girls in measures of self-esteem on relationship formation. The consideration of age is crucial because research

findings have revealed that late adolescence is a phase of life which coincides with the pressure to a start independent social life among individuals. During this stage, several environmental and social challenges occur and as such, self-esteem helps one to cope with these changes as well as protecting both their mental health and well-being. In addition, the consideration of age investigating the level of self-esteem was necessitated by the fact that evidence from empirical studies on self-esteem has shown that self-esteem begins to decrease during late adolescence because of strained relationships with both family members as well as peers (Meskauskiene, 2015).

The consideration of gender in the evaluation of self-esteem is important because although both Boys and Girls report similar levels of the construct during childhood, a gender gap exists during adolescence and this persists throughout adulthood (Bleidorn et al., 2016; Zeigler-Hill and Myers, 2012). Further consideration of gender in the assessment of self-esteem is essential because evidence from empirical studies suggest that men develop their self-esteem from individuating themselves from others while women derive their self-esteem in terms of their connections to others. Further consideration of gender in evaluating self-esteem is significant because although both girls and boys report comparable self-esteem levels during childhood, the case is different during adolescence with boys reporting relatively higher self-esteem than girls. This situation continues until adulthood from when the level of

self-esteem declines over time self-esteem during childhood, a gender gap emerges during adolescence, as boys show higher levels of self-esteem than girls (Bleidorn et al., 2016; Zeigler-Hill and Myers, 2012). In line with these, the researcher conducted a t-test for independent sample to test the differences in mean between both sexes in secondary schools in Murang'a County. The results were illustrated in Table 5 .

Table 5: Independent Samples t-test For the Comparison of Means of The Level of Self-Esteem across Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std	F	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)	St. error Diff
Self-Esteem	Male	204	1.7384	.44105	3.525	.080	397	.937	.04704
	Female	196	1.7346	.49782		.079	386.43	.937	.04716

(Source: Researcher, 2024)

From Table 5, both the means values of self-esteem (boys =1.73840 and girls =1.73460) show a high self-esteem. Girls showed a slightly higher self-esteem than boys although difference is insignificant (p- value greater than the critical p-value). This suggests that no statistically significant differences in self-esteem between males and females in secondary schools in Murang'a county. The findings were consistent with Arora (2021) results that revealed non-significant association between boys and girls in levels of self-esteem. In addition, according to Marshall et al (2014), the association between self-esteem and social support did not differ significantly between boys and girls. However, the results contradicted the findings by Rahimi (2016) among adolescents in Iran that showed higher levels of self-esteem among females than male students. Similarly, the explanation of this reported gender differences could be that women are expected to be more selfless and modest than men. Whereas females are expected not to demonstrate their successes, this is not acceptable when it comes to men (Smith & Huntoon, 2014). In addition, literature reviews have explored gender differences in self-esteem and mixed results have been found. For instance, research findings have found evidence that revealed that females tend to have lower self-esteem than males, which can be explained in terms of lower evaluation of the stereotypic female role by the society as well as greater cultural pressure on the physical appearance by females (Zeigler-Hill and Myers, 2012)). However, the results may concur with other studies that revealed no gender differences in self-esteem among adolescents (Erol & Orth, 2011). In addition, other findings revealed that boys and girls have comparable levels of Self-esteem during childhood (Zeigler-Hill and Myers, 2012).

In addition, the researcher analyzed quantitative data from the students' questionnaires to assess self-esteem on relationship formation by use of chi-square tests. The researcher began the analysis by summarizing the two variables using a cross-tabulation table shown as Table 6.

Table 6: Cross-Tabulation for Self-Esteem on Relationship Formation among Students

		RELATIONSHIP FORMATION AMONG STUDENTS			
		HIGH	**MEDIUM**	**LOW**	**TOTAL**
SELF-ESTEEM	**HIGH**	246	104	35	385
		63.90 %	27.01 %	9.09 %	100.0 %
	MEDIUM	5	7	3	15
		33.33 %	46.67 %	33.67 %	100.0 %
	LOW	0	0	0	0
		0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %
	TOTAL	251	111	38	400
		62.75 %	27.75 %	9.5 %	100.0 %

Source: Researcher, 2024)

Table 6 revealed that on the high levels of self-esteem, 63.90 % reported high relationships, 27.01 % reported medium and 9.09 % reported low levels of relationships. On medium levels of self-esteem 33.33 % reported high, 46.67 % reported medium and 33.67 % reported low levels of relationship formation. Still, none of the students (0 %) reported any relationships with regard to low level of self-esteem. Further, the researcher used chi-square tests of analysis to establish both the nature and the strength of

relationship between the two variables. The findings were presented in Table 7 shown

Table 7: Chi-Square Test between Self-Esteem and Relationship Formation

Chi-Square test			
	value	df	Asymp. Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	51.768[a]	8	
Likelihood Ratio	45.247	8	
Linear by Linear Association	33.745	1	
No of Valid Cases	400		
A.6 cells (40.0 %) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .08			

(Source: Researcher, 2024)

Table 7 shows the results findings from the chi-square test of association with alpha value of .05 to assess whether Self-esteem level was related to Relationship formation. The results of the chi-square test were found to be statistically significant with X^2 (1, N=400) = 51.768 [a], P=.000. This indicated that the relationship between self-esteem and relationship formation at alpha=.05 was statistically significant.

Further inquiry to investigate the strength of the association between self-esteem and relationship formation was done and interpreted based on Cohen's standards where coefficients of above .50 indicate a large effect size, .30 to .49 represent a moderate effect size and coefficients of below .30 represents a small effect size (Cohen, 1988). The results of the correlation were also assessed at an alpha value of .050. The findings of the inquiry were illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8: Symmetry Measure on Self-Esteem and Relationship formation among students

Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.335	.000
	Cramer's V	.237	.000
N of Valid Cases		400	

(Source: Researcher 2022)

From table 8 presented, phi (φ) coefficient of .335, indicating modest to moderate relationship was found. As the tables above show, self-esteem was more positively associated to relationship formation, implying that students with high levels of self-esteem tend to relate moderately well with significant others. These findings concur with the study by Shuai (2020) in which self-esteem is associated with friendship quality positively. The findings also agreed with the results of the study by Huang (2015) in which self-esteem correlated positively and significantly with friendship quality, conflict resolutions and strategies. In addition, Zhou (2016) revealed close relationships between self-esteem and friendship quality among adolescents. Still, some studies revealed bidirectional associations between the two variables (e.g., Mund et al., 2015; Mund & Nestler, 2019). The correlation between self-esteem and relationship outcomes has been a concern for social scientists (Van scheppingen et al., 2018). The findings of the study were indications that identification of modifiable risk factors for low self-esteem during adolescence is crucial in developing interventions to prevent and to enhance students' self-esteem.

These findings suggest that self-esteem has been associated correlates with relationship formation. This highlight the fact that high self-esteem has been particularly correlated with better relationship qualities like relationship satisfaction, which would otherwise suggest that perceiving one as a worthy person is related to satisfaction of individuals are in social relationships . This would eventually prove pivotal to the overall developmental tasks during adolescence.

4.4 Thematic analysis of students' level of self-esteem on relationship formation

The researcher prepared and organized the qualitative data obtained from both the focused group discussions and interviews. The interviews were conducted on the heads of guidance and counseling departments while the focused group discussion guides were conducted on the peer counselors. After the preparations and organization of the qualitative data, the data was then summarized in narratives and verbatim citations as seen below. According

to the guidance and counseling head of department many students were keen on characteristics that defined high self-esteem. Through interviews, one teacher noted:

> *"Students are currently competing in academics and other relations compared to the past where the focus was on academics only. Considering the case of leadership, many students remain disciplined and observe ethics to benefit from leadership positions given through assessment of self believe. Students who tend to have high self-esteem are seen as ready and able to take leadership positions in the school"* [KI 01].

This assertion by the teachers highlights useful information on investigating the level of self-esteem among the students in secondary schools. Further investigation using focused group discussions revealed that students seem to be aware of the significance of self-esteem in building a strong rapport with people. One group pointed out:

> *"We are aware that teachers like students with high self-esteem as only such students would easily connect with others. Low self-esteem causes shying away from other people and thus may deny one a sense of free interactions and association; this may affect their abilities to deliver as leaders. Hence, low self-esteem students are hardly considered to prefect positions in school."* [FGD 01].

From further analysis of the qualitative data, an important theme that came out clearly was the concept of self-competence. This was illustrated in the ability to do classroom activities as well as other activities outside the classroom. From the teachers, majority of students had high self-competence as one teacher cited

> *"Many of students feel they are capable of doing things as well as others but still a number of students feel that some activities especially in academic are beyond their abilities and that only few among them should do"* [KI 10].

Further investigation of the same concept using focused group discussions revealed that the ability of students is well demonstrated in co-curricular activities more than in academic as one group member reported

> *"Well in games and sports, the students feel okey and capable …. Also, they seem to be okay in scouting and girl guides*

> *and in prayers and in praise and worship songs during assembly."* [FGD 03].

Further qualitative inquiry revealed that students have relatively high self-worth among themselves. This was well illustrated in the importance that they attach to themselves and satisfaction in the schools as one teacher posited

> *"The majority of the students have high self-worth. Those students from well to do families feel important about themselves and feel satisfied in life in general compared to those from poor backgrounds. However, with time even those who feel less worthy at first came to feel worthy after sometimes as they interact with others and perhaps realize they can achieve something in school whether in sports, in subject contests, clubs and in other areas."* [KI 04].

This was further affirmed by peer counselors in focused group discussions where one group reported

> *" Some of students have many pressing issues at this stage, but all in all, it goes with the family background. If one comes from a well to do family, they feel satisfied and important and those from poor background feel stressed sometimes and do not appear feeling satisfied in them…"* [FGD 02]

This assertion further highlights the significance of family background in raising self-worth among students and eventually the level of self-esteem.

Still, another major theme that came out clearly during the qualitative inquiry is the concept of self-respect. This concept had been cited as one of the principles of mental health where one loves the self and accepts the self as it is. This concept of mental health was then conceived as an important component of a healthy interpersonal relationship. According to guidance and counseling teachers, the concept of self-respect has a strong significance especially during adolescence when identity is a major developmental task. Contributing on the same, one teacher posited that

> *"We have majority of our students with high self-respect. However, to some students, they have low respect for themselves and their bodies. Some do not value themselves and the dignity which is brought about by the issue of drugs as*

well as boy-girl relationships in the school." [KI 09].

This was further affirmed by focused group discussions where one member said that

"I feel that most of our fellow students do respect themselves and others as seen in how they relate with one another, with teachers as well as non-teaching staff. However, a few students engage in unhealthy habits like drug and substance use as well as illicit relationships which are not healthy for them and their bodies." [FGD O4].

Further analysis of the qualitative data across gender revealed that boys had low self-esteem compared to girls. One G&C teacher pointed out:

Girls are more likely to have higher self-esteem compared to boys. As girls realize that they are almost adults through experiences of menstruation, they remain alert and feel already adults. This is not the case with the boys who hardly differentiate between being in childhood and adulthood. However, some boys show maturity and self-confidence from their own belief drawn from what they know. Such is drawn from academic performance where more boys that perform better feel that are they smart enough to create social relationships in which they can share their academic abilities. This makes them build more self-esteem [KI 07].

In comparison of the results with the FGD findings in which students discussed, one group agreed that gender differences occurred in self-esteem as reported

"I think girls have better self-esteem compared to boys…you know boys tend to shy off and remain silent, suffer in silence but our teachers are doing everything" [FGD O1].

Further analysis of the qualitative data acknowledged the role of counseling in building self-esteem that is translated to forming of better relationships. The interviewee posited.

"The concern of this study is key as the students always bring out issues related to appreciating the counseling services

for forming relationships. The relationships are not only between the teachers and the students but also within the student body. By talking to the students, we create a sense of self-belief which is important to the students when speaking to their peers. Through speaking, they form a unique and strong bond of relationships. The students become very happy with themselves which highlight the need to carefully sensitize them on building self-esteem within themselves" [KI 03].

Similar sentiments were seen among the students in their focused group discussions as one of the respondents pointed out:

"We become more easily driven into friendship because we believe in ourselves. I easily attract friendship and building strong relationships with our peers because we know that we are worth and able to do what it takes. When I feel that I am "useless", I may not even want to be heard in any corner of our context whether it is in class or dormitory. The motive of self-belief is important for all of us to create a platform to converse into a positive relationship. Spare for the introverts, only those who feel they can take control even in speech can make more friends. Thus, it is a plus for us to have strong self-esteem in creation of positive relationships." [FGD O1].

These findings agreed with the basis of Erikson's psychosocial theory of development, especially the fifth stage. This stage is identity versus role confusion. According to Erickson (1982), development of one's identity is a core psychosocial developmental goal of adolescents. This would imply that encouraging adolescents to develop personal worth and values help in creating the basis for a healthy identity which would eventually lead to healthy interpersonal relationships during adolescence. Students will therefore judge and evaluate their selves and traits better in the process of interacting with significant others.

4.5 Mixing and interpreting data in students' level of self-esteem on relationship formations

The researcher mixed and interpreted the findings from the three levels of analysis, which included descriptive, inferential and thematic analysis on the second objective. From the descriptive statistics, most of the students (96.25 %) reported high self-esteem, 3.8 % reported medium levels of self-esteem none (0.0 %) reported low levels of self-esteem. From the inferential statistics, both t-test for independent samples and the chi-square test of association were conducted. The analysis of the t-test for independent samples revealed that girls reported a statistically insignificant higher self-esteem (mean=1.7346) than their male counterparts (mean=1.7384).Further, the chi-square test of association conducted on self-esteem on relationships revealed a modest and a positively significant association between the two variables with X^2 (1, N=399) =51.76, P=.000, and φ coefficient of .36, indicating modest to moderate relationship.

From thematic analysis, students have reported having a high value of self-esteem. This self-regard was demonstrated in all aspects of self-esteem investigated which included self-competence, self-worth and self-respect. The findings concur with similar findings by Erol & Orth (2017) in which high self-esteem correlated with life-satisfaction. Further, Erol & Orth (2011), and Isiklar (2012) revealed no significant gender differences in students' self-esteem and finally, Shuai (2020) revealed that self-esteem is associated positively with relationship quality. The researcher therefore concluded that self-esteem is significantly related to the relationship formation among secondary school students.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

From the result analysis, it was established that about 71.5 % of the respondents reported high self-esteem. In addition, 4.8 % had moderate level of esteem while 23.7 % reported low self-esteem. The study also established that although girls reported a relatively higher self-esteem than boys, the difference was found to be insignificant at 95% confidence level where p value was greater than .05 .In addition, the study established a significantly positive correlation between self-esteem and relationship formation among secondary school students in Murang'a county where X^2 (1, N=399) =51.768, P=.000, with phi (φ) coefficient of .335, indicating modest to moderate relationship

5.2 Recommendations

The study established that self-esteem associate significantly with relationship formation among students in Kenya. In realization of this, the researchers made the following recommendations:

1. The curriculum developers and policy makers need to provide curriculum that afford opportunities to promote and nurture talents among learners.
2. The relevant stakeholders, especially teachers and parents should emphasize on identification of talents by assigning tasks and responsibilities which eventually improve competencies and self-worth among learners.

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